

**Department of Community Planning and Economic Development**  
Above the Falls Plan Update

**Date:** February 19, 2013

**Project Name:** Above the Falls Plan Update

**CPED Staff and Phone:** Haila Maze, (612) 673-2098

**Wards:** 1, 3, 4, 5

**Neighborhood Organization:** Bottineau Neighborhood Association, Columbia Park Neighborhood Association, Hawthorne Neighborhood Council, Lind-Bohanon Neighborhood Association, Concerned Citizens for Marshall Terrace, McKinley Community, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council, St Anthony West Neighborhood Organization, Sheridan Neighborhood Organization, Webber-Camden Neighborhood Organization

**Existing Minneapolis Plan Designations:**

- West Broadway Avenue is designated as a Commercial Corridor; Broadway Street NE, Marshall Street NE, and Lowry Avenue are designated Community Corridors; the Grain Belt area is a designated Activity Center; Lowry Ave NE & Marshall Street NE is a designated Neighborhood Commercial Node; and North Washington Jobs Park, Shoreham Yards, and Upper River are designated Industrial Employment Districts

**Zoning Plate Numbers:** 4, 8, 9, 13, 14

**Background and Public Process**

In 2000, the City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) jointly adopted a bold vision for the upper Mississippi riverfront, defined as the area north of Plymouth Ave N on the west side of the river, and 8th St NE on the east side. The Above the Falls plan envisioned new parks, trails, and transformational redevelopment of the adjacent land uses.

In the time since the plan's adoption, significant progress has been made towards achieving that vision, especially in terms of park and trail improvements. However, much remains to be accomplished. In 2009, the Minneapolis City Council renewed its commitment to this area by directing staff to pursue a review and update of the plan. At the same time, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) initiated a high profile and ambitious initiative to refresh the park vision for the same area. The resulting vision, known as RiverFirst, was approved by the Park Board in 2012.

The Above the Falls Master Plan Update reflects a renewed vision of the original Above the Falls Master Plan, focused on "developing the Mississippi riverfront into a regional park amenity in north and northeast Minneapolis." Likewise, this plan update supports addressing land use conflicts, improving environmental quality, and supporting new investment – in order to leverage the unique and valuable asset that is the Mississippi River.

The parks component of this plan retains the broad vision and goals of the original while incorporating significant new parks elements from RiverFirst. A regional park master plan with more detail is included as an appendix to the main document.

The plan update continues to reflect a desire for positive change that will benefit the residents of North and Northeast Minneapolis, as well as the city and region as a whole. This plan update does have some key differences from the original, however. The most significant changes from the original include:

- More incremental approaches to implementation of redevelopment plans, based both on financial and market feasibility issues, as well as changes in legal guidelines that weaken eminent domain powers and strengthen nonconforming rights – both of which have happened since 2000.
- Greater appreciation for the value of industrial areas, and their importance to the employment base of the City. The Industrial Land Use and Employment Policy Plan (2006) pointed out the rapid decline in available sites to attract new jobs.
- Integration of City community and economic development functions into the plan and recommendations for this area. Consistently heard through the process was the need to ensure the plans for new jobs and housing fit within the larger strategy for improving neighborhoods and the well-being of residents on this side of Minneapolis.
- More robust implementation section, with specific recommendations matched with timeframes and responsible parties. The plan lays out top priorities for implementation, and divides them into a Priority Plan (near term, some feasibility) and a Vision Plan (long term, unclear feasibility). This reflected the need to attain achievable results, without losing sight of a long term vision.

The planning process was jointly staffed by the City and MPRB. The Above the Falls Citizen Advisory Committee (AFCAC) served as the citizens' advisory committee and the Riverfront Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) as the project's technical advisory committee. Both of these groups met monthly or more frequently during the planning process.

The planning process was initiated in late November 2010, starting with a research phase which lasted through 2011. This process included three major public meetings and numerous focus groups and smaller discussions, providing insight into the data gathering and analysis. The results from this phase were summarized in a series of technical reports, which are included as appendices to the plan.

In 2012, the plan update phase began. This stage was more outreach intensive – with a second series of three public forums, as well as a number of targeted outreach efforts, focusing on those less likely to be involved in the planning process. Targeted meetings reached a range of different groups, including residents, business owners, Hispanic/Latino, Southeast Asian, African American, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, bicycle advocates, and others. Where needed, meetings were bilingual, with translation into Spanish, Lao, and sign language where needed.

The draft plan was made available to neighborhoods, organizations, residents and City departments via e-mail, the CPED Planning Division website, the MPRB headquarters, and six local libraries and community centers December 10, 2012 for a 45-day review period ending on January 24, 2013.

## **Overview**

### **Land Use and Design Plan**

The future land use vision for this plan represents a transformational approach to the riverfront, balanced with an incremental approach to implementation. Due to the size and complexity of the area, the main categories of land use are summarized below:

- **Parks.** A defining feature of this plan is the riverfront parkland which is proposed as a continuous connection along both river banks. As in the original Above the Falls plan, these do not always follow parcel boundaries. This is intentional, as the division between parks and development will be decided at the point of land acquisition by the Park Board. Acquisition in general will be incremental, long term, and based on opportunities as they arise.
- **Mixed Use.** While the original plan shows residential-only areas along the riverfront, this update shows them as mixed use. This reflects the desire to incorporate retail, service, office, and hospitality uses within these areas, in addition to retail – and possibly compatible light industrial. It also reflects that these areas will be transitioning over time, and may include industrial uses for some time. These mixed use areas are located strategically near areas of relative market strength and on main corridors, consistent with both general City policy and market research done for this plan.
- **Transitional Industrial.** One area, the west central riverfront referred to in the plan as Subarea 5, is shown as transitional industrial. This reflects the fact that it is expected to transition, but that this likely will happen on a longer time frame than some other areas, due to challenges in relocating existing uses.
- **Industrial.** The industrial employment districts shown in the original Above the Falls Plan and affirmed in the Industrial Land Use Study (2006) are maintained here. Policy supports improvements to these areas, and a focus on clean, job-intensive uses. The jobs based here are important, but also important is that these areas do not create a barrier for people traveling to the river – and that the jobs there benefit area residents. Both are priorities in the plan recommendations.
- **Business Park.** This is a proposed new or modified zoning district, with a focus on high-value industrial uses. It would limit the lower end uses that end up in industrial districts often by default, and would be focused on accommodating jobs while at the same time being potential compatible with residential development. The specific standards associated with this new zoning district would be determined after plan adoption via a rezoning study.

The plan also contains a range of more specific guidance for each subarea. It also contains a number of design guidelines, with a focus on encouraging development that is compatible with the amenity of a riverfront location. Additionally, the intent is to provide guidance for rehabilitation of existing sites as well as new development, since it is anticipated that the transition period for development in this area will be significant.

### Parks and Trails Plan

The parks plan for this document is fairly extensive. As the Above the Falls riverfront park is designated as a regional park, the plan (and appendices) must meet Metropolitan Council standards for a regional park plan amendment.

The main ideas behind the parks plan have not changed greatly. The vision of continuous riverfront park and trails remains. However, the design competition and subsequent design work through RiverFirst has advanced some exciting new concepts for how riverfront park development can happen, and what features and amenities it will contain.

The MPRB is already actively engaged in implementation of various elements of the plan, including land acquisition, advance design work, and identification of funds for park development. For the sake of clarity, the Above the Falls Plan Update does not go into detail on all these implementation phase projects, but just describes the general policy and priorities for park development.

It is expected that the MPRB also will be approving this plan, likely at a later date than Planning Commission and City Council action. Due to these parallel processes, there will need to be ongoing communication between the MPRB and City regarding the approval schedule and status of any plan amendments. As the proposed boundaries of the planned park have changed, this will be reflected in an update to the regional park boundary.

### Environment and Infrastructure

The original plan had a strong focus on the environment, particularly environmental remediation, shoreland restoration, and innovative stormwater management. This study maintains these priorities and focus, but with a different approach. While the original plan laid out specific master planned concepts – consistent with large scale acquisition and redevelopment – this update takes more of a toolbox approach, describing viable options that might be used in various locations within the area. Since implementation is likely to happen incrementally, it was determined this approach would likely be more flexible and useful than one that depended on large scale solutions and structures.

This plan also builds on the infrastructure approaches in the original plan, specifically the series of Riverway Streets that provide access from the adjacent neighborhoods to the riverfront. Virtually all of these were adopted as planned bicycle corridors into the City's Bicycle Master Plan (2011), and a number already have completed or funded upgrades planned. Work on improving these connections will be an ongoing process.

The plan also adds detail on other transportation infrastructure not fully discussed in the original plan – including freight rail, barging, truck routes, bus transit, and parking. In the context of barging, there is some general discussion of the threat of Asian carp, and the potential impacts of lock closure. While this does not attempt to be the City's official policy plan on these particular topics, they needed to be addressed to provide context for the river use discussion that is central to riverfront planning.

### Community and Economic Development

As mentioned above, the planning process identified a need to look at how the guidance for this area fits into the larger strategy for strengthening neighborhoods in North and Northeast Minneapolis.

On the community development side, the plan addresses the need for a diversity of housing types (both affordable and market rate), and the need to invest in both existing communities and new developments. The plan's analysis explored the relationships between neighborhoods and new riverfront development, and provided a range of recommendations to benefit both. The plan also stresses the need for more retail and service options, and the importance of public safety.

On the economic development side, the plan focused on the importance of ensuring that new job growth benefits area residents. As in many other parts of the city, a substantial majority of the jobs in the area are not held by people living nearby. Given the high unemployment rates and disparities present in a number of the nearby neighborhoods, it was apparent that any strategy to retain or increase jobs should also include job training and job linkage elements for local job seekers.

### Health Impact Analysis

One additional feature of this plan was a related Health Impact Analysis (HIA), staffed by Department of Health and Family Support (DHFS). The HIA explored a range of public health issues related to the park and land use recommendations outlined in the plan, including physical activity, public safety, economic opportunity, environmental contamination, and others. Recommendations throughout the plan reflect the research and findings generated by this process.

The HIA played a particularly important role in outreach to targeted populations, as described above. The results from this outreach are included in the plan and its appendices.

This plan surfaced some important topics, ranging from the incidence of asthma in nearby neighborhoods, to public safety concerns along the most significant corridors to the river, to the perception in some populations that benefits of new development would accrue to others – not them. The work of the HIA will continue past the formal adoption of the plan, including intensive involvement with a group of North Minneapolis youth to develop strategies and solutions to make unsafe corridors to the river more welcoming to them and their peers.

### Implementation

The Implementation chapter provides guidance on a range of topics to help realize the vision of this plan.

As this update is based on the original plan, it includes a status update of what has been accomplished to date from the 2000 plan, and how this sets the stage for the next phase of implementation.

The chapter calls out high priority projects for implementation, on both the development and parks side. As this reflects the ongoing work from the original plan, several of these are already underway. The plan makes the distinction between the Priority Plan recommendations (feasible in near term, some resources already identified) and Vision Plan recommendations (much longer term, much more uncertain path to implementation). Vision Plan recommendations are not precluded from moving forward sooner, but a list of criteria is given to judge when there is readiness to proceed.

There also are detailed recommendations for each of the sections discussed above, including general time frames and responsible parties. The goal is to be able to use this section to track progress on implementation over time.

The plan provides general guidance for a subsequent rezoning study. Consistent with the Priority/Vision approach, it recommends that the entire area should not be rezoned immediately, but done over time based on criteria. This addresses concerns raised by businesses about the threat of nonconformity, as well as managing the uncertainties about the implementation timeframe – while still striving to generally maintain consistency between policy and regulatory guidance for land use.

The plan also addresses some implementation tools. The role of a third party development organization in implementation (a centerpiece of the original plan's approach) is discussed – though this will continue to be an ongoing discussion due to recent organizational changes. A list of partner agencies involved in riverfront work is included, along with their respective roles. There is a discussion of strategy around both public acquisition and addressing environmental concerns. Finally, there is a resource list of potential funding sources that could be accessed for improvements along the riverfront.

### Comprehensive Plan Consistency

The Above the Falls study area has a number of existing land use features, including Community Corridors, a Commercial Corridor, Industrial Employment Districts, an Activity Center, and a Neighborhood Commercial

Node. This plan affirms these land use feature boundaries and extents as shown in the existing comprehensive plan, adopted by the City in 2009.

The plan is largely consistent with the comprehensive plan in terms of its guidance on other topics, including housing, economic development, transportation and parking, and urban design.

The plan is also largely consistent with other overlapping adopted plans that have been incorporated into the comprehensive plan, but does not fully replicate the detail of these plans, or attempt to completely replace their analysis and recommendations. These include the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan, the West Broadway Alive Plan, and the Industrial Land Use and Employment Policy Plan.

The plan does depart from some of the land use classifications in the comprehensive plan, as discussed above. This will require a comprehensive plan amendment, both to the land use and parks sections of the plan.

### **Future Related Actions**

Implementation of the plan recommendations is part of City Planning staff's 2013 work plan and will likely continue into the future. While there are many related activities, the main ones include:

- Comprehensive plan changes. This small area plan will be incorporated into the City's comprehensive plan, including incorporating this plan's future land use map into the comprehensive plan's citywide Future Land Use map, and updating the parks chapter's regional park boundary. This will involve a Metropolitan Council review and approval of the update, including a separate but related approval of an update to the Regional Park Master Plan.
- Rezoning study. This plan recommends rezoning of portions of the study area, as well as the modification or creation of a zoning district for Business Park uses. As discussed above, this would not necessarily involve immediate rezoning of the entire affected area.
- Parks implementation. This is already ongoing, as mentioned above. Near term work will likely continue to focus on the Scherer site and establishing trail connections to and along the riverfront.
- Upper Harbor Terminal development plan. The redevelopment of the Upper Harbor Terminal is a near term priority in this plan, and the proposed timing of the closure is within a couple years of plan approval. Intensive work will be needed to plan for the closure, cleanup, and preparation of the site for new development – including the development of a riverfront parkway and park.
- Development review. Future development proposals for property in the Above the Falls area will typically require City Planning Commission review of development applications such as rezonings, conditional use permits, and site plan review. In this way, the Planning Commission also has a role in the incremental implementation of the plan.
- Capital project prioritization. The capital improvements process (through the City, County, University, and other public entities) provides an important way to implement recommended projects in the comprehensive plan. This plan's identification of these projects provides additional priority and weight to them in project review and ranking. It also allows for proposals to be made when funding opportunities (such as grants) emerge.

As this is joint plan, there are implied implementation steps for the MPRB and other public entities as well. All major entities listed in the implementation chapter as potential implementers were given an opportunity to review and comment on plan content.

### **Public Comments**

A number of comments were received during the 45-day comment period from individuals, community organizations, and businesses. There were a number changes as a result of these comments, including adding detail and clarification around topics that were considered priorities. These edits did not represent large changes in the direction or intent of the plan, but rather added to the existing framework and provided clarification on a range of issues. A table listing the comments and the responses to them is attached.

The comments include some received prior to the official public comment period. This reflected the desire to include as much input as possible from this large and complex study area.

The comments followed several major themes, which were consistent with what was heard throughout the planning process. These are summarized below. Every attempt was made to be responsive to these concerns within the body of the plan and its recommendations:

- Housing: build strong residential options for everyone, and support and strengthen existing residential areas
- Riverfront: build on area's unique riverfront location and reflect that in design and land use; activate the riverfront with people and attractions
- Equity: create value to promote equity for northern portion of city, which lacks amenities enjoyed by the rest of the city
- Jobs: they are important, but they need to benefit local residents, especially those facing unemployment; investigate other options for locations too
- Environment: clean it up and improve it; there are valuable resources and a lot of contamination; restore natural features
- Connections: linking to nearby areas is very important, and ways to improve those connections should be prioritized, especially for bike/pedestrian

### **RECOMMENDATION**

#### **Recommendation of the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development:**

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the City Planning Commission and City Council **approve** the *Above the Falls Plan Update* document and **amend** the policy guidance for the area into the City's comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan amendment is subject to final review and approval by the Metropolitan Council.

Attachments:

- Above the Falls Plan Update document
- Written comments received to date
- Table of comments and responses

To conserve paper, only the plan itself is included in the packet. The technical appendices are available online at: [http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/projects/cped\\_above\\_the\\_falls](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/projects/cped_above_the_falls)