

SMALL AREA PLAN

Public Review Draft 9/5/13

Linden Hills Neighborhood



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Small Area Plan builds on the existing policies of The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth, the City of Minneapolis' Comprehensive Plan. It provides a 20 year vision for the three commercial districts of Linden Hills—43rd & Upton, 44th & Beard, and 44th & France—and the corridors of 44th Street & France Avenue.

This community work was initiated in 2012 by the Linden Hills Neighborhood Council (LHiNC). The City of Minneapolis managed the creation of the Plan, guided by a LHiNC-appointed Steering Committee. Existing conditions, City of Minneapolis policy, past planning efforts, and input from the community shaped the proposed policies and recommendations described in this Plan.



Vision

Linden Hills is a thriving pedestrian-friendly and sustainable urban village that offers varied housing, commercial, open space, and transportation choices to meet residents' and business owners' needs. Renovation and new development support and enhance the existing scale and character of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood scale and character are in part defined by:

- A walkable, pedestrian friendly public realm
- An eclectic mix of human-scale buildings
- Vibrant, independent, neighborhood-serving businesses

To fulfill this vision five goals have been established:

- 1. Keep and enhance what makes the Linden Hills commercial districts unique.**
- 2. Ensure appropriately-scaled development.**
- 3. Encourage complementary uses, activities, and public realm enhancements.**
- 4. Promote public infrastructure and private development that reinforces an ecologically healthy neighborhood.**
- 5. Support the development of a broad spectrum of life-cycle housing options.**

A series of policies* adding further guidance to each goal are described in chapter 3, including:

Policy 1.1: Encourage the retention, reuse, and renovation of existing buildings, especially those with historic value to the neighborhood and to the regional community.

Policy 2.1: Encourage development that reinforces the 43rd & Upton, 44th & Beard, and 44th & France Neighborhood Commercial Nodes and connects them along 44th Street.

Policy 3.1: Facilitate the expansion of alternative transportation choices and infrastructure including walking, cycling, and transit to support active living, public health, and environmental quality.

Policy 4.1: Encourage infill developments that offer a broad spectrum of housing types, sizes, and prices to provide more generational, economic, and cultural diversity.

Policy 5.1: Encourage the development of a range of housing types and sizes.

** This list highlights only the first policy associated with each goal. There are 29 policies in total, they appear in the "Small Area Plan Goals and Policies" section of each plan element presented covered in chapter 3.*

Development Patterns

Understanding the history of development in the Linden Hills neighborhood is central to explaining the existing character. These past development patterns influenced the footprint and character of the commercial districts and adjacent properties, and are still evident today. Furthermore, historical context informs the challenges and opportunities of future growth and this Plan's recommendations.

The primary influence was the streetcar line that ran through the neighborhood. The presence of the streetcar encouraged a certain type of commercial development that was oriented toward pedestrians. The pattern is evident in the location and size of commercial lots at 43rd & Upton and 44th & France. The small scale of buildings, characterized by modest width and height, create a pedestrian friendly, human-scale character that community wants to preserve and enhance.



Historic view Linden Hills ca. 1930. "Twin Cities by Trolley" (Diers and Isaacs, 2007)

Recommendations

The guidance in the Small Area Plan is organized around five plan elements: "Land Use and Development," "Building and Site Design," "Movement Connectivity and Parking," "Sustainability and the Environment," and "Heritage Preservation." These create the framework to evaluate existing conditions, City policy, and community input, and they inform the recommendations in this Plan. Policies are suggested in each section to further clarify and refine the goals created for the Small Area Plan. Implementation recommendations are provided to guide the application of goals and policies to specific projects over the next 20 years.

Land Use & Intensity

The recommendations in the Land Use and Intensity and the Building and Site Design sections work together to shape development in Linden Hills. The community highly values the small, neighborhood-serving businesses located in the Neighborhood Commercial Nodes. Access to a neighborhood grocery store, restaurants, hardware stores, and other businesses that serve the residents needs is a character-defining feature of the community. The 44th & Beard commercial district is not officially recognized as a Neighborhood Commercial Node in The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth. This Plan recommends officially designating this as a Neighborhood Commercial Node. Official recognition of the past and current development patterns makes the properties within the node eligible to receive grant funding for facade improvements through the City of Minneapolis. This would provide opportunity and access to funding to help retain and enhance the character of the buildings in this node.



This Plan is recommending changes to the land use and intensity of two areas along 44th Street and one area along France Avenue. In each of these areas the Plan recommends allowing medium density multi-family residential consisting of 2 to 3-story row homes or apartments. This recommendation is responsive to The Minneapolis Comprehensive Plan for increasing density, to existing development patterns in the area, and provides the opportunity for additional housing options in Linden Hills.

Building & Site Design

Building height, length, and placement contribute to the character of the three commercial nodes and the community corridors within Linden Hills. Together these elements establish a distinct visual character, human-scale, discernible rhythm, and strong sense of place, which should serve as the reference point or basis of design for new developments, substantial building renovations, or additions.

The Plan recommends a building height of 3-stories for the three defined Neighborhood Commercial Nodes and properties along the community corridors of 44th Street & France Avenue. This recommendation is based on considerable exploration of building height impacts and preferences with the community. Height is one of the contributing elements to the character of the area and it impacts the human-scale and pedestrian experience of the area. Due to the existing character and development patterns at 43rd & Upton, 44th & Beard, and along 44th Street, a height of 3-stories was considered to be the most contextually sensitive in these nodes.

The historical development patterns of the 44th & France Neighborhood Commercial Node provide for a slightly different context than 43rd & Upton and 44th & Beard as there is less traditional building fabric to relate to in terms of scale and height, especially along 44th Street. Consequently, there is responsiveness to considering additional building height along a portion of 44th Street if that additional building height contributes to the development's ability to more effectively meet goals and policies described in this Small Area Plan.

New development should in all possible cases, avoid design of long continuous building frontages (building facade facing the street). Currently in Linden Hills, frontage lengths of existing buildings correspond to the original parcel sizes established in the previous century. This has resulted in the rhythmic, main street, commercial pattern of individual shop fronts found in the 43rd & Upton and 44th & Beard commercial districts. Continuous frontages should be reduced by dividing building projects into multiple, smaller buildings or to use techniques that reduce the perceived length of buildings. Such techniques include introducing mid-block passageways, entry courts, variable setbacks, and street facing terraces, or patios. This is especially important when development projects assemble multiple parcels and/or occupy sites of a half block or more in length.

Locations within the study area that allow medium density, commercial, and multi-family buildings are typically surrounded by low-scale, 1 to 2-family residential properties that have their own distinct character and rhythm. At many of these sites, larger commercial, mixed use, and multi-family residential structures share an alley, side, or rear lot line with smaller-scale buildings and uses. In other cases they are across the street from each other. This was a topic of considerable concern for the community. Transition issues include impacts to the overall character of a block, shading of back yards caused by adjacent tall buildings, disruption and degradation of views, loss of privacy, and increases in noise and traffic. These concerns and issues are consistent with City policies that address the need for transitions between higher density and lower density development.

Visual impacts of 3-story developments should be reduced on properties in transition areas. New development adjacent to transition areas should consider additional side and rear building setbacks or stepping back the third story as a means of reducing these impacts.

Movement, Connectivity, & Parking

Improving connections and movement between the three Neighborhood Commercial Nodes is a priority in this Plan. It encourages infrastructure improvements that make walking and bicycling more appealing options to get to, from, and within Linden Hills. Adding curb extensions will help calm and slow traffic, prioritize pedestrian movements, and provide more space for streetscape infrastructure at intersections with the Neighborhood Commercial Nodes.

Providing additional public/semi-public open space, parks or plazas at each node, connected by a uniform streetscape, is one way to link the three nodes and support pedestrian movement. The 44th & France commercial node does not have any public space and therefore a plaza or pocket park should be explored within this node.



From top to bottom: 44th & France, 44th & Beard, and 43rd & Upton. Linden Hills community corridors and Neighborhood Commercial Nodes are characterized by small-scale, 1 to 3-story buildings located along tree-lined streets

To address parking concerns, the Plan recommends ways to better organize and manage the existing supply of parking resources to achieve their maximum potential. The three commercial areas of Linden Hills contain over 900 on-street and off-street parking spaces on privately and publicly controlled property. These parking areas can be better utilized through design improvements, such as angled on-street parking, or shared parking agreements between businesses and parking lot owners. The Plan also promotes enhancements to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (including additional bike parking) to encourage alternatives to using the automobile.

Sustainability & Environment

Many elements of this Plan address sustainability holistically, focusing not only on environmental aspects, but also on cultural and economic sustainability. This approach to sustainability is integral to recommendations in each section. The following highlights examples of these alternate definitions:

- Promote contextually sensitive building designs that retain or enhance the character of the area.
- Encourage building rehabilitation and retrofitting practices to ensure existing buildings meet modern commercial and housing needs and desires.
- Encourage and foster the small independent businesses that are a vital component of neighborhood character.
- Encourage infrastructure that promotes walking, biking, and transit as alternatives to cars.

This Plan also specifically promotes environmental sustainability through the use of infrastructure and building systems (permeable paving, green roofs, recycled building materials, day lighting, etc.) intended to reduce overall resource consumption. It recommends the development of public and private rain gardens, use of permeable pavers, and other practices to better manage stormwater on-site through the retrofit or new installation of infrastructure.

Heritage Preservation

The Plan recommends exploring the potential of historic designation—local and national—for individual properties as well as the establishment of designated historic or conservation districts. Historic designation may help provide greater protection for buildings and development patterns that define the character of the commercial nodes. It also could provide further financial resources to help mitigate renovation and maintenance costs. There are several areas that may qualify as historic districts in the neighborhood. Three examples include 43rd & Upton, the former streetcar right of way, and 44th & Beard, each because it is emblematic of streetcar development and infrastructure. Because designation requires strict adherence to historic design standards, further detailed discussions with impacted property owners and the community would need to occur as part of the designated process.

Implementation

Implementation of the recommendations are phased over a 20-year period. The implementation matrix identifies specific implementation tasks and provides a timeline of when they could, or should likely occur. Because the implementation will fall to a variety of stakeholders, the implementation section also identifies potential parties to lead tasks required by specific recommendations of the Plan.



Existing curb extension with ADA features at 44th & Beard.