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

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Project Name: Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan

Submitted By: CPED Planning Division

Planning Staff and Phone: Beth Elliott, 673-2442; Haila Maze, 673-2098

Wards: 2

Neighborhood Organizations:

- West Bank Community Coalition

Current Minneapolis Plan Designations:

- Activity Center – Seven Corners/Cedar-Riverside intersection
- Community Corridors – Cedar Avenue and Riverside Avenue

Background

The Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan is a policy document produced by the City of Minneapolis to guide land use and development in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood for the next 20 years. It builds upon the policy direction of The Minneapolis Plan, the City's comprehensive plan. It is meant to articulate a vision for the neighborhood based on existing City policy and input from residents, businesses, students, and employees throughout the planning process. The City, public institutions, and community organizations will use the plan to guide their own decision-making processes with incremental changes to realize the full vision.

The plan examines the current conditions of the area, develops a future vision of what residents and other stakeholders want the neighborhood to become and then formulates specific goals, objectives, and policies that will help implement that vision. The plan itself builds on past planning efforts and public involvement processes, particularly with regards to themes that have emerged repeatedly.

Planning staff began meeting with community groups and other neighborhood stakeholders in the summer of 2006 in order to craft a scope for the project. After considering the full breadth of the issues, staff determined that the project should be managed wholly in-house with the assistance of specialized consultants. This offered us the opportunity to better direct the community engagement process, hire consultants that best suited the neighborhood and tasks, and adjust the scope as needed throughout the project.

We hired consultants to perform the following tasks:

- Community engagement – Center for Policy, Planning and Performance

- Economic development – Economic Development Services and ZHA, Inc.
- Riverside traffic analysis – SRF Consulting Group, Inc.
- Central Corridor station analysis – URS Corp.
- Urban design – Cuningham Group

This model worked well in Cedar Riverside due to the complexity of its physical barriers, non-traditional populations, major institutional neighbors, and community organizational structures. Hopefully this model can be replicated in other small area plans with unique qualities and when staff work plans allow time for increased management.

Community Engagement

The community engagement model included a project steering committee, technical advisory committee, large community meetings, and additional outreach strategies. The steering committee included members from all of the various community organizations and the three major institutions – Augsburg College, University of Minnesota, and Fairview Hospital. The steering committee generally met monthly from October 2006 to August 2007 and then again to review a draft of the full plan. The City also held intermittent meetings with representatives of the major institutions, primarily to discuss economic development issues and their roles in improving their campuses and the neighborhood in which they reside.

Due to Cedar Riverside's unique makeup of large concentrations of immigrants, low-income residents, and students, three large community meetings alone would not have adequately reached neighborhood stakeholders. Instead, the process included a large community meeting after each phase of the process plus additional outreach depending on which populations did not provide input at the meeting. The official community engagement process began in December 2006 and ended in September 2007.

After each community meeting, staff evaluated which stakeholders may not have been represented. Staff then made connections with those groups to find ways to receive feedback. For instance, staff attended many tenant meetings at The Cedars public housing, business association meetings, and co-op housing board meetings. Similar to our large community meetings, many of these meetings were multilingual. The goal was to reach residents, businesses, and property owners in their own settings where they would be the most comfortable providing feedback on various elements of the work. We also held focus groups with property owners, businesses, and arts/cultural organizations to gain a better understanding of the market. In the end, this tailored community process was successful in reaching non-traditional populations.

The draft Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan was available for public review from January 4 to February 17 of this year.

Plan Summary

The plan is divided into in several main sections:

The Summary of Research, Site Conditions, and Community Engagement Process chapters provide a summary of information that sets the stage for the plan's analysis and recommendations.

The Land Use and Design Plan, Economic Development Plan, and Transportation Plan chapters provide analysis of the issues facing the neighborhood, describe options, and outline recommendations.

The Implementation Plan chapter describes the steps needed for implementing the recommendations in the previous chapters. This outlines potential options for the implementation process; a more in-depth implementation strategy will need to be formulated once the plan is adopted.

Land Use and Design Plan

The plan recommends that land uses in the neighborhood generally stay the same into the future. It is recommended, however, that both Cedar and Riverside Avenues are changed from Community Corridors to Commercial Corridors in the comprehensive plan. This change reflects the existing character of Cedar Avenue and sets a vision for Riverside Avenue to become more commercially-oriented and pedestrian-friendly once infrastructure improvements can be made and institutional property is redeveloped.

Crime and safety were identified by all neighborhood stakeholders as major concerns. While a land use and development plan cannot specifically direct the Police Department to increase patrols, the plan does provide recommendations for paying special attention to the benefits of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

While urban design issues did not rise to the top of the priority list in the community process, the plan does provide general guidelines for new and rehabbed development. This includes recommendations for how institutional buildings can be better designed to seamlessly fit into the neighborhood fabric, improvements to public open spaces and other gathering spaces, and general upgrades to the public realm.

Economic Development Plan

Because a healthy economy also depends on a good land use mix, housing choices, perceptions of personal safety, effective and safe physical infrastructure, and a well-designed environment, the plan's economic development work depended on an analysis tailored to the intricacies of the Cedar Riverside neighborhood. The City hired Janna King from Economic Development Services early in the planning process and designed a scope of work that would be flexible in reacting to the other topical components of the plan.

Based on market research, we found that Cedar Riverside's 3,000 households have a median income that is only one-third that of the city as a whole. Consequently, the buying power of the neighborhood residents is insufficient to sustain healthy commercial corridors along Washington/Cedar and Riverside or attract a broad range of new businesses by itself. To succeed, businesses must capture not only the buying power of area residents, but also students, employees and visitors associated with area institutions, as well as customers from throughout the metropolitan area who are drawn to destination-oriented businesses, theater, dining, and entertainment venues.

There is also a pent-up market demand within the three major institutions. Augsburg, the University of Minnesota/West Bank, and Fairview bring almost 6,000 employees to Cedar Riverside that are not currently utilizing neighborhood services. The market analysis conservatively estimated that $3 million in additional buying power may be available annually, primarily associated with the 3,000 employees who work year-round at Fairview University Hospital.

While abundant assets exist to perpetuate the future health of the market in the neighborhood, some challenges do stand in the way of realizing its full potential. A disconnected street grid makes driving, walking, and biking to area businesses confusing. The lack of physical connections also makes wayfinding to businesses and parking facilities difficult for visitors. Additionally, the neighborhood experiences both real and perceived safety issues.

In order to combat some of the neighborhood challenges and capitalize on its main market strengths – proximity to downtown and the river, a well established arts and entertainment district, prominent retailers, and an abundance of institutional staff, students, and visitors – the plan recommends a multi-layered approach to economic revitalization. The approach includes:

1. Initiation by business community: Coordinated focus from the business community, including commercial property owners, on commercial corridor revitalization in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood with committed partners in the public and private sector.

2. Crime and safety: Bring together institutional, business, public and private resources to aggressively address crime and safety issues in the commercial areas.

3. Clear economic vision: Engage property owners and business owners in refining the market niche for the four sub-areas of Cedar Riverside as a foundation for shaping the business mix through more strategic leasing, guiding the design and appearance of public realm improvements, facades and other features, as well as focusing marketing and promotional efforts. Continue to support small business owners.

4. Design and appearance: Strengthen connections between the commercial districts and the institutions, light rail transit, housing, downtown, freeways, and parking. Create an environment that inspires people to walk, bike, shop and visit the area.

5. Marketing and promotion: Implement marketing and promotional strategies to enable the sub-areas to attract businesses, developers and/or customers consistent with the sub-area market niches.

6. Opportunity sites: Stimulate commercial district revitalization by supporting redevelopment and/or renovation at key locations. (While this is a 6th element, it should not be considered 6th in sequential order. Market conditions, property owners and developer interest will substantially impact the time frame for redevelopment of opportunity sites.)

<u>Transportation Plan</u>

This chapter of the plan includes the most extensive recommendations for elements of the transportation system – connectivity, Riverside Avenue, Cedar/Washington Avenue, and the Central Corridor. Building connections is the theme of this plan due to physical barriers within the

neighborhood and to adjacent areas, and also speaking to the desire for better conversations and coordination among the community groups and with the institutions. Connectivity recommendations broadly call for improvements that would move toward eliminating these barriers.

Both the Riverside and Cedar/Washington are major corridors within Cedar Riverside. Riverside Avenue is currently wider than it needs to be to handle auto traffic, so the plan recommends reconfiguring the lanes to add a bike lane, along with improved pedestrian facilities for safety and aesthetic comfort. Cedar and Washington currently get a lot of pedestrian traffic because of the students and transit-dependent populations in the nearby residential complexes. A couple of the intersections have high levels of pedestrian/car collisions, and the sidewalk treatment on South Cedar is deteriorated and difficult for the City to maintain. The plan recommends a variety of pedestrian improvements for this corridor to improve pedestrian safety and accessibility while updating the current streetscape.

Initially, the scope of the project did not include an analysis of Central Corridor station issues. Once the plan was in full swing, the Metropolitan Council ramped up the preliminary engineering phase of the Central Corridor project. In an effort to avoid another planning process once the West Bank station was identified, staff expanded the small area plan scope to include items related to Central Corridor's siting, design, and pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. While it was not the role of the small area plan to recommend a specific location or design for the station, staff used the opportunity to help the community set priorities. These priorities included:

- Location within the heart of the neighborhood
- Direct access to the Cedar Avenue bridge
- Good pedestrian and bicycle linkages
- Design that reflects the unique qualities of the neighborhood, including a prominent station entrance
- Connections between the station and major bus routes

Since the end of the community engagement process in late 2007, the Metropolitan Council has presented and revised a number of West Bank station concepts. The most current concept is much more aligned with these community values.

Analysis – Major Considerations and Issues

<u>Parking</u>

Almost all community stakeholders identified parking as one of the biggest challenges in the neighborhood. During the summer of 2006, a CPED intern conducted an analysis of the existing supply and how it was being used. While there are many parking facilities in Cedar Riverside, most are for institutional purposes and too expensive for neighborhood visitors. Additionally, all but a couple of streets have restricted on-street parking.

The parking crunch is most felt in the area of the Cedar-Riverside intersection and South Cedar Avenue. This is exacerbated by a high concentration of nighttime peak uses such as theaters, bars, and music venues, as well as visitors to the large residential complexes. The City currently owns two small surface parking lots and one large lot ("Lot A") with payment and validation systems unique to each lot.

Staff struggled throughout the process with a neighborhood demand for more (and cheap) parking while the area sits within an existing and future transit station area. In the end, staff came to the conclusion that this area is unique from other transit station areas and requires publicly-accessible parking facilities and better management of existing lots.

The plan includes recommendations for parking in all three topical plan chapters:

- Land Use and Design Plan. The three large public parking areas in the neighborhood – Lot A on 4th Street and 16th Avenue, Seven Corners Ramp, and the surface lot and ramp behind Midwest Mountaineering – should continue to have parking available to the public if they are redeveloped in the future.

- Economic Development Plan. These recommendations focus on visitor hospitality through better wayfinding to existing facilities, a coordinated payment and validation system, and additional security measures.

- Transportation Plan. Making transit usage more friendly is a high priority, but the plan also proposes the development of district parking strategies, improvement of shared parking agreements, and a higher level of security at parking facilities.

Connectivity

The theme of the small area plan, "Building Connections", derived from the issues the economic development consultant was seeing, even though it speaks more broadly than that. Through an economic development lens, small physical improvements can be made within the neighborhood and to adjacent areas to help Cedar Riverside feel less closed off from the rest of the world. Additionally, improved coordination between the community organizations and institutions can lead to synergistic implementation.

The disconnectedness of the transportation infrastructure within the neighborhood and to adjacent areas is a major barrier to the further success of Cedar Riverside. Over the last half century, the street grid has disintegrated with the introduction of the freeway system and street vacations. While there is a large transit-dependent population in the neighborhood, pedestrian paths are inefficient and uncomfortable and bicycle routes dead-end. Moreover, visitors in vehicles have difficulty distinguishing public versus private roads and finding entrances to parking facilities.

While many of the physical connection issues will not be resolved easily, over time additional connections can be made and others preserved. First of all, street vacations should have an even higher level of scrutiny than other parts of the city. Second, all parties should continue to look for ways to reconnect the street grid within the neighborhood and to adjacent areas. This will be a long-term endeavor but it is important in alleviating the island-like feel of Cedar Riverside. The

plan supports continued analysis of ways to redesign the nearby freeway system in order to make room for new street connections, particularly to Downtown.

Implementation

Unlike other small area plans where the private sector will drive implementation, the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan will depend on public sector coordination and implementation over the long-term. The strengths of this neighborhood make it an ideal place for private investment, but it is instead experiencing a stagnant market, lack of broad institutional support, and physical infrastructure and property disinvestment.

Both the City and neighborhood organization are looking into ways to better include the major institutions in the overall success of Cedar Riverside, potentially through a new public-private partnership. This highly cooperative effort will only work if all three institutions, the different public agencies, and all community organizations support the idea.

Within the City enterprise, a staff team will be convened that may include all divisions of CPED, Public Works, Regulatory Services, and Police. This work group will evaluate all of the plan's recommended implementation strategies and prioritize a long-term work plan. A rezoning study is usually a priority implementation tool in most plan areas, but in the case of the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan, it may be capital improvement programming, safety strategies, and business financing options.

Public Comments

Staff received about a half-dozen comments during the 45-day public review period for the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan. A wide variety of revisions were made to the document based on these comments, though no major changes were warranted to the content of the plan.

A couple of letters expressed confusion over maps that identified property ownership based on data from the assessor. Map 4.3 accurately shows the City as a major land owner in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood, but in many cases the City has a long-term land lease with organizations that own the physical structures for either housing cooperatives or affordable housing planned unit developments. In order to alleviate some of the confusion over ownership structures, staff added explanatory disclaimers on the map itself as well as additional narrative in Chapter 4 Site Conditions.

Many of the letters also had questions about implementation of the plan. While it is always beneficial for a small area plan to examine implementation options, the plan is a policy document with no funding mechanism associated with it. The Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan includes an Implementation section that assigns a responsible party and timeframe for implementation of each recommendation. Many of the recommendations will require further analysis and prioritization once the plan is adopted as a component of its actual implementation. City staff will work actively on an implementation program once adoption occurs.

Future Related Actions

- **Comprehensive plan changes.** This small area plan will be incorporated into the updated comprehensive plan.
- **Development review.** Future development proposals for property in the Cedar Riverside neighborhood would require Planning Commission review of development applications such as rezonings, conditional use permits, street vacations, and site plan review. The Planning Commission also has a role in recommending whether the capital improvement plan, proposed land sales - including those sold through the RFP process –and the establishment of redevelopment districts are in conformance with the city's comprehensive plan and the small area plan.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – PLANNING DIVISION:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the City Planning Commission and City Council **adopt** the Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan as an articulation of and amendment to the policies found in the City's comprehensive plan.

Reference Materials / Attachments:

- Public comments
- Cedar Riverside Small Area Plan
- The official plan website: http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/planning/cedar-riverside.asp.