15th Avenue SE Urban Design Plan

Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood
Minneapolis, Minnesota

December 1, 2008

Prepared for:
Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association

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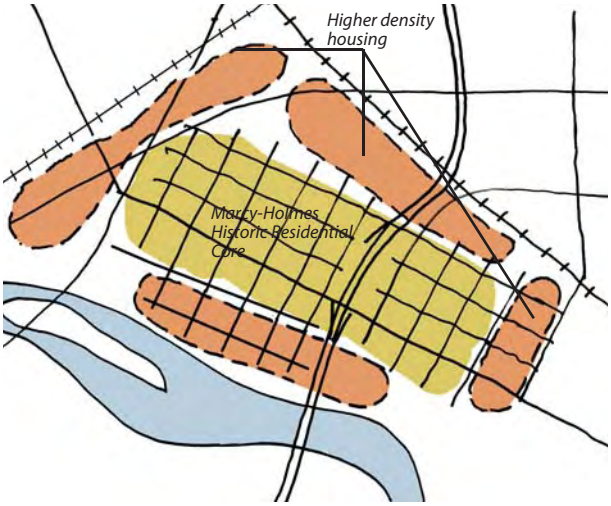
1. Background & Setting

Background & Purpose

The Marcy-Holmes neighborhood is adjacent to the Mississippi River, downtown Minneapolis, and the University of Minnesota. Proximity to the oldest part of the city and today's city center offers Marcy-Holmes the public benefits of an historical urban street pattern and architectural fabric, but also the pressures to absorb new growth and development.

The Marcy-Holmes neighborhood policy reinforces the connection between the past and the future by defining where new growth should occur and what public benefits can be granted and enhanced by new development. New growth is welcome at neighborhood edges in exchange for preserving the historic core and gaining public amenities. This perspective aligns with the City of Minneapolis Comprehensive Plan, which identifies the area as a growth center, or an area that "will be well served by transit and alternative transportation, have superior amenities, accommodate a range of housing needs and offer attractive employment opportunities."



Growth along the Edges: The Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood encourages higher density development along its edges to welcome growth and to reinforce the historic neighborhood core.

Marcy-Holmes understands the trade-off between density and amenity. Linking aggressive development with historic preservation and other public amenities enables Marcy-Holmes to attract, not discourage, new higher density developments. The neighborhood recognizes that innovative, denser, and well-designed redevelopment initiatives along its edges can bring significant benefits to all residents and businesses in the neighborhood.

The purpose of this document is to articulate to the development community and potential implementation partners the community expectations for new, aggressive, high-quality development on 15th Avenue SE. The document outlines a design strategy, makes recommendations, and shows conceptual plans for the three and a half block area.

Strategic Location: The Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood is located near downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota.

Neighborhood Vision

For the three and a half blocks along 15th Avenue SE, The Marcy-Holmes neighborhood envisions:

- Buildings, public spaces, and streetscapes that add visual variety to the neighborhood.
- High-quality architecture that prioritizes appropriate proportion and massing over total building height.
- New public spaces that add to the neighborhood's sense of place.
- Streets and sidewalks that are pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-friendly.
- A range of housing types, including affordable housing, that attract staff, researchers, students, and others interested in living near the University.
- Stabilization of the historical residential neighborhood core through redevelopment at neighborhood edges.
- Preservation of historical buildings where appropriate.
- A new SE library as part of a mixed-use redevelopment.
- Space for U-tech expansion.
- Shared parking with Dinkytown.
- Elimination of blighted and poorly maintained properties.
- Additional market support for local businesses.

The Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association has a long-standing policy when considering variances. Generally, requests for variances and conditional use permits would be supported by the neighborhood in proportion to what the development gives back to the street, historic district, neighborhood, riverfront and city.

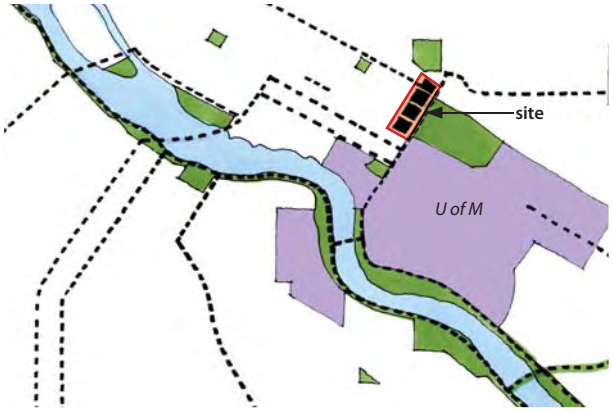
-Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association

Neighborhood Vision for 15th Avenue: New higher density housing along the edge of the neighborhood can help stabilize the core of the neighborhood.

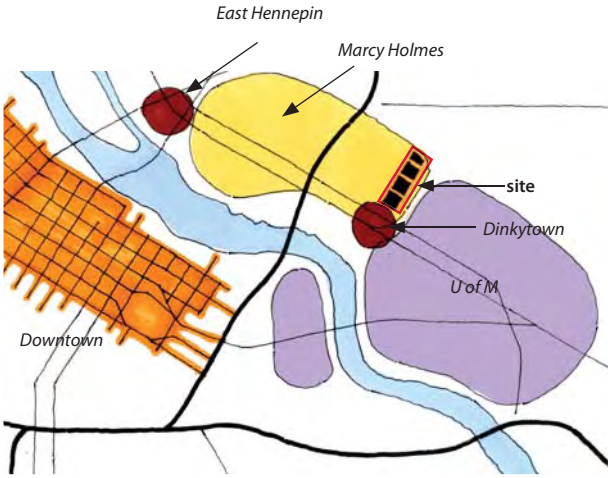
Setting

Regional Setting

Situated along the Mississippi River between downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota, the Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood is strategically located to grow over the next several decades. The neighborhood has immediate access to two of the largest employment centers in the state, the renowned Grand Rounds Scenic Byway parks and trails system, a strong network of current and future transit routes, and the Interstate highway system.



Public Realm & Recreation: Marcy-Holmes is connected to the Minneapolis bicycle system and the Grand Rounds Scenic Byway.



Employment & Cultural Amenities: Located between the University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis, Marcy-Holmes offers immediate proximity to cultural amenities and employment opportunities.

Transportation Amenities: Marcy-Holmes is well served by transit. The northern alignment of the Central Corridor could pass through Dinkytown, and the southern alignment through the U of M would be within comfortable walking distance.

Setting (Continued)

Neighborhood Setting

The site's immediate context includes the University of Minnesota, Dinkytown, SE Library, and Marcy and Van Cleve Parks. Downtown Minneapolis and the Mississippi River are nearby as well. The site is within walking distance of many amenities and is therefore a prime location for redevelopment.

The Marcy-Holmes neighborhood is characterized by historical homes, narrow streets, and unique commercial buildings. The architecture and building forms are representative of a mix of styles popular in the neighborhood over the past century.

Neighborhood Setting: Located minutes from downtown Minneapolis and within walking distance of the U of M, Dinkytown, future LRT, neighborhood parks, and the Mississippi River, the site offers all the advantages of a great urban neighborhood.

The Architecture of Marcy-Holmes: As home to many of the city's early civic and industrial leaders, much of the housing stock is historical and includes large estates. The architectural styles vary and consist of Arts and Crafts, Victorian, Colonial, and University Gothic styles. This rich collection of styles and building forms should be both preserved and considered in new developments.

Setting (Continued)

The Site

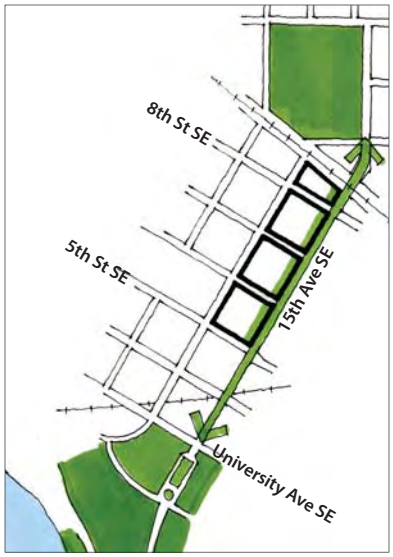
The site consists of three and a half blocks between 15th Avenue SE and 14th Avenue SE. Blocks 1, 2, and 3 are zoned R5, and Block 4 is zoned I1. The site contains primarily apartments for students. Many of the buildings are original structures, and others have been built in the past several decades. Rollins Court (low-rise, owner-occupied townhouses on Block 3) and Bierman Apartments (medium-rise rental flats on Block 2) are the two most recent significant investments. The site is comprised of multiple lots and owners.

Buildings on the Site: The site contains both original buildings that have been subdivided into apartments, as well as more recent ownership and rental developments.

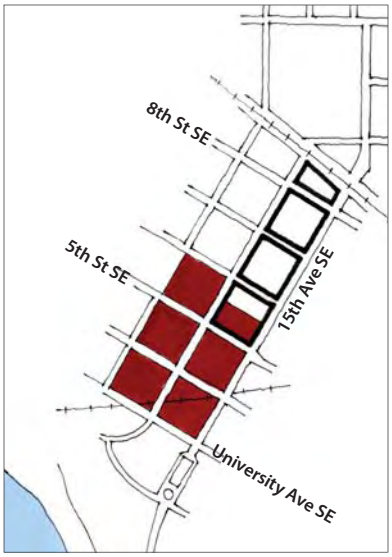
The Site: The site is located on the east edge of Marcy-Holmes, adjacent to Dinkytown and Bierman Field.

2. Design Strategy

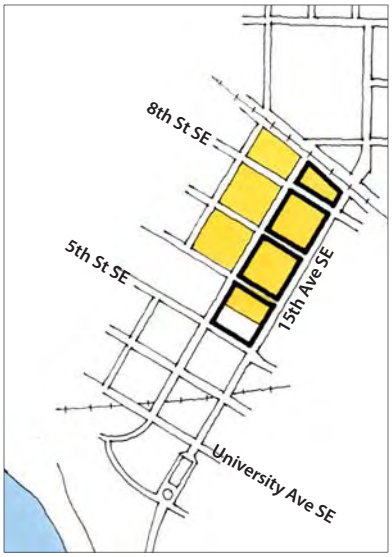
Urban Design Goals



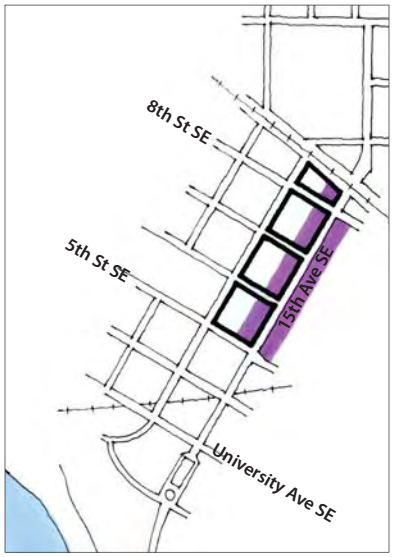
Public Realm Connection: 15th Avenue SE should be the unifying feature. It should be developed as a pedestrian and bicycle promenade connecting Van Cleve Park to the University of Minnesota.



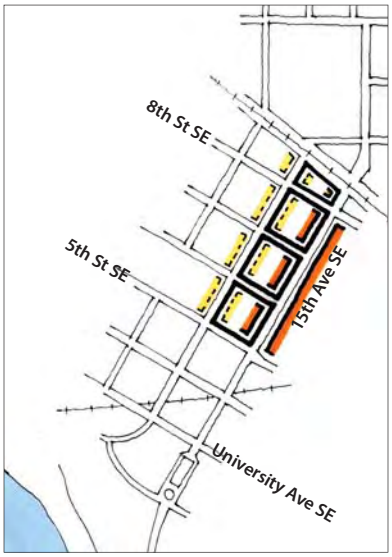
Non-Residential Uses: The lower half of the southern-most block adjacent to Dinkytown should be considered for non-residential uses like retail space, university office space, and/or a new SE library as a part of a larger mixed-use project.



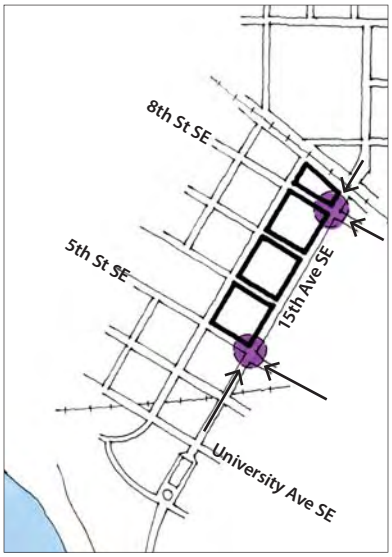
Residential Uses: The primary use should be residential for individuals, students, and families who desire access to the University and Downtown. A range of unit types and price points should be offered.



University Frontage: 15th Avenue SE is the interface between the University and the beginning of the neighborhood. New development should establish a strong neighborhood frontage and presence.



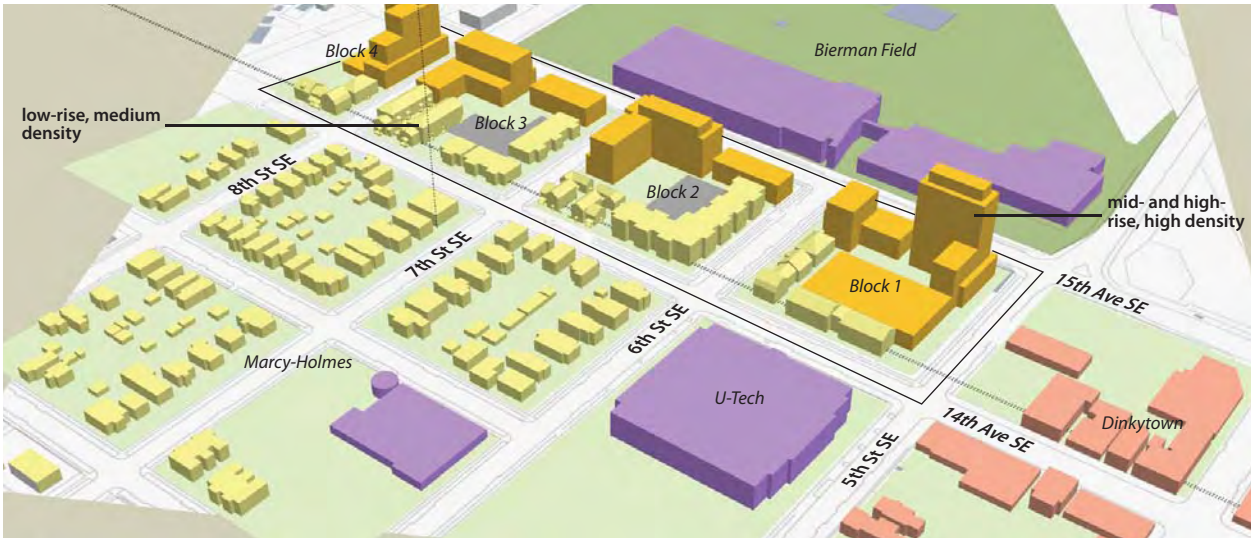
Neighborhood Transitions: New development should acknowledge different edge conditions (university and neighborhood) and transition gracefully with appropriate scales and building types.



Gateway Elements: Entrances to the neighborhood should be marked with strong corner buildings and building elements.

Organizing the Site

Development of the three and a half blocks should respond to the surrounding context. Blocks should develop with a range of building types and heights, as well as a range of private and public open spaces. Generally, the blocks should be organized with lower scale buildings to the west, and taller buildings to the east. Given the relatively large block size, the east-west streets between 14th and 15th Avenues SE should transition from low to medium to tall buildings. The greatest density (and possible non-residential uses) should be located on Block 1, the block directly north of Dinkytown.



Design Principle: The block between 14th Ave SE and 15th Ave SE should transition from neighborhood scale to higher density housing.

3. Design Guidelines

6-Step Process

Step 1.

Aggregate Lots (orange): Gradually, lots on the three and a half blocks should be aggregated into increments that can be developed with appropriate densities. Existing high-quality buildings that contribute to the character of Marcy-Holmes should be preserved, if possible, as a part of a larger redevelopment effort.

Step 2.

Create a Strong Public Realm (green): A pedestrian promenade on 15th Avenue SE should be established by expanding the sidewalk, improving the landscaping, setting buildings back approximately 15 feet from the sidewalk, and creating lively facades with raised patios, balconies and common spaces.

Step 3.

Locate Parking (grey): All parking should be located mid-block, primarily in structures above or below ground. Existing surface lots should be eventually redeveloped and intensified.

Step 4.

Site Non-Residential Uses (blue): Non-residential uses, such as limited retail, university offices, incubator space, or a new SE library could be located on the southern most block, adjacent to Dinkytown.

Step 5.

Create Block Perimeters (orange): The lower floors of the development should respond to the surrounding context.

Step 6.

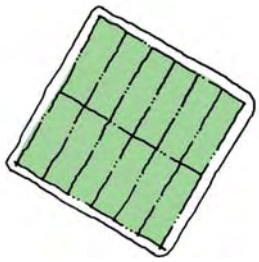
Locate Density & Height Strategically (pink): Upper floors should be sculpted to minimize shadowing on existing residential buildings and public spaces and to maximize views.

1. Aggregate Lots

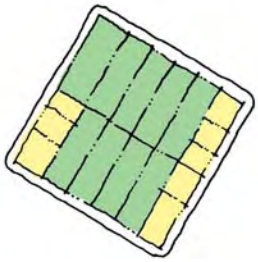
Redevelopment efforts will require property assembly. The community recognizes redevelopment on a lot by lot basis will not yield the desired outcome as it will likely not create significant change. Instead of lot-by-lot projects, developers and investors are encouraged to aggregate properties to achieve the necessary efficiencies and densities envisioned in this plan. The strategy of aggregating properties is not an endorsement of urban renewal, rather it is a recognition that larger properties are needed to achieve higher densities and maximum public benefits. It is important to note, however, that while this Plan encourages property assembly to create larger projects, it also recognizes the value of gradual and incremental redevelopment. Developers are expected to balance these two conditions.

Eventual and gradual redevelopment of these three and a half blocks should:

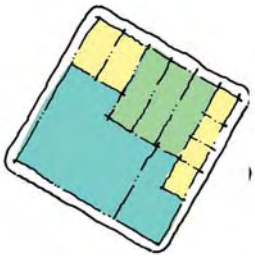
- Contain both infill development on a smaller scale (1/4 block on 14th Ave SE) as well as aggressive redevelopment efforts (1/2 block to full block on 15th Ave SE).
- Should attempt to preserve architecturally significant and contributing buildings as part of a larger redevelopment effort.



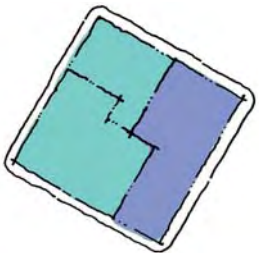
Original lot pattern.



1970 - 1990
Subdivided lots on north-south streets.



1980 - 2008
Aggregated lots for larger projects.



2008 - Future
Further aggregation of lots.

Hypothetical Block on 15th Ave SE: Over time, parcels on the three and a half block on 15th Ave SE have been both subdivided and aggregated. This Plan recommends further aggregation in order to achieve both aggressive and incremental infill development.

Balancing Development with Preservation: New development should attempt to preserve the architecturally valuable buildings on site by transferring development rights across the site.

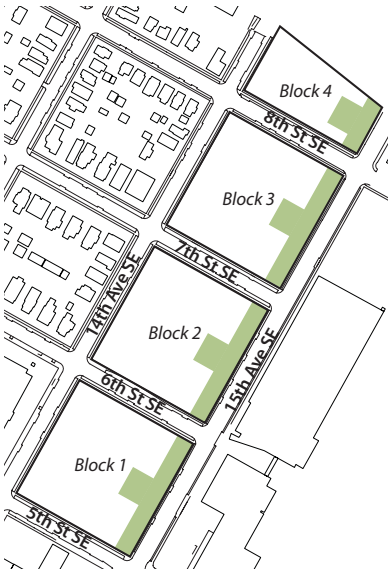
2. Public Realm

The Promenade & Forecourts

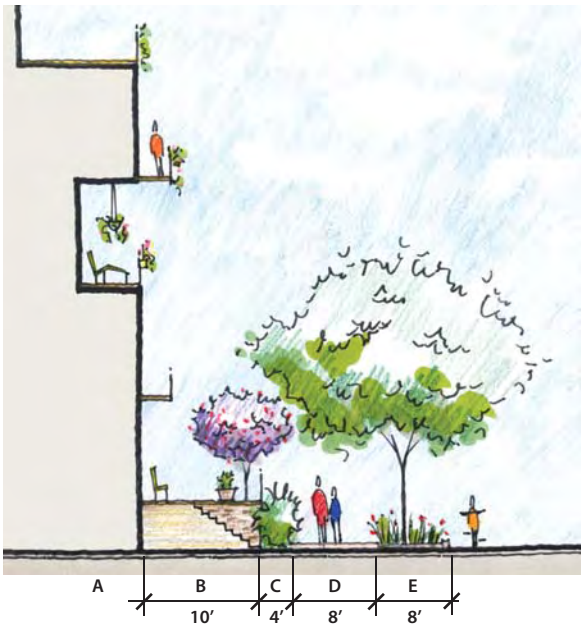
The 15th Avenue Promenade can be the unifying feature of the three and a half blocks. The blocks themselves are different, but their frontage along 15th Avenue SE is the same and offers an opportunity to create a valued public space connection between Van Cleve Park and the University of Minnesota. Pedestrians and cyclists favor the route now, and improvements to its quality and appearance can enhance it as a prominent public space.

Recommended improvements include:

- Increase the street boulevard width from five to eight feet to create a well-defined promenade edge.
- Plant robust and interesting plants in the widened boulevard to highlight and distinguish the area.
- Increase the sidewalk width from five to eight feet to provide a more generous walking area.
- Add a four-foot vegetation strip to mark the transition between public and private space.
- Require new buildings to have raised patios that add activity and open space adjacent to the promenade.
- Require balconies and occupiable step-back decks that provide additional open space along the promenade.
- Encourage building forecourts along the promenade to highlight entrances, add variation to the building and promenade edge, and give visual interest to the promenade experience.



The Promenade & Forecourts: 15th Avenue SE will be enlivened with raised patios, enhanced landscaping, new streetscapes, and forecourts to building entrances.



A: Interior semi-public zone (balconies and decks)
B: Exterior semi-public zone (raised patios)
C: Landscape transition (vegetation strip)
D: Promenade (increased sidewalk space)
E: Enhanced landscaping (distinguishable boulevard planting)

The Promenade: The creation of the 15th Avenue Promenade can result in a distinguishable and identifiable place. Given the existing right-of-way, some of the proposed improvements would be on private property.

2. Public Realm (Continued)

Gallery of Examples: Promenades, Raised Patios, & Forecourts

2. Public Realm (Continued)

Courtyards, Mews, & Passages

In order to create substantial density and assure a variety of spaces and building types, new development should use not just the perimeter of the blocks for their frontage, but also the interiors of the blocks. Semi-public spaces such as courtyards, mews, and passages create additional opportunities for front doors and access to buildings. These spaces contribute visual interest and variety to the 15th Avenue Promenade because of their adjacency and connectivity to it, and will offer views to the interiors of the blocks from the Promenade and the sidewalks.

Courtyards, mews, and passages are appropriate anywhere in the block interiors. Mews and passages should connect to sidewalks and the 15th Avenue Promenade where possible.

Gallery of Examples: Courtyards, Mews, & Passages

2. Public Realm (Continued)

Street Frontage

The perimeter of the blocks should be developed with a range of frontage types. Along 14th Avenue SE, porches set relatively close to the street (similar to Rollins Court) are appropriate. Raised patios and forecourts should be built along 15th Avenue SE in order to create the 15th Avenue Promenade. The east-west streets (8th, 7th, and 6th Streets SE) should contain stoops at the sidewalk that create a transition between the neighborhood and the Promenade area.

All frontages should be designed to encourage personalization and frequent use, and should contain entrances at least every 40 feet.

Gallery of Examples: Street Frontage Types

Non-Residential Entry

Raised Patio

Stoop

Porch

Street Frontage: Non-residential entries, raised patios, stoops, and porches are the appropriate frontage types for Blocks 1-4.

note: commercial storefronts should not extend onto 14th AveSE. Non residential entries on 14th can be office space, classroom space or other uses complimentary to the U-Tech Building

3. Parking

Parking Types & Locations

Parking should be located mid-block and below or above ground. Access to parking should be at one location per block face. No curb cuts or driveways should be located on 15th Avenue SE. If possible, additional retail parking should be provided on Block 1 to support Dinkytown. In order to reduce on-street parking demand throughout the neighborhood, each development should have .5 spaces per bedroom unless a professionally prepared Traffic Demand Mangement Plan indicates otherwise.

Above-Ground and Surface Parking

- Surface parking is discouraged. If surface parking cannot be avoided, it should be located in the center of the block so that all streets have building frontage, not parking frontage.
- Above-ground parking, or structured parking, should be located in the center of the block so that all streets have building frontage, not parking frontage.
- Structured parking with active uses on the ground floor is allowed on the block face nearest Dinkytown.
- Shared parking is encouraged.

Underground Parking

- Underground parking, or parking beneath buildings, is allowed in all parts of all blocks.

Access to Parking

- Parking should not be accessed from 15th Avenue SE. Access from side streets is preferred.
- As few parking access points as possible per block is encouraged to limit the number of curb cuts and to increase street parking space.
- Shared access to multiple parking areas is encouraged.

Parking Locations: Structured and surface parking areas are appropriate in the interior of the blocks. Underground parking is appropriate in any location. Access to parking is limited to one point per block face, and access from 15th Avenue SE is strongly discouraged.

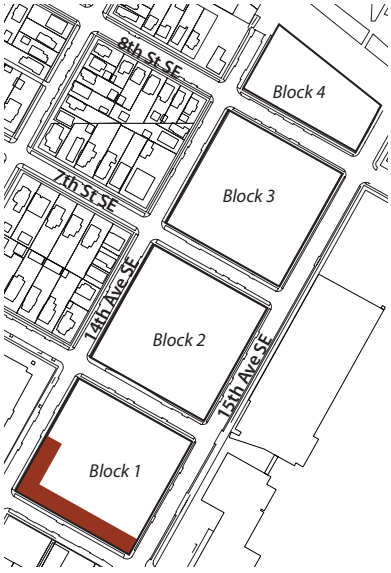
Gallery of Examples: Parking Buildings & Parking Beneath Buildings

4. Non-Residential Uses

Non-Residential Uses

The opportunities for non-residential uses exist primarily on Block 1, adjacent to Dinkytown. Non-residential uses on this block should be oriented to Dinkytown, the U-Tech building and/or the intersection of 15th Ave SE and 5th Street NE. Non-residential uses should be located on the ground floor and easily accessed from the sidewalk.

Non-residential uses can consist of University office space, retail, U-Tech expansion, neighborhood services, or a new Southeast Library. Parking for such uses should be accommodated on the block, preferably in a shared ramp that serves Dinkytown as well as development on the block.



note: retail uses should not extend onto 14th AveSE. Non residential space on 14th can be office space, classroom space or other uses complimentary to the U-Tech Building

Non Residential Uses:

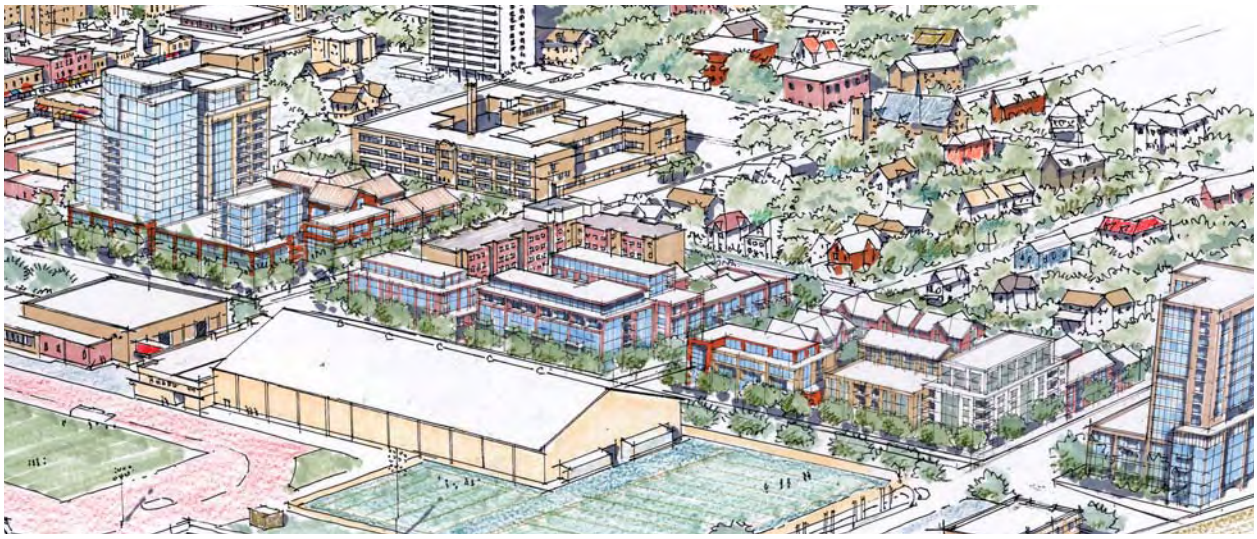
Non-Residential Uses: Block 1, adjacent to Dinkytown can be developed with non-residential uses. Offices, a library, or other similar uses would complete the north edge of Dinkytown and would create partnership possibilities.

5 & 6: Block Perimeters, Height, & Density

The three and a half blocks between 14th and 15th Avenues SE should be designed a transitional edge of the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood. New developments should resemble the scale of buildings across 14th Avenue. Taller buildings on 15th Avenue should be stepped back from the street so as to not overwhelm the street and sidewalk. Buildings on 14th Avenue SE should be low scale, but medium density, such as townhouses and small apartments. Blocks 1 and 4 present immediate opportunities for taller buildings and greater density. Blocks 2 and 3 can be developed with taller buildings or with mid-rise buildings. Floorplates above six stories should be limited to avoid monolithic building forms. The range of building heights and types combined with the range of public and semi-public spaces will create a variety of housing choices for families and individuals who desire to be adjacent to the University.

View East from 8th Street SE: New development on 14th Avenue SE will mirror the scale of the neighborhood; new development with taller buildings will be stepped back from the street and located on and towards 15th Avenue SE.

Building Height Plan: Building heights should transition from the low-rise neighborhood to high-rise buildings overlooking Bierman Field. Floorplates above six stories should be limited to create a sculpted skyline and to avoid monolithic buildings.

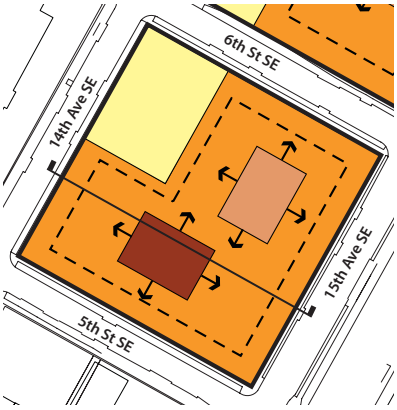


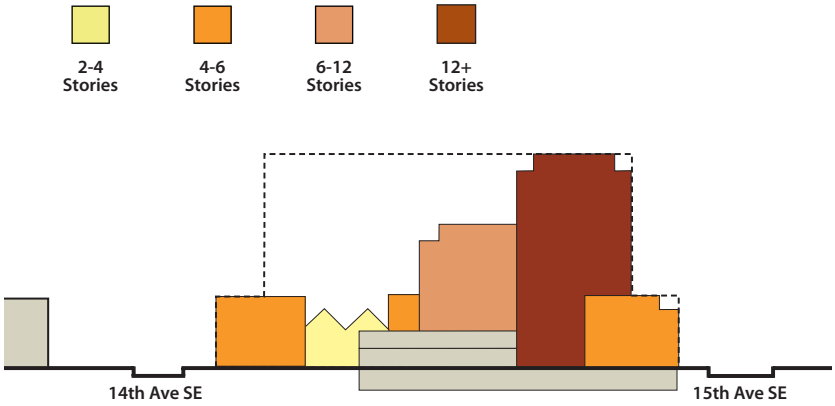
Potential Build-out: New buildings will create lively streets and a varied skyline. New Development will be low scale towards the neighborhood and will gradually increase to mid and high rise on 15th Ave SE.

5 & 6: Block Perimeters, Height, & Density

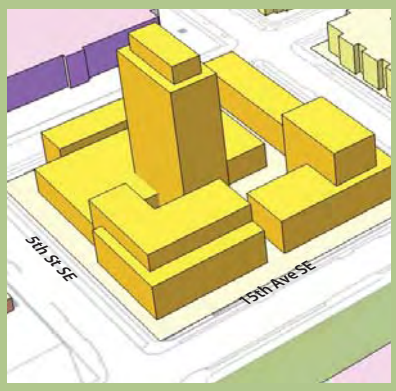
Block 1

Located on the north edge of Dinkytown, Block 1 can be the most intensely developed block and can be a signature and iconic development. The south edge of the block should create a strong commercial or non-residential edge to Dinkytown. Consideration should be given to creating additional or shared parking for Dinkytown. The northwest corner of the block should be developed at a neighborhood scale, and the remainder of the block should contain a four to five story street enclosure. Consideration should be given to creating two taller buildings, one on the north or east edge (approximately 12,000 SF floorplate) and a slender signature tower (floorplate between 8,000 and 10,000 SF) on the south edge of the block.





Building Heights: The block should be developed with a variety of building heights. The north corner of the block should be lower scale, and in scale with the neighborhood. Floorplates above six stories should be set back from the street and not greater than approximately 12,000 SF in area.

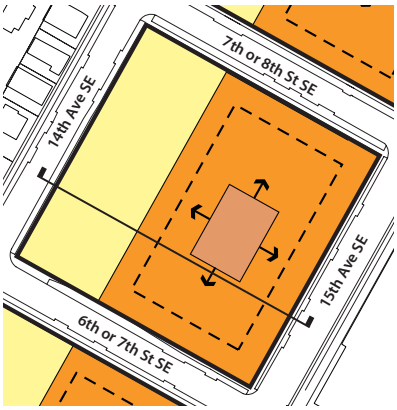


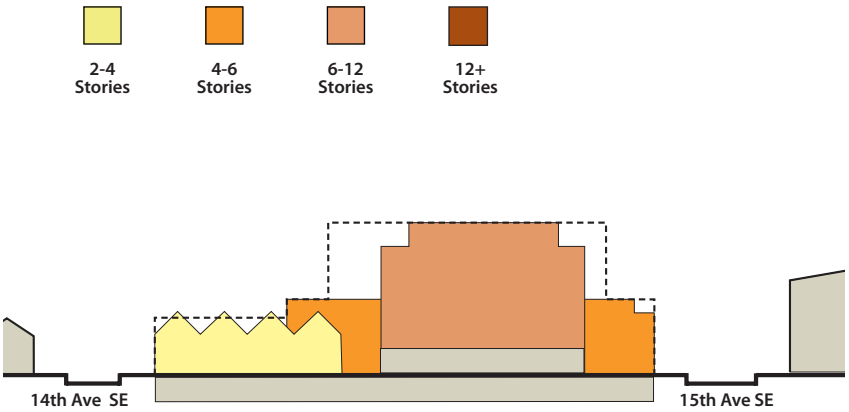
Possible Outcomes

5 & 6: Block Perimeters, Height, & Density

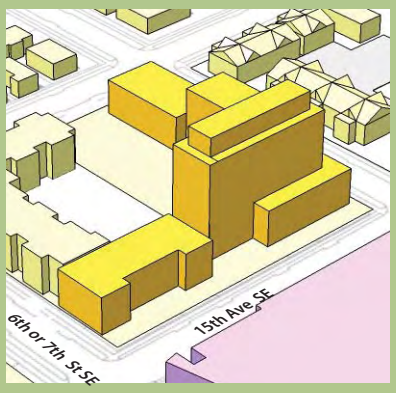
Blocks 2-3

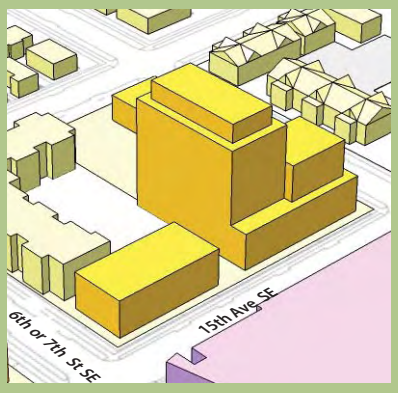
Blocks 2 and 3 are similar; they are both defined on the east by the University facilities and the west by neighborhood scaled buildings. The west edge of these two blocks should respond to the neighborhood scale with low-rise medium-density housing. The remainder of the block should contain a 4 to 5 story street enclosure. Taller buildings, up to 12 stories may be located towards the east side of the block and should be set back from the property line at least 20 feet. In order to avoid monolithic building forms, floor plates above 6 stories should be a maximum of approximately 12,000 sf.

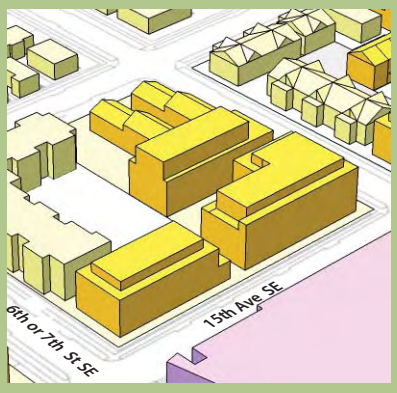




Building Heights: The block should be developed with a variety of building heights. The west edge of the block should be lower scale and in scale with the neighborhood. Floorplates above six stories should be set back from the street and not greater than approximately 12,000 SF in area.





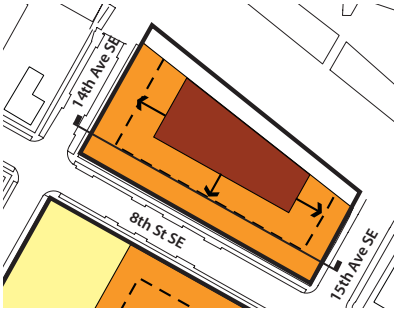


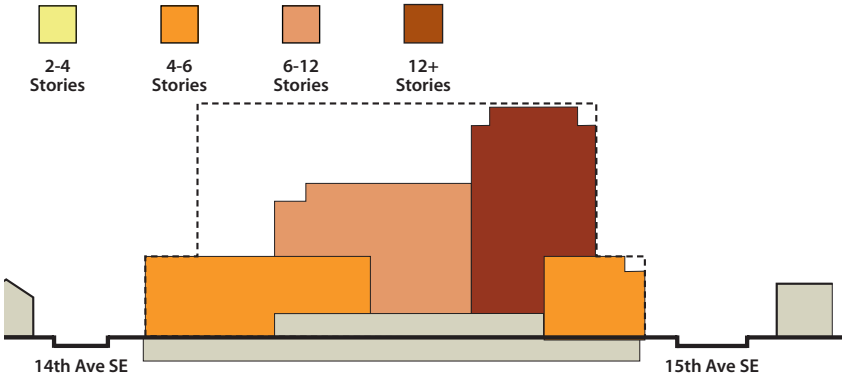
Possible Outcomes

5 & 6: Block Perimeters, Height, & Density

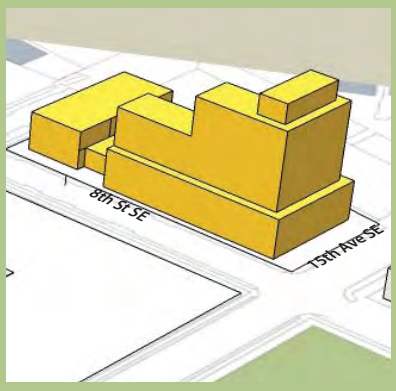
Block 4

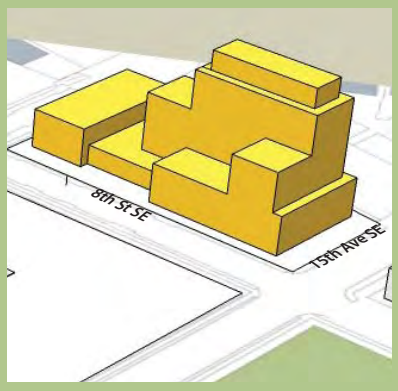
Block 4 is located along the south edge of the rail tracks. The block overlooks Van Cleve Park, the neighborhoods and Bierman Field. New development should create a strong 4 to 6 story street enclosure with front doors on 8th St SE, 14th Ave SE and 14th Ave SE. A small footprint residential tower (approximately 10,000 sf) oriented east west can be located anywhere on the block so long as it is set back from the street.

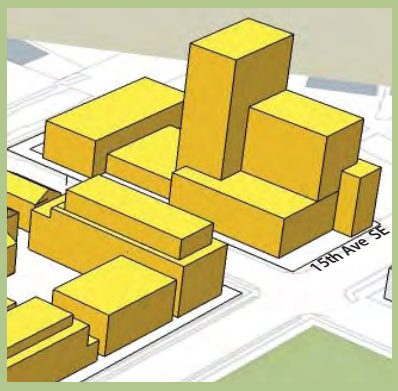




Building Heights: The block should be developed with a variety of building heights. A taller building is appropriate anywhere on the block if it is set back from the street.







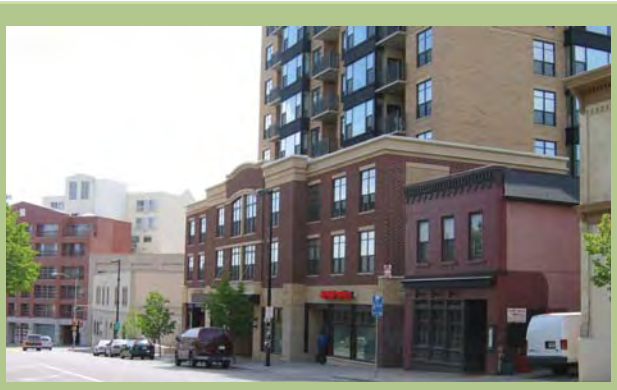
Possible Outcomes

Development Models: Examples

Modest upper floor stepbacks

Substantial stepback at third floor

Base matches adjacent low scale building



Townhouses with multiple entries on street

Taller building set behind and in the middle of the block

Development Models: Examples

Narrow side to the street

Semi-public space adjacent to public sidewalk

Views to the interior of the block

Multiple building heights

Mix of building types on a single block.

Small floor plates and slender towers modestly stepped back at the third floor

Highly articulated ground floor with second and third floor roof decks and balconies

Renovate existing building as part of a larger redevelopment

Multiple street level entries

Semi public spaces (courts, patios, etc) adjacent to sidewalk

Larger full block length project articulated as multiple buildings

Development Models: Examples

Narrow side of tower to street

Multiple street level entries

Semi public spaces (courts, patios, etc) adjacent to sidewalk

New courtyard integrates new development with adjacent historic building