Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division
Small Area Plan/Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Date: December 18, 2006

Project Name: Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan

Submitted By: CPED Planning Division

Planning Staff and Phone: Thomas Leighton, 673-3853; Beth Elliott, 673-2442

Wards: 6, 7, 9, 10, 13

Neighborhood Organizations:

- Cedar-Isles-Dean Neighborhood Association
- West Calhoun Neighborhood Council
- East Isles Residents Association
- Lowry Hill East Neighborhood Association
- Whittier Alliance
- Phillips West Neighborhood Organization
- Midtown Phillips
- East Phillips Improvement Coalition

Current Minneapolis Plan Designations:

- Activity Centers – Uptown and Lyn-Lake
- Commercial Corridors – Lake, Hennepin, Lyndale and Chicago
- Community Corridors – Bloomington, Chicago and Cedar

Background

In early 2005, the Planning Division was charged with creating a plan for Phases 1 and 2 of the Midtown Greenway (western border of city east to Hiawatha) to complement the recently concluded Seward Longfellow Greenway Area Land Use and Pre-Development Study which pertained to Phase 3 of the Greenway (Hiawatha Avenue to Mississippi River). Land uses are changing dramatically along the greenway spurred by the new trail amenity and by the construction of new projects, in addition to the prospect of future rail transit along the Midtown Greenway corridor.

From spring 2005 until spring of 2006, the City and its consultants worked with a Steering Committee made up of representatives from the adjacent neighborhoods, Lake Street Council, Midtown Greenway Coalition, Midtown Community Works, and City/County elected offices. Additionally, seven community meetings were held to provide information and receive input from the broader community.

The 45-day public review period began on November 1, 2006 and ended on December 15, 2006.

Plan Summary

The primary purpose of the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan is to provide clear policy direction for land use and development along the Midtown Greenway from Hiawatha Avenue to the west city limits. The Plan evaluates the long-term viability of existing land uses along the corridor. It proposes future land use and provides guidelines for development related to development intensity and other development characteristics. It offers development concepts for selected case study sites that represent a range of development opportunities throughout the project area. It explores possible approaches to key implementation issues, such as the role of regulation, and open space ownership and management.

The plan recommendations take into consideration policies from the comprehensive plan and other planning documents, the development of Lake Street, current land use patterns, existing transit service and the anticipated rail transit under consideration for the area.

Analysis – Major Considerations and Issues

Compatibility with The Minneapolis Plan. The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan was created as a complementary piece to the comprehensive plan for the greenway study area. Within the study area, designated land use features include: Activity Centers – Uptown and Lyn-Lake; Commercial Corridors – West Lake, Hennepin, Lyndale and Chicago; and Community Corridors – Bloomington, Chicago and Cedar. The plan does not propose any changes to these comprehensive plan designations. However, it adds definition to the area specific guidance of the comprehensive plan through the addition of a future land use map. This map will be integrated with complementary maps from other small area plans, becoming part of a map that provides land use guidance for the entire city.

Role of Industrial Uses in the Corridor. The majority of existing industrial sites along the greenway inhabit small parcels surrounded by primarily residential areas. In some cases the close proximity of residential and industrial uses seems to work, and is accepted or even embraced by residents and business owners alike. But in many cases the existing buildings are becoming obsolete for today's industrial users and the proximity to residential creates conflicts for both the residents and the industrial businesses. Rather than attempt to sort out where industrial activity seems to work currently and why, the plan takes a more fundamental approach to the question of where industrial uses belong in the long run. It asks the question, "Which currently industrial sites would make sense as a home for a new industrial business if the property were to be redeveloped?"

In today's market, access is the driving force for locational decisions by industrial businesses. Industrial businesses are also generally looking for larger sites and some level of confidence that neighbors won't object to the regular activities associated with industrial businesses. Because very few industrial properties along the Midtown Greenway have these characteristics—the exception is a few properties near Hiawatha Avenue—they are not likely to attract new industrial development even if guided industrial on city land use maps.

For this reason the plan recommends that new industrial development is concentrated in the far east of the study area at Hiawatha. This is consistent with the Seward/Hiawatha Employment District recently approved in the Industrial Land Use and Employment Policy Plan. Note that, even if followed by the rezoning of property, the future land use plan does not prevent the continuing use of industrial land in the Midtown Greenway area, nor does it encourage the elimination of viable existing industrial businesses.

Density/Height. Some of the sensitivity around development density and height stem from the concern that dense development will be monolithic and insensitive to its setting. The MGLUD Plan takes a multi-layered approach to issues of density and height utilizing land use mapping, development guidelines, and regulatory techniques to allow development of an appropriate scale, while encouraging a character that is compatible with the Midtown Greenway environment and neighboring properties.

> **Land use and development intensity mapping.** The standard format of the plan's Future Land Use Map allows some distinctions to be made relative to the density of different residential areas. It fails, however, to provide guidance concerning the appropriate density of commercial areas. In order to make finer distinctions, and to recommend appropriate development intensity for commercial areas, the MGLUD Plan augments the Future Land Use Map with a Development Intensity Map. By this tool the study area is divided into Transit-Oriented, Urban-Oriented, and Neighborhood-Oriented development districts. Each development district is associated with a menu of building types that are potentially appropriate for the district. Building types are described according to various characteristics including typical heights.
>
> **Design guidelines.** The development guidelines include recommendations for mitigating development intensity. Developers are encouraged to use a mix of building types in the development, to include open space, and to keep the scale of development at the street at a human scale. The development guidelines also offer a menu of suggestions for how new development should relate to neighboring properties, and to the Midtown Greenway. They encourage stepping down the scale of development where it meets adjacent residential properties. The guidelines also recommend that developments relate to the greenway as they would a street by adding entrances and additional window coverage.
>
> **Regulation.** The MGLUD plan recommends a regulatory approach to ensuring that new development along the greenway doesn't prevent solar access to the Midtown Greenway. Rezoning of property following plan adoption puts teeth into the land use and development intensity recommendations of the plan.

Building the Public Realm. The need for public amenities along the greenway was expressed by many stakeholders throughout the planning process, and is a central element of many of the planning documents that preceded this plan. These encompass such elements as parks or open space, community gardens, promenades, additional greenway access points, and ample station areas serving future transit. Even though this plan is meant to guide private development, an amenity rich public realm is a critical part of the livability of the greenway area. The plan considers a variety of the anticipated public realm features, and recommends a number of approaches to ensure that new development does not foreclose the implementation of important public realm elements. It goes

further in encouraging private development to supply additions to the public realm networks. It provides guidelines for the design of some of these elements, and offers recommendations as to how they should be owned and managed.

Public Comments

A few public comments were received during the public comment period. These comments are attached in their entirety to this staff report. The major themes of these comments are summarized in this section, with staff comments.

Promenades versus greenway buildings. Some comments were received that encouraged greater support in the plan for greenway buildings. Greenway buildings are referred to in several places in the plan document. A greenway building is a building that actually makes up part of the wall of the greenway instead of an earth slope or retaining wall. There are a few examples of existing structures fitting this description from the industrial era of the corridor and some developers have proposed new buildings that mimic this design. These structures have the potential to create more interaction at the trench level.

Two specific issues exist with new buildings of this design. Firstly, the greenway trench is nationally eligible for historic designation and the slope up to grade level is part of its historic character. If new development disrupts the slope, the historic character of the corridor has potentially been negatively impacted. Greenway buildings also introduce a disruption to the promenade network along the rim of the greenway trench. A major theme throughout the public engagement process was that it was crucial to create a promenade and public sidewalk network on either side of the greenway trench in order to create more activity around the greenway as well as to allow people to enjoy the corridor without having to actually be in the trench.

Given these considerations, and the fact that the implications of developing a greenway building are so unique to the particular location and the design of the building, staff did not include an overarching policy recommendation on greenway buildings in the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan.

Density in Lowry Hill East. Some residents of the Lowry Hill East neighborhood have commented that the future land use and development district recommendations in the plan may result in the loss of single-family structures, particularly between West 28th Street and the greenway.

The plan recommends a variety of housing densities and building types in that area. High-density housing (40-120 dwelling units/acre) is proposed for properties closest to Hennepin Avenue and the Uptown Transit Station as well as for properties closest to the greenway in a linear fashion. Most parcels fronting West 28th Street are designated as Medium-density housing (10-50 du/acre) except for those within about one block of Hennepin. Relative to the current zoning of property, the land use and development intensity maps represent a decrease in density allowed in the Lowry Hill East neighborhood. This in turn should have the effect of reducing the development pressure on many of the single-family structures in this area.

Future Related Actions

- **Comprehensive plan changes.** This small area plan will be an amendment to the city's comprehensive plan, and its Future Land Use map will be incorporated into the comprehensive plan's citywide Future Land Use map.
- **Rezoning study.** Zoning changes compatible with this plan's land use recommendations would be made through a future rezoning study
- **Zoning Code modifications.** The following zoning code changes will be made as a future step in implementing this plan.

  1. Establishment of a 15-foot setback requirement for development of property along the Midtown Greenway property line.
  2. Prohibition of billboards (off-premise advertising) within 300 feet of the Greenway.
- **Development review.** Future development proposals for property in the Midtown Greenway Area would require Planning Commission review of development applications such as rezonings, conditional use permits, and site plan review. The Planning Commission also has a role in recommending whether proposed land sales and the establishment of redevelopment districts are in conformance with the city's comprehensive plan.

Staff Recommendation

That the Planning Commission recommend that the City Council adopt the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan as a small area plan and as an articulation of and amendment to the comprehensive plan's policies, subject to review and approval by the Metropolitan Council.

Reference Materials / Attachments:

- Existing industrial zoning and land use map
- Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan Future Land Use Map
- Comments received during the 45-day public review period
- Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan (excluding appendices)
- The official plan website: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/planning/midtown-greenway.asp.