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

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Project Name: Above the Falls Plan Update

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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.

The plan was brought to the Planning Commission for a public hearing on February 19, 2013. After extensive public comment, the Planning Commission moved to continue the item two cycles, to allow for time to respond to the issues raised by the public. This staff report has been amended to include additional information requested at that meeting, and at a subsequent Committee of the Whole meeting on March 6, 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 and Responses

A number of comments were received during the 45-day comment period from individuals, community organizations, and businesses. There were a number changes made to the plan 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.

Additionally, a number of comments were received at the Planning Commission public hearing on February 19, 2013. Below are a summary of comments (in italics) and responses to them. For clarity, some comments with similar themes are shortened or combined:

1. *Concerns were raised regarding any potential legal issues present in the letter submitted during the public comment period on behalf of GAF (included in the packet of comment letters attached).*

   A City attorney has reviewed the letter and stated that the issues raised are primarily policy, not legal, ones. This information was provided to the Planning Commission at the March 6, 2013 committee of the whole meeting.

2. *There are potential negative impacts on GAF business, including potentially closure/relocation or a nonconforming status, which would deter future expansion or investment. Planning Commission has directed staff to look at modifications to the plan to address these concerns.*

   The existing adopted policy (in the 2000 Above the Falls Plan) for the site is park and mixed use. However, the site was never rezoned to reflect this. At present, the parcels occupied by GAF are zoned I2 and I3. The new plan proposes expanding the park portion, to reflect the new future configuration of the riverfront parkway, as determined by the placement of a portal for the parkway under the new Lowry Avenue Bridge structure. The area near the intersection of Lowry and 2nd St N remains guided for mixed use.

   It would be challenging to modify the plan to change the park boundary to remove GAF from it. This would be an exception to the established pattern of publicly owned park frontage bounded by the parkway – as the future parkway's path is essentially determined, any modification to the park usage would place the GAF plant on the river side of the parkway.

   It is the opinion of staff that future guidance for park usage is not detrimental to the continued use of the site for industry in the near term. Parks are allowed in all zoning districts, so guidance for park use does not require rezoning to provide zoning conformance with policy. The zoning guidance for this area recommends that the location will not be rezoned until either (1) the land is eventually purchased for park, or (2) there are land assembly and market conditions for redevelopment. On the topic of parkland acquisitions, the plan makes it clear that the primary implementation approach is to rely on a willing seller transaction, rather than eminent domain.

   Additionally, the plan calls out an interim parkway route for the west bank, following 2nd Street North in the vicinity of this site, to allow for parkway connectivity prior to the completion of land acquisition needed for the new parkway route. A route along 2nd Street North is already designated as the interim route for the Mississippi River Trail, a state designated bikeway stretching the full length of the river. Furthermore, an interim trail connection may be possible along the riverfront if easements can be obtained. This will allow the parks and trails vision for the area to move forward, even if significant time elapses before full land acquisition.

See the responses to Planning Commission requests section (below) for some alternative approaches to the other land use guidance.

3. *St Anthony West neighborhood has submitted a request that a portion of the area guided for Business Park on 8th Avenue NE be changed to mixed use, to be more compatible with the residential across the street.*

   A portion of the park site owned by MPRB has been changed from the original guidance to mixed use, to accommodate park-supportive uses. The intent of the MPRB, which is currently drafting development standards for the park, is to create a use that is compatible with both the park and its adjacent industrial neighbors, including Graco.

   It is not recommended by staff to guide more of the site for mixed use, as this would increase the chance of residential uses being placed in close proximity to light industrial or related uses, potentially causing conflicts. Furthermore, the Business Park district supports commercial uses, including retail and hospitality, which are preferred by the neighborhood. Additionally, the plan's design guidelines and existing City regulations would support an active frontage along the street with any new development.

4. *The process did not do enough to reach out to larger industrial property owners to assess the impacts of the project, including Northern Metals.*

   The guidance for the area including Northern Metals is transitional industrial. This category is designed to accommodate industrial uses which may remain for an indefinite period, while allowing for transition and change in the future when opportunities present themselves. Furthermore, as a change from the original plan, this one shifts its focus to working in partnership with businesses to improve their sites, rather than to focus simply on removing them.

   During the planning process, a business survey was conducted. This included one-on-one outreach to many major businesses, and generated detailed responses from nearly 50 businesses that were summarized and used in the planning process. It was not possible to continue to provide this level of outreach due to the size and complexity of the area, but the business was kept informed of public meetings and availability of drafts for comment.

   Throughout the process, a number of direct mail invitations to meetings were sent out to invite participation in the process. The mailing list included all identified property owners and businesses within the study area. Many businesses attended the various community meetings, as recorded on the sign in sheets for these events.

   In subsequent work conducted through project partners (including the Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership), outreach was done to all industrial property owners along the proposed 26th Avenue North connection – a priority project in the plan. The purpose of the project was to provide general information on the planning process and specific information on the vision for 26th Ave N – including how greening of industrial sites could contribute.

5. *Subarea 6 should be reexamined and potentially given different guidance. At present, it is guided for industry, but this provides a barrier between the neighborhoods and riverfront. It should be guided for either transitional industrial or mixed use.*

   Subarea 6 is a designated Industrial Employment District in the Comprehensive Plan, reflecting the guidance in Industrial Land Use Study (adopted by Council in 2006). Due to the fairly recent guidance affirming this area should remain an industrial employment district – as it also was in the original Above the Falls Plan – it is recommended that it remain industrial.

   Other policy guidance supports greening and other site improvements to mitigate negative effects, and redevelopment where possible with higher value more job dense development. Linkages between the neighborhood and the riverfront – particularly 26th Avenue North – are high priorities in the plan.

Additionally, analysis of the study area suggests that large scale blocks and a lack of crossings over Interstate 94 contribute significantly to the barriers between the neighborhoods and the river. The plan recommends supporting increased connectivity and linkages in many areas, including this one.

6. *Address polluting industries along the riverfront, particularly in Subarea 5. They do not belong there, and are detrimental to the environment and community. They should be relocated and replaced with more attractive redevelopment, including recreational uses that provide vibrancy. The city needs more residential areas, and this is a prime location. Residential uses also generate a higher tax base.*

   The guidance for Subarea 5 is transitional industrial. This accommodates industry in the short term, while allowing for transition and change in the future when opportunities present themselves.

   The plan supports the vision that heavy industry is not the ideal use along the riverfront. However, it also acknowledges that relocating these industries in the short term may not be feasible. Therefore, it proposes short term mitigation efforts, including greening and buffering of sites, to reduce negative impacts on the surrounding area. Also, the plan is flexible to allow for transition to higher value uses when opportunities to do so emerge.

   The plan does acknowledge the need for residential areas, and supports additional residential development and density in areas that are more ready for transition. While residential uses (particularly condominiums) do generate a higher tax base, market feasibility issues must be considered as well.

7. *The proposed riverfront park width shown is too narrow in certain locations and needs to be widened to more fully accommodate adequate park and trail amenities, as shown in the cross sections. Additionally, the area needs more specific design standards, for instance regarding allowance for greater setbacks to provide green space along the parkway. The plan should also reflect the vision of Horace Cleveland to create publicly accessible riverfront parks.*

   The map that was measured for this exercise was not drawn precisely to scale. The dimensioned sections shown in the plan more accurately show the intent of the plan to provide adequate space for parkway, trail and riverbank improvements. The plan does state that the park boundaries may vary somewhat in their final version, as they do not reflect a detailed analysis of the soils, topography, and other features that may impact the desirable configuration of the park land and route of the parkway and trail. For reasons of clarity, the park boundary on the land use map can be modified to reflect the

   The design standards were developed to be consistent with those in the zoning code's site plan review standards. Increasing the setback may be done on a discretionary basis already under site plan review, as appropriate – it is unclear if there is value in recommending that greater setbacks be allowed as part of the plan's guidelines. The language on preferred building materials in the design guidelines is defined to reflect the guidance developed through the City's site plan review process – namely a preference for durable materials.

   The comments also suggest a more proactive design review process, as conducted by the St Paul Riverfront Corporation. This was brought up during the planning process as well, and is described briefly on 196 of the draft plan as a potential future action

   Some language regarding the Horace Cleveland vision was drafted, but was accidentally left out of the CPC version of the plan. It can be added in the final version. The focus of the language is on the model for parks development – namely the commitment to publicly accessible parkland along the water, bounded by a parkway.

8. *We need to support good jobs and job growth in the area. Additionally, these businesses (roofing, concrete, and other construction materials) provide important services and products needed to build the city. Parks are important, but you need more than parks for a city. Don't rezone land for park, or it will be a taking. This change will reduce the competitiveness of some industries in the area.*

This plan supports maintaining areas for quality jobs and important industries. It acknowledges the factors that cause some industries to prefer to locate in this central location. Furthermore, it recommends strategies to improve area businesses and mitigate negative impacts rather than to attempt to force relocation.

There is no park zoning district, so there is no scenario where all other viable use would be zoned out of existence. The transition to parks will occur when the land is purchased by the Park Board and converted to park use.

The existing adopted policy already redirects much of the area away from industrial use. The new plan is more flexible and accommodating of industry remaining, either permanently or until it is ready to relocate for other reasons. As stated above, nonconforming rights provide a level of protection for many long-standing uses.

The plan acknowledges the pre-existing industrial character of the area, and seeks incremental changes rather than large-scale ones, with a focus on fostering compatibility between a diverse range of uses.

In response to some requests from Planning Commission members, some additional information is supplied below:

1. *Consider an interim condition with a riverfront esplanade that provides river access around existing industries, as has been done in Portland.*

   This has been discussed with Park Board staff, who considered some similar concepts during the RiverFirst visioning process. The RiverFirst document actually suggests a temporary boardwalk feature along the riverfront through Subarea 5, the heaviest industrial area on the riverfront. This included consideration of a grade separated element for the portion which would need to span active port uses.

   There has also been some discussion of acquiring easements around industrial uses that do not actively use the riverfront. Some existing property owners and businesses have been open to this discussion, although there are no firm commitments as of this date. The plan does call this strategy out on the east bank, where there are many more private owners and therefore more possibility of a need for long term easements.

   While there may well be mutually beneficial arrangements possible, the Park Board has been cautious about preparing to invest extensively in an interim waterfront access, rather than to focusing limited implementation resources on land acquisition and development of more permanent park and trail facilities. The plan identifies near-term implementation opportunities for river access, including a proposed public overlook and steps at the east end of 26th Avenue North. The plan also suggests an inland temporary "parkway" connecting route following Pacific and 2nd on the west bank, following existing roads rather than proposed new corridors. The details of implementation will continue to be developed as this plan moves forward.

2. *Provide some options for modifying the draft plan, to more explicitly allow for the continued operations of GAF and similar uses in the study area.*

   Three options are described below:

   - **Option 1: Keep Existing Plan Guidance**. The state legislation enabling city comprehensive planning states: "The comprehensive plan shall provide guidelines for the timing and sequence of the adoption of official controls to ensure planned, orderly, and staged development and redevelopment consistent with the comprehensive plan." (Minnesota Statutes section 473.858).c

     On pages 197-198, the plan outlines a proposed staged approach to zoning, fitting with the staged implementation strategy presented in the Implementation chapter. It states: "For areas identified as 'mixed use,' allow existing zoning to remain in the interim, but permit rezoning to residential or mixed use development once conditions for the Vision Plan are met (see Vision Plan section)."

     If rezoning does create a nonconforming use, any preexisting use legally will be allowed to continue to operate indefinitely on its site. Nonconforming rights are only lost if a use is discontinued for more than

one year. Additionally, the use may seek to expand its operations with an expansion of a nonconforming use application through Planning Commission.

- **Option 2: Strengthen Reference to Staged Zoning**. The language quoted above was written very generally, to balance the need for staging with the uncertain time frame of the transition.

  To more specifically accommodate existing uses through zoning, the language described above could be modified to read: "For areas identified as 'mixed use,' allow existing zoning to remain as long as current uses continue to operate in these areas, but permit rezoning to residential or mixed use development once conditions for the Vision Plan are met (see Vision Plan section)."

  This would more explicitly allow GAF and similar businesses to continue to operate with existing zoning, until they chose to close or relocate.

- **Option 3: Change Long Range Land Use Guidance**. The land use transition at Lowry Avenue North in the study area was seen as a logical long term transition. Connectivity to the Lowry community corridor, transit access, potential for riverfront retail, and relationship to the commercial node on the east bank of the river were all reasons this guidance seemed appropriate.

  However, if the expectation is that this transition is expected over a much longer time frame, the underlying land use guidance could be changed to "transitional industrial," a use which more directly acknowledges the existing industrial use may continue for some time. The area immediately to the south along the riverfront is currently guided for transitional industrial.

  It should be mentioned that this may not be favored by some members of the public, who have voiced their support for being more proactive about setting the stage for transition of uses.

3. *Provide information on where workers in the area live, particularly in terms of employment of Minneapolis residents, and information on concentration of jobs.*

According to the Census website, there were about 6,097 jobs in the Above the Falls study area in 2010, the most recent year available for this level of analysis. Some summary points on the distribution of these workers:

- Around 190 jobs (3.1%) were held by residents of the two major North zip codes, 55411 and 55412.

- Around 254 jobs (4.2%) were held by residents of the three major Northeast zip codes 55418, 55413, and 55414.

- A total of around 786 jobs (12.6%) were held by Minneapolis residents in general.

- The distribution of workers is very broad, with the largest concentrations in the northernmost end of the city and up the Highway 10 corridor in the northern suburbs.

By way of comparison, around 73,394 (25.2%) of all jobs in the City of Minneapolis are held by city residents.

Outreach during the planning process indicated support for new jobs for residents. For instance, a resident survey indicated that 47% of local respondents thought there were not enough jobs nearby (with North residents much more likely to think this than Northeast residents). However some seem to automatically assume that new jobs will benefit others, not themselves. There are complex reasons for this unfortunate perception.

The plan's focus on job linkages – including support for training and placement services – is outlined in Chapter 8. It is clear that, for the economic benefits of this area to most directly benefit Minneapolis residents, there needs to be ongoing work to help residents connect with and maintain jobs in this area.

This is especially true for non-white populations in the city. These populations are disproportionately impacted by unemployment, and even when employed, are more likely to work lower wage jobs than white workers.

The most significant cluster of jobs is at the southern end of the study area, around the North Washington Jobs Park. This is not surprising, as this has been the focus of ongoing economic development efforts by the City for a number of years. There are some limited clusters of job intensity further north (including the area north of the Upper Harbor Terminal), but many tend be lower intensity on average due to the prevalence of low job density uses involving recycling, transportation, and storage functions.

Jobs in this largely industrial area do tend to have higher pay on average than other categories of jobs in the city. In 2012, average wages in Minneapolis for manufacturing, wholesale trade, and construction were around $1,100-$1,200 weekly, in comparison to $400-$500 weekly for food services, hospitality, and retail trade.

The Health Impact Analysis has further supported employment growth as a goal for the area, citing literature that makes a strong case for this having a positive impact on public health in general, above most other variables.

4. *Describe in more detail the plan for the 26th Avenue North connection.*

The connection along 26th Avenue North is an important one for neighborhoods in that vicinity, which otherwise face a significant barrier in getting to the riverfront. As such, it has been prioritized in the plan, in both the Priority and Vision plan elements.

The short term project is to complete an enhanced bicycle facility from Wirth Park along 26th up to the riverfront. This project is in the City's CIP, and the Park Board is working with Public Works staff on the scope for the improvements.

The MPRB is currently pursuing a state bonding request to add enhancements to this project. The request includes funds to "1) design the conversion of 26th Avenue North between Farview Park and the Mississippi River from an urban street to a complete street with dedicated vehicle lanes, pedestrian sidewalks, a multi-use off-street trail, green boulevards and other green infrastructure innovations; and 2) to design, engineer, and construct a pilot project within the corridor from 2nd Street North to a new park amenity on the shores of the Mississippi River."

Additionally, there has been discussion regarding potential easements or temporary routes that could link the terminus of this project to other roads, including West River Parkway, to provide more access and connectivity.

The RiverFirst plan details a more enhanced vision, which includes the development of a broader connecting corridor and more substantial riverfront park. At present, these elements are in the Vision Plan section of the ATF plan due to uncertain funding and timing.

5. *Initiate more outreach to area businesses regarding planning for the area and their role in it.*

As described above, there have been several efforts focused on business outreach during the planning process for the Above the Falls Plan. At present, there are several ongoing business outreach efforts in the area, letting them know about the future vision and their role in it. These include:

- CPED Business Development targeted outreach – As part of the ongoing work in this area, Business Development staff have had ongoing contact with a range of businesses within the study area. The efforts in this area have been closely coordinated with the planning process, to ensure that consistent information is being shared.

- Conversations around development proposals and site improvements – Several recent proposed land use applications have provided opportunities for detailed discussion of the plan's vision with businesses, in the context of planned improvements to their sites.

- Park Board implementation discussions – MPRB has proceeded with discussions with property owners and businesses regarding the details of land acquisition, park development, and trail connectivity.

6. *Provide more detail on polluting industries in the area.*

The MPCA identifies nearly 300 sites in the study area with some environmental issues, over 160 of which are active. This high number is typical of industrial areas in Minneapolis. Of the active sites:

- Around 40% produce a "small to minimal" amount of hazardous waste
- Around 50% have "multiple activities" that contribute to pollution
- The remainder have a mix of types, including open landfills, air permits, and site involved in the Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup program

The MPCA also reports on enforcement activities related to violations of pollution control standards.

- In 2012, there were eight enforcement actions against Minneapolis businesses. One of them was in the ATF study area: Northern Metals (for water quality)
- In 2011, there were three enforcement actions against Minneapolis businesses. None were in the study area.
- In 2010, there were three enforcement actions against Minneapolis businesses. Two were in the study area: Northern Metals (for air quality) and Ramsey Excavating (for air quality)

The information suggests that, while contamination and polluting uses are common in this area, most are operating within legal guidelines – with some exceptions. One of the challenges that should be noted is that, with ambient conditions, it is at times difficult to ascribe pollutants to specific uses.

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