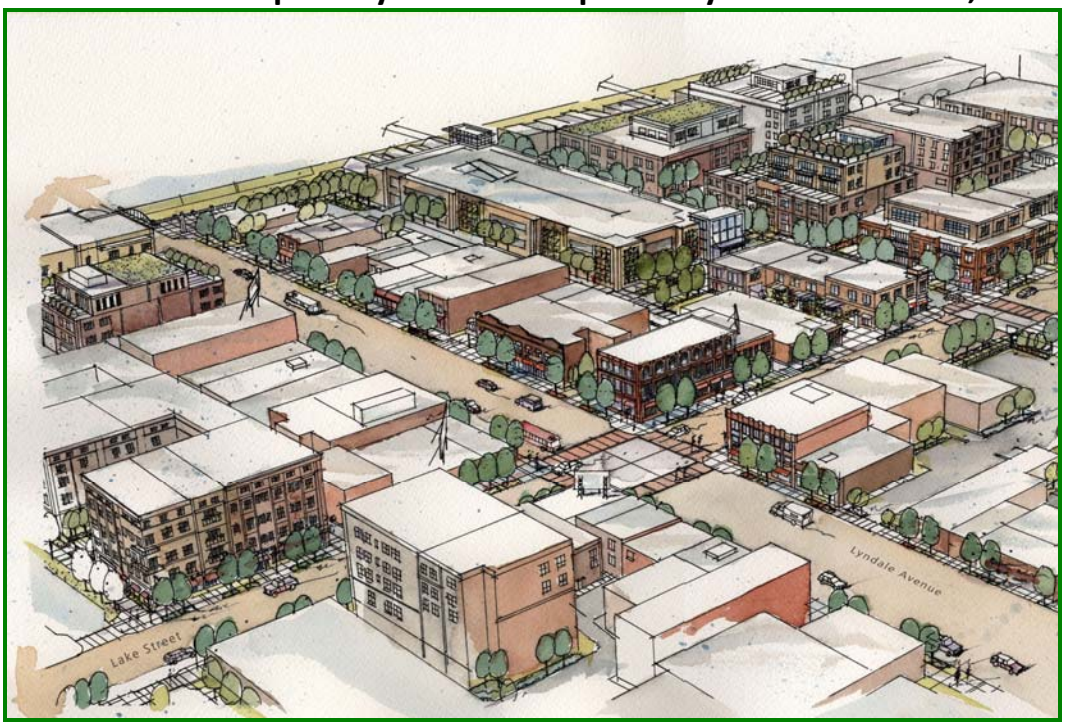
Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Adopted by the Minneapolis City Council June 26, 2009



Prepared by the:
City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department as an amendment to the Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth

Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan

City of Minneapolis
CPED – Community Planning
250 South 4th Street – PSC 110
Minneapolis, MN 55044

Acknowledgements

Elected Officials

R.T. Rybak	Mayor
Paul Ostrow	Ward 1
Cam Gordon	Ward 2
Diane Hofstede	Ward 3
Barbara Johnson	Ward 4
Don Samuels	Ward 5
Robert Lilligren	Ward 6
Lisa Goodman	Ward 7
Elizabeth Glidden	Ward 8
Gary Schiff	Ward 9
Ralph Remington	Ward 10
Scott Benson	Ward 11
Sandy Colvin Roy	Ward 12
Betsy Hodges	Ward 13

City Planning Commission

David Motzenbecker, President
Ted Tucker, Vice President
Lauren Huynh, Secretary
Carla Bates
Dan Cohen
Brian Gorecki
Alissa Luepke-Pier
Tom Nordyke
Lara Norkus-Crampton
CM Gary Schiff

Consultants

Joe Urban Inc.
Bonestroo Inc.

CPED Staff

Amanda Arnold, AICP
Joseph Bernard, AICP
Hilary Dvorak
Binoy Panicker

Steering Committee

Council Offices
- CM Robert Lilligren
- Nimco Ahmed, Ward 6 Policy Aide
- CM Ralph Remington
- Kim Malrick, Ward 10 Policy Aide

Planning Commission
- David Motzenbecker

Lowry Hill East Neighborhood Association
- Jay Demma
- Sue Bode/Peter Dahlberg

Whittier Alliance
- Larry Ludeman
- Mark Trehous

CARAG
- Aaron Rubenstein
- Howard Verson

Lyndale Neighborhood Association
- Mark Hinds
- Fred Retzloff

Midtown Greenway Coalition
- Tony Hull

Lyn-Lake Business Association
- Al Hagen
- Gregg Scott

Ward 6 Appointees
- Alex Bauman
- Barbara Lickness
- Jim Walsh

Ward 10 Appointees
- Arnie Gregory
- Pam Price
- Holly Reckle
- Roger Worm

Additional thanks to those not mentioned here who gave their time and energy to this effort.

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Executive Summary

In early 2008, the Community Planning and Economic Development Department's Planning Division began work on the Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan, following the adoption of the Uptown Small Area Plan. Early in the Uptown planning process, a decision was made to follow it with a Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan so that there would be detailed planning guidance for both of these "sister" Activity Centers.

During this planning process, City staff worked with a Steering Committee made up of representatives from the four surrounding neighborhoods, the Lyn-Lake Business Association, and the Midtown Greenway Coalition. Council Members Ralph Remington and Robert Lilligren each appointed additional individuals who did not represent specific groups. During the year long development of the plan, five steering committee meetings and four community meetings were held. Other outreach included direct mail, an online survey, regular e-mail updates, a project website, and updates at regularly held neighborhood and business association meetings.

The primary purpose of the plan is to provide more detailed policy direction for land use and development in the Lyn-Lake area. The plan builds on the existing land use policies in the *Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth, the Uptown Small Area Plan* and the *Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan*.

Principles that guide the plan include the need to:

- Maintain and grow an independent and diverse business mix.
- Promote a clean, safe, pedestrian friendly urban environment.
- Maintain and cultivate a residential and commercial identity that is uniquely Lyn-Lake.
- Support a dense environment with housing options for a variety of incomes and lifestyles.
- Encourage incremental greening through the development of small urban green spaces and environmentally sensitive design.
- Balance the needs of automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian travelers while recognizing the exceptional nearby amenities of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes and the Midtown Greenway.
- Continue to plan for the parking needs of area businesses, residents, and visitors while balancing the need for a walkable, well developed area.

The plan includes a demographic and real estate market analysis conducted by Joe Urban, Inc. and a series of development case studies and conceptual "build-out" sketches created by Bonestroo, Inc.

The plan contains a series of recommendations designed to strengthen the business core, provide design considerations in the case that rail service is implemented within the Midtown Greenway, further historic preservation efforts, encourage incremental additions of green space, and provide guidance on building scale and design.

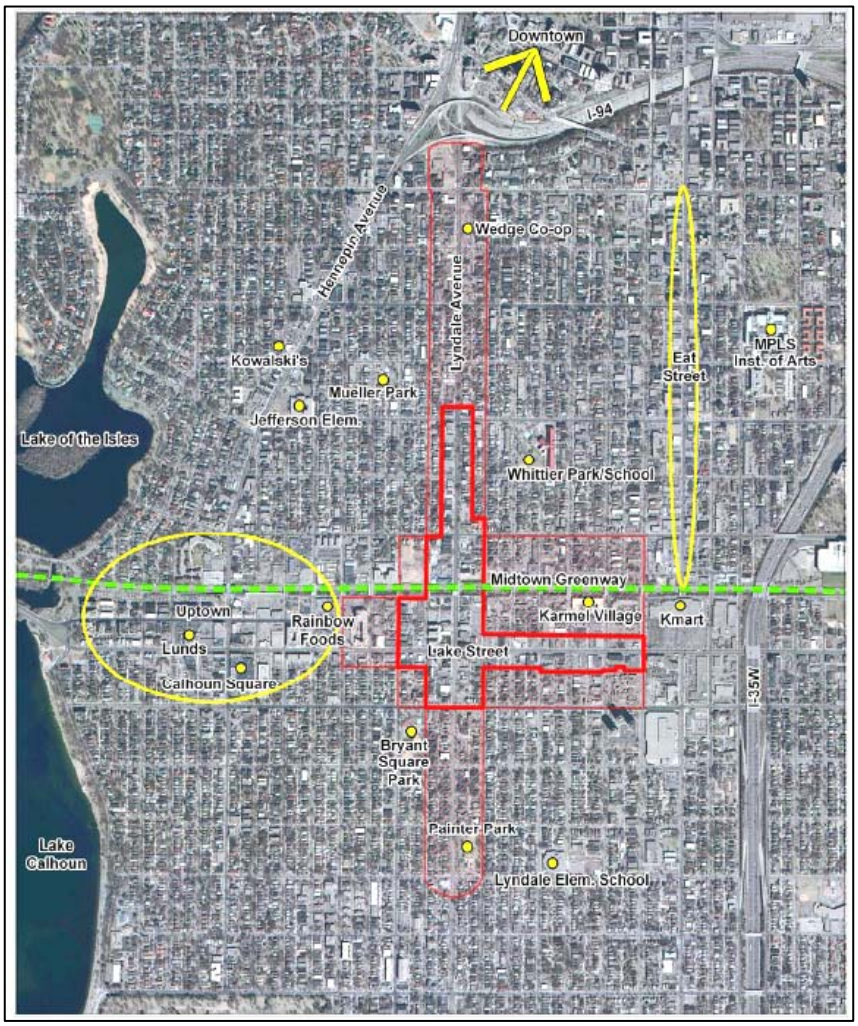
CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This chapter provides background on the study effort and explains the purpose of the plan. It also reviews past planning efforts and existing City policy and presents a community vision in order to provide context for recommendations presented later in the document.

BACKGROUND

The Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan is focused around the intersection of Lyndale Avenue South and West Lake Street in southwest Minneapolis. It is a dynamic area made up of a variety of restaurants, arts venues, and businesses. The intersection of Lyndale Avenue South and West Lake, commonly referred to as just Lyn-Lake, is surrounded by four unique neighborhoods: Lowry Hill East, CARAG, Whittier, and Lyndale.

Lyn-Lake is approximately a half mile from the intersection of Hennepin Avenue and West Lake Street which is the heart of the Uptown area. Lyn-Lake is considered by some to be part of Uptown, but it has a character and flavor that is unique and separate.

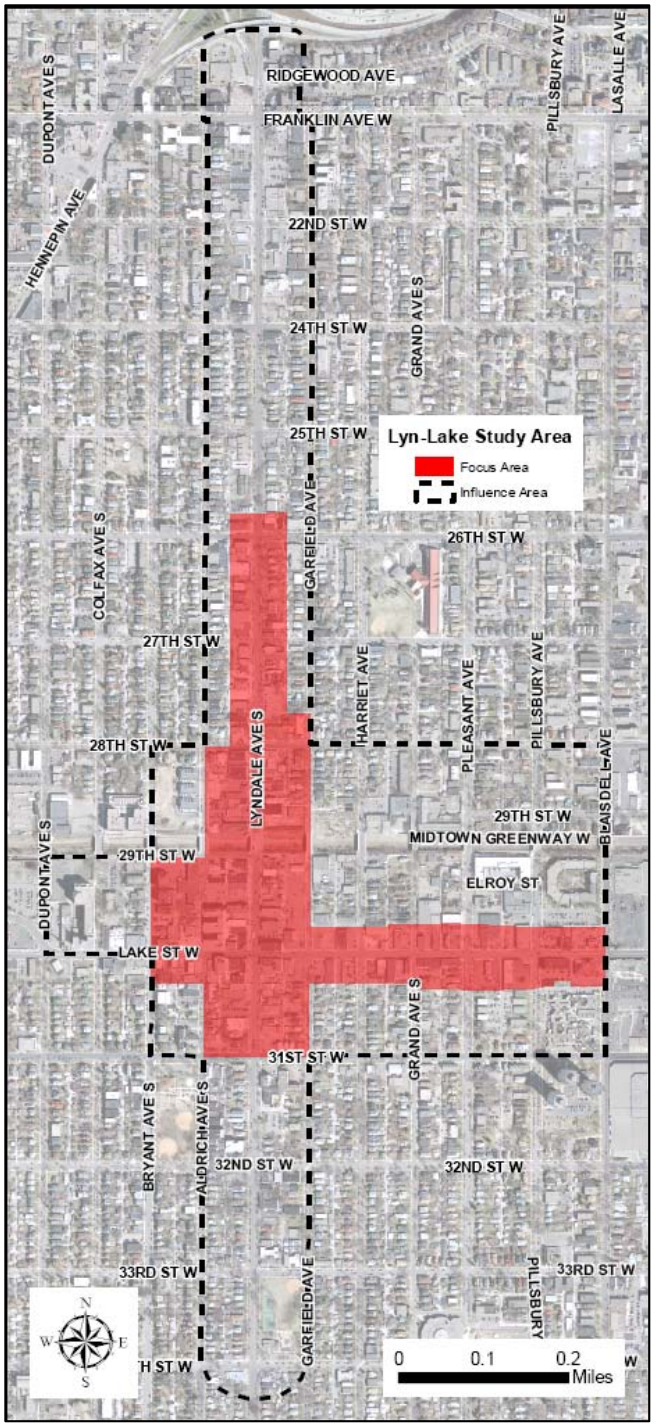


Geographic Orientation of the Lyn-Lake Study Area

In recent years there has been strong residential and commercial development interest throughout the Uptown and Lyn-Lake areas, particularly along the Midtown Greenway. In early 2006 a small area planning process was initiated for the Uptown area. At that time, including Lyn-Lake in the boundaries of that study was considered. However, it was ultimately decided that a separate process would be more appropriate. In early 2008 the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development Department initiated the Lyn-Lake Small Area Planning process to provide more detailed planning guidance for the area.

Defining the area in need of study was a challenging task. The Uptown Small Area Plan's eastern boundary is Bryant Avenue South, and the Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan, which was adopted by the City Council in 2005, has a western boundary of Blaisdell Avenue.

Thus, the east/west boundaries were apparent. However, much thought was given to how far the boundaries should stretch along Lyndale Avenue South. In addition, the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan, which was adopted by the City Council in 2007, covers all parcels along the Greenway. Ultimately, a two tiered approach of having an "influence area" and a "focus area" was decided upon. The focus area below is drawn tightly around locations that currently lack specific future land use policy at a small area plan level. The influence area boundary includes areas that play a major role in shaping the place known as Lyn-Lake, but require less detailed guidance than the focus area.



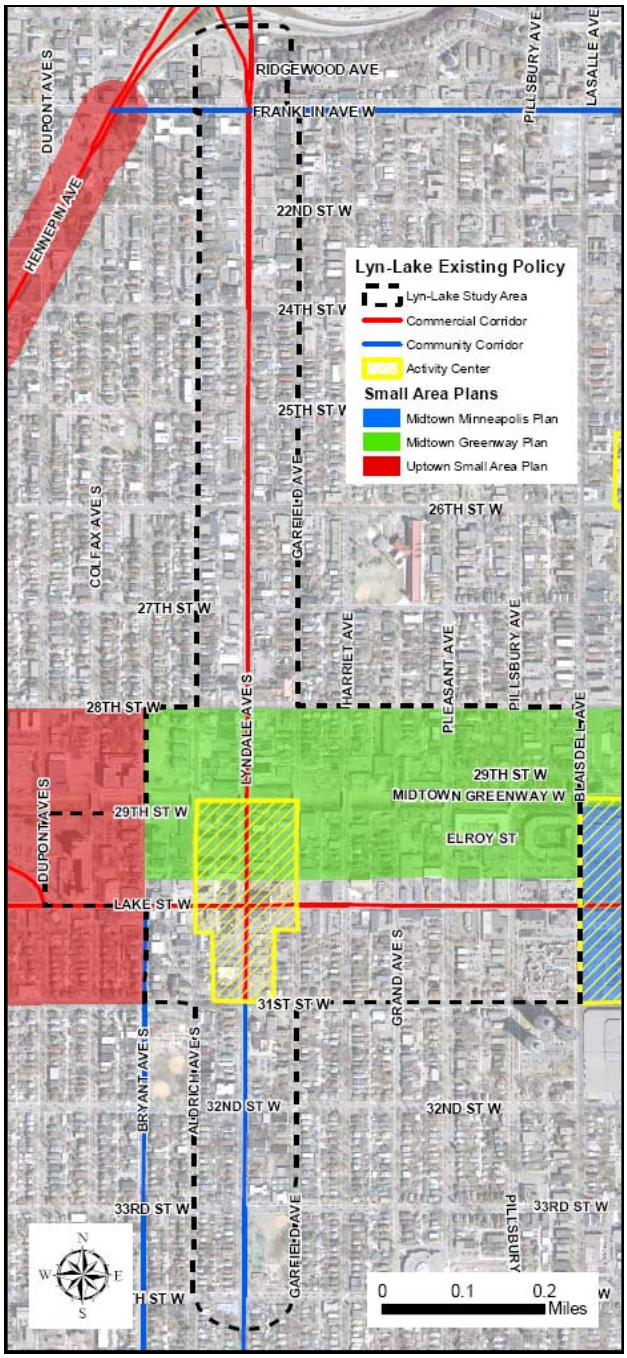
Study Area

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

A small area plan is a plan that is developed for a clearly delineated area and gives more specific recommendations than would be provided in the City's comprehensive plan. It builds on the goals, policies and implementation steps in the comprehensive plan to provide a finer level of detail.

The Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan outlines a long-range vision of approximately 10 to 15 years for land use and development in the area. This plan examines the current conditions of the area, develops a future vision of what residents, business owners, and other stakeholders want the area to become and then formulates specific goals, objectives, and policies that will help implement that vision.

Following the completion and public review of this document, it will be presented to the City Planning Commission and City Council for adoption as official policy direction for the study area. It will become part of the City's comprehensive plan and be used by various city departments, Planning Commissioners, policy makers, developers, and business and community organizations to guide future land use and development decisions.



Adopted City Plans that influenced the study boundaries

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Lyn-Lake area was initially developed in the late 1880s, with some additional housing in the surrounding neighborhoods being developed as late as 1930. Before that time, local Dakota lived on the eastern shore of Lake Calhoun and forest land surrounded the lakes [Imboden, 2004]. Lake Calhoun became the site of large resort hotels by the 1870s, and the area around the intersection of West Lake Street and Lyndale Avenue South developed because it was a major streetcar transfer point between downtown Minneapolis and Lake Calhoun. Many homes were constructed here at the time so that people could escape the congestion of downtown. In 1890 when the streetcar lines were electrified there were approximately 50 businesses at the intersection, five years later there were over 90 [South Minneapolis: A Historic Context, 2000]. Today, the intersection of West Lake Street and Lyndale Avenue South retains a commercial character. While some traditional commercial buildings from the era remain, many others were demolished and replaced with buildings designed for an emerging automobile focused lifestyle. This is particularly evident in the portion of the study area that runs along West Lake Street from Garfield Avenue to Blaisdell Avenue.

What is now the Midtown Greenway was originally the Chicago Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad and was built in 1884. In 1912 the rail line was lowered and the existing trench was created. At that time, the neighborhoods surrounding the corridor were primarily residential and comprised mostly of modest working-class houses, over half of the properties directly adjacent to the rail line were industrial, and Lake Street was rapidly developing as one of the city's major commercial corridors [National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2005]

Around the time train service was eliminated in the corridor, it was developed into a pedestrian and bicycle trail by the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority with support from the Midtown Greenway Coalition and others. The section that traverses the Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan study area was opened in 2000, with other phases opening in 2004 and 2006. It is expected that transit in the form of light rail or streetcar will be placed in the Midtown Greenway at some time in the future.

Courtesy of MN Historical Society

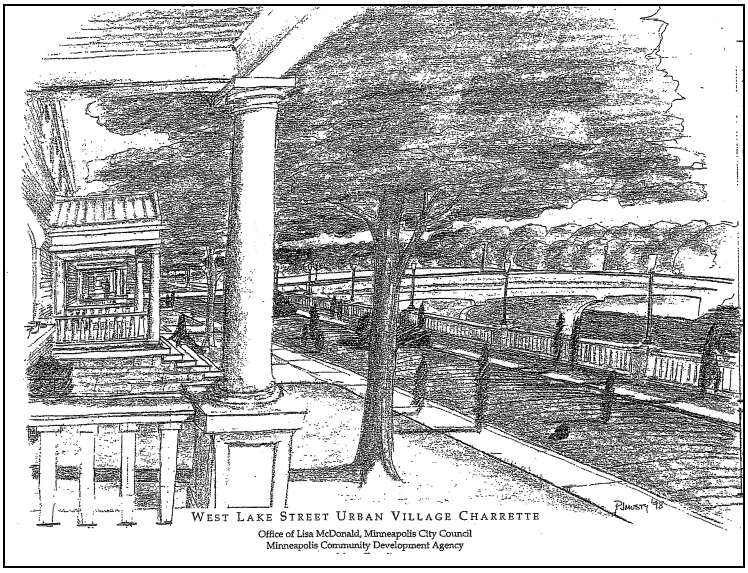
June 2009

PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

In 1997, the City of Minneapolis adopted a plan titled "Lyndale Avenue: A Vision". This plan was produced in reaction to the widening of Lyndale Avenue South which was proposed in 1994. A task force was formed and developed the plan in order to outline a vision for a more pedestrian friendly Lyndale Avenue South. The study area for the plan included areas along Lyndale Avenue South from West Franklin Avenue to the Crosstown Highway.

The plan informed the designs for the rebuilding of Lyndale Avenue South, south of West Lake Street, which is currently underway. While the plan was valuable for the purpose of influencing the reconstruction of Lyndale Avenue, its remaining content is now somewhat out of date. In addition, many of the elements that are now common in a small area plan, such as a future land use map, are absent from this document

In 1998, a community based design charrette was held to outline a community vision for the area bounded by Humboldt Avenue South, West 28th Street, Garfield Avenue South and West 31st Street. While the plan, referred to as the West Lake Urban Village Charrette, focused on an area closer to the intersection of Hennepin Avenue South and West Lake Street, it also contained recommendations related to the development of the Midtown Greenway and the further redevelopment of West Lake Street, especially between Hennepin and Lyndale Avenues. Results of the charrette process provide valuable background information and outline many concepts that are still relevant today, such as the desire for strong and safe pedestrian connections, the need to enhance the public realm whenever possible, and the need to have a good business mix housed in quality architecture. While many elements of the plan have in fact already been implemented, the plan was never formally adopted by the City Council.



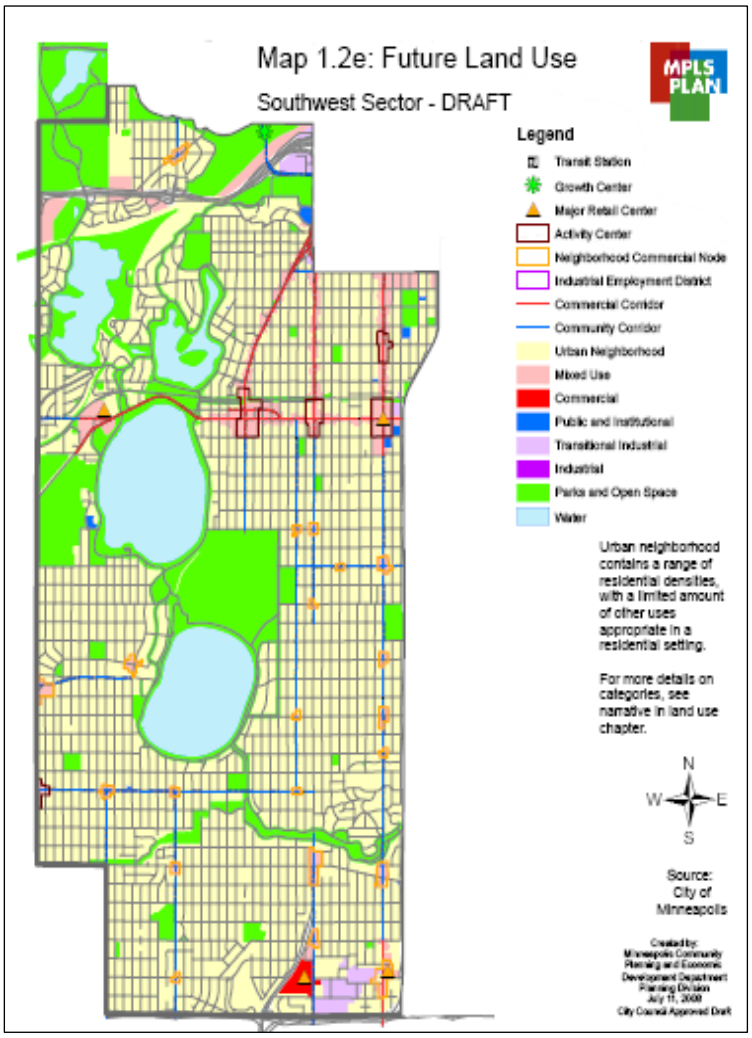
West Lake Urban Village Charrette report cover, 1998

EXISTING POLICY

This small area plan is intended to fill a gap in detailed planning in the area. However, there are several recent and relevant adopted plans that set the stage for this work.

The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth

The City's comprehensive plan was recently updated, providing a future vision and strategy for the entire City. It covers a variety of topics including land use, transportation, housing, heritage preservation, environmental sustainability, and urban design. The land use section of the comprehensive plan focuses on a series of land use features, several of which are applicable to the Lyn-Lake area.



Southwest Land Use Features from the Comprehensive Plan

Activity Centers

The comprehensive plan identifies several "Activity Centers" throughout the city. The intersections of Hennepin and Lake, Lyndale and Lake, and Nicollet and Lake are all designated as Activity Centers along the western portion of West Lake Street. Activity Centers are the places that shape Minneapolis' urban identity. They attract residents, workers, and visitors from the rest of the city and region. Activity Centers support a wide range of commercial, office, and high- to very high-density residential uses. They typically have a busy street life with activity throughout the day and into the evening. They are heavily oriented towards pedestrians, and maintain a traditional urban form and scale. Activity Centers are also well-served by transit. It is the City's goal to support Activity Centers by preserving the mix and intensity of land uses and by enhancing the design features that give each center its unique urban character.

Commercial Corridors

The comprehensive plan designates West Lake Street as a Commercial Corridor. Typically, Commercial Corridors can accommodate intensive commercial uses and high levels of traffic. Commercial Corridors support all types of commercial uses, with some light industrial and high density residential uses as well. While the character of these streets is mainly commercial, residential areas are nearby and impacts from commercial uses must be mitigated as appropriate. Additionally, the City encourages new medium- to high-density residential development along Commercial Corridors, particularly as part of mixed-use development.

Community Corridors

Lyndale Avenue South is designated as a Commercial Corridor north of West 31st Street, and a Community Corridor south of West 31st Street. Community Corridors support limited commercial uses concentrated at Neighborhood Commercial Nodes and low- to medium-density housing

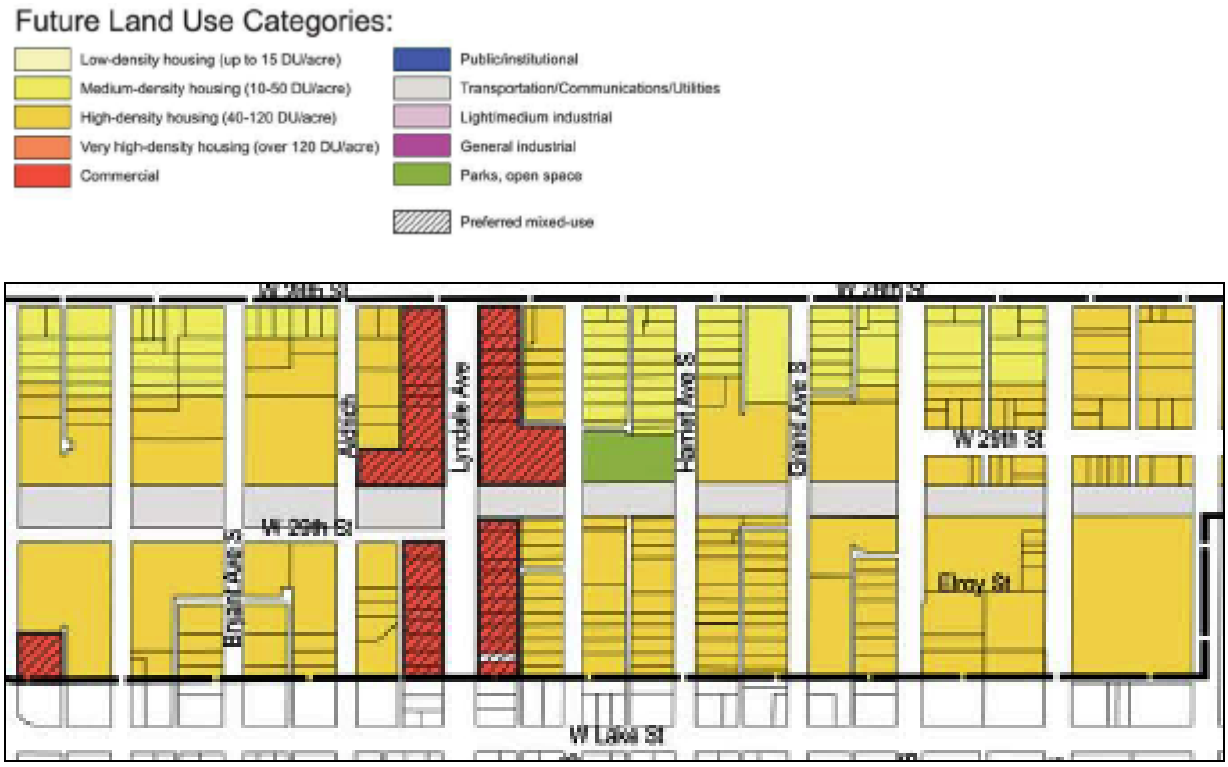
The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan

The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan sets policy direction for possible future change along the Midtown Greenway corridor from the western city limits to the Mississippi River. Adopted by the City Council in January of 2007, this plan recommends future land uses and public infrastructure improvements. The Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan builds on the recommendations outlined in the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan.

Key recommendations from the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan that are relevant to the Lyn-Lake area include:

- Concentrating commercial and mixed-use development at intersections of existing commercial corridors and the Midtown Greenway.
- Encouraging high-density residential development along the Midtown Greenway near major corridors.
- Reestablishing West 29th Street between Emerson and Dupont Avenues and securing additional property where needed to provide a sidewalk along the Greenway edge.
- Providing a linear public “promenade” or walkway wherever possible between private development and the Midtown Greenway and other spaces.
- Considering opportunities to acquire property at future transit stations to create expanded and enhanced public spaces.

The following map shows the future land uses adopted as part of the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan. The Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan also provides development guidelines that address development intensity and desired characteristics of new development.



Future Land Use Plan from the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To understand and recognize the unique nature of the Lyn-Lake area, at the beginning of the planning process three exercises were done to get a sense of what the community values, what concerns exist, and what communal vision exists for the area. First, steering committee members were asked to detail what they like and dislike about the Lyn-Lake area. Second, an online survey was posted and advertised to ask a larger group what they value and what concerns they have about the area. Third, similar questions were asked at the first community meeting held on June 24th, 2008. At the community meeting and on the survey people were also asked to provide three adjectives that describe how they'd like the Lyn-Lake area to be in the future. From this input, the following vision statement and guiding principles were crafted for this plan:

The Lyn-Lake area highly values its independent and diverse business mix. This colorful destination will be supported and enhanced by encouraging the continued development of a clean, dense, and vibrant district. Lyn-Lake's diversity and urban character is valued; it will continue to be an artsy enclave that serves as a home to a diverse population. It will continue to be a place where people choose to walk, bike, and take transit to enjoy all that the area has to offer.

Principles that guide this plan include:

- Maintain and grow an independent and diverse business mix.
- Promote a clean, safe, pedestrian friendly urban environment.
- Maintain and cultivate a residential and commercial identity that is uniquely Lyn-Lake.
- Support a dense environment with housing options for a variety of incomes and lifestyles.
- Encourage incremental greening through the development of small urban green spaces and environmentally sensitive design.
- Balance the needs of automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian travelers while recognizing the exceptional nearby amenities of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes and the Midtown Greenway.
- Continue to plan for the parking needs of area businesses, residents, and visitors while balancing the need for a walkable, well developed area.

The following Chapters will outline existing conditions in the area, summarize the input received from the community, review the issues discovered, and make a series of recommendations that respond to the principles outline above.