

Minneapolis Department of Community Planning and Economic Development
Community Planning Division
350 South Fifth Street, Room 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1385
(612) 673-2597 Phone
(612) 673-2728 Fax
(612) 673-2157 TDD

STAFF REPORT

DATE: November 28, 2005
TO: Minneapolis City Planning Commission
FROM: Pam Miner, CPED Community Planning
RE: Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan

The Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan was initiated by the City to provide planning and future development detail for an area currently undergoing significant change and development. Major public infrastructure improvements are planned and/or underway along with significant interest by private developers. The project area was selected as Lake Street from Blaisdell Avenue to 10th Avenue, and the Midtown Greenway and 31st Street as north-south boundaries. Upon adoption of this plan, it will be used like *The Minneapolis Plan* to guide development activities in the project area.

Background

A steering committee was formed in July 2003 to oversee the completion of this project. Members represented area City Council members; neighborhood and business organizations of the Whittier, Phillips, Lyndale, Central and Powderhorn Park neighborhoods; and other private organizations with interest in the project area. A Request for Proposal was issued in August 2003 with proposals received by October 15, 2003. Two consulting firms were chosen to prepare separate products in the planning process – Biko Associates, Inc. and B. Aaron Parker & Associates|Metropeligo PC.

Review of Previous Plans

It was identified that the first step of this planning process needed to acknowledge all of the previous planning work that had been done in parts or all of this project area. The initial phase included a review of all previous plans and studies that had been completed for all or part of this project area. This step was necessary to ensure that these previous efforts and associated recommendations were taken into consideration during this process as well.

Key findings of this review were:

- Lake Street is appropriately identified as a Commercial Corridor as define in *The Minneapolis Plan*;
- Lake Street has both positive and negative characteristics associated with its identity as a regional transportation resource;

- Lake Street’s location, alignment, and adjacent uses define it as a “strip;”
- the Midtown Greenway is recognized as an organizing element;
- Re-opening Nicollet Avenue at Lake Street is broadly supported;
- Successfully linking development activities is the most cost effective approach to project implementation; and
- Benefits from redevelopment should be widespread.

Urban Forensic Analysis

An Urban Forensic Analysis was conducted regarding the existing physical condition of the area and the historical conditions from which they evolved. Seven key findings resulted from that analysis:

- The sturdy area is a distinct district, the character of which suggests that it should be named “Midtown Minneapolis;”
- Midtown Minneapolis is a natural crossroads within the City and the region;
- Recent transportation and land use decisions in Minneapolis have severed physical connections between Downtown and Midtown;
- The shift in transportation from multiple modes to sole reliance on the use of automobiles caused a shift in the land utilization for commercial parcels in the study area;
- Lake Street is a major east-west thoroughfare with a high volume of traffic;
- Variations in block dimension and street width in the study area have created unique development conditions with potential for special urban places; and
- The existing structure of Midtown Minneapolis presents an opportunity to revitalize a once and future sustainable district of the city.

Market Analysis

The market analysis included an assessment of demographic characteristics, information on existing housing and commercial properties, and an understanding of long-term market dynamics that will affect land use decision-making and development within the project area. Key findings were:

- Midtown Minneapolis experienced significant shifts in population and households during the decade of 1990 to 2000;
- Young people in their early to mid-20’s are returning to the city as urban dwellers;
- Household type trends in the project area revealed strong growth in married couple families with children;
- There is a need for greater diversity of housing styles and products to meet demand from larger families as well as smaller units to meet the demand from young singles who prefer to live alone;
- Home values have steadily risen from 1999 through 2003 for single-family dwellings; multi-family home values have also risen but have fluctuated somewhat during the period due to limited availability;
- At the eastern end of the project area, Lake Street supports a diverse mix of office and retail uses;
- Since 2000, commercial real estate activity on Lake Street has increased with many buildings bought and sold;
- There has been increased interest from some soft goods retailers that are considering locating on Lake Street in new space;
- There is market pressure to convert industrial buildings/property within the analysis area to alternate uses; and
- Improved transportation access from I-35W will enhance the desirability of parcels close to the freeway for use as retail and/or high density office development.

A summary of the market research also shows projected growth and increased market absorption by the year 2015 – 14 to 20 percent in commercial, 22 – 25 percent in industrial, 13 to 19 percent residential and 14 – 20 percent combined development. These factors were used in developing future land use scenarios.

Planning Process

Several approaches were used to obtain community participation and input into the planning process.

Public Input/Meetings

Three community meetings were held during the preparation of this plan.

- In May 2004, a two-day kickoff meeting and design workshop where the planning project was introduced and community members were given the opportunity to provide input into potential development scenarios;
- A one-day design workshop for the Hispanic community; and
- In October 2004, a community meeting to present the preliminary draft of the plan.

Continuously throughout the planning process, one-on-one meetings were conducted with key stakeholders. This included the Midtown Greenway Coalition, property owners (including Hennepin County) and directors of organizations serving new immigrant populations. Each neighborhood group and business association was visited at least two times.

A 45-day public review period extended from December 14, 2004 through January 21, 2005. Hard copies of the draft document were distributed to each participating organization. Electronic copies of the report were available for review on the website of CarretteCenter.com. At the conclusion of the review period, comments received were reviewed and analyzed for incorporation into the document as practical.

From the May 2004 design workshop for the community, participants were given the opportunity to identify their primary development and design concerns for the area. Specific recommendations resulted from this work, and the insistence that these recommendations be kept in the forefront as the planning process moved forward. Included in these recommendations were:

- Desirable characteristics and concepts to reinforce in the plan include:
 - Two to three-story mixed use with retail on the ground floor;
 - Off-street parking, not surface parking;
 - “Eyes on the street” concept;
 - Small businesses to mesh with North Nicollet Avenue (“Eat Street”);
 - Re-opening Nicollet Avenue at Lake Street;
 - Connection of I-35W to Lake Street;
 - Increased access to the Midtown Greenway;
 - Buildings that front the Greenway as feasible;
 - Increased affordable housing opportunities;
 - Home ownership opportunities;
 - Increase level of housing on the Greenway;
 - Creation of a community gathering place, or plaza; and
 - Any “big-box” retail development should be required to fit into the urban character of the area.
- Elements in the study area that should be linked or connected include:
 - Development and transportation;
 - Places for living and places for shopping;
 - Places for living and places for working;
 - North Nicollet to South Nicollet;
 - Lake Street and the Midtown Greenway;
 - Lake Street and improved transit service;

- Parks, pedestrian circulation routes, and parkway (Greenway) ramps to access businesses;
 - Transit stops and building design;
 - Multi-use development and affordable housing;
 - Information center connected to a common community gathering space; and
 - A commercial theme with residential access.
- Suggested land uses included:
 - Theater;
 - Artists' galleries;
 - Public gathering spaces;
 - Places for cultural exchange;
 - Spaces for women only with the opportunity to share time with other groups;
 - Spaces for the elderly for exercise and health care;
 - Places to pray five times a day, possibly combined with businesses; and
 - Mosque.
- Residential development should include:
 - Increased opportunities for home ownership;
 - The establishment of programs that provide low interest mortgages;
 - Four to five bedroom homes;
 - Provision of play spaces; and
 - A range of housing types and a range of price points.
- Transportation and circulation concepts should:
 - Provide an interconnected system for people who do not own cars;
 - Reduce the volume of traffic on Lake Street;
 - Make walking more convenient;
 - Provide adequate parking for area businesses; and
 - Integrate different transportation needs into an efficient system.

Community-Identified Objectives for Development

Along with these recommendations, community members also identified what should be the primary objectives of this plan. These were:

- Commercial development;
- Employment/job site development;
- Housing development
- Automobile transportation;
- Public realm and recreation; and
- Private realm design and appearance.

Land Use and Development Plans

Urban Development Districts

Building on the community input and steering committee direction, land use alternatives were considered. Due to the one-mile east-west expanse of the study area from Blaisdell Avenue to 11th Avenue, participants determined that sub-areas would be the most effective manner in which to determine future development. Through the work at the community workshops and meetings and with Steering Committee input, three distinct Urban Development Districts were identified.

- I-35W – includes the area from Blaisdell to Third Avenue, and was identified as an area where large-scale redevelopment should take place based on the benefit of increased accessibility to the transportation system. Directing more intensity at this location would serve to reduce travel demand along the length of the study area.
- Park/Portland – following the planning principles of *The Minneapolis Plan* of locating higher intensity development at major intersection nodes with less intense development in between nodes, the Park/Portland area was identified as an area that should support less intense development between the two nodes of the study area.
- Chicago-Midtown Exchange – recognizing ongoing redevelopment near the Chicago/Lake intersection, it was determined that this node be the third area of focus for further development, and that higher intensity uses should be encouraged. This area is defined by 11th Avenue on the east and Columbus Avenue on the west.

General Development Recommendations

Each of the three Urban Development Districts was considered separately for potential development scenarios, keeping in mind the continuity of Lake Street and the need to coordinate development between the nodes as well.

- I-35W:
 - Concentrate highest intensity development close to the I-35W interchange;
 - Reconnect Nicollet Avenue to Lake Street and increase intensity of use;
 - Encourage office/commercial and mixed use (commercial/retail and commercial/residential) as office/commercial uses allow vertical profiles providing the opportunity to maximize floor-area ratios;
- Park/Portland:
 - Development at this node should be less intense than the other two districts;
 - Most new development should occur on the north side of Lake Street based on the recognition that the buildings on the south side of Lake Street are in good condition and could be rehabilitated for new uses.
- Chicago-Midtown Exchange:
 - Node should continue in its historical pattern as a commercial node with office, retail and mixed-use (commercial/residential) uses.
 - New development should complement the redevelopment of the former Sears building (Midtown Exchange) which further supports the commercial node identity of this intersection.

Urban Design Plan

Urban design plans and objectives were developed to address the form of future development. These concepts were divided into the public and private realms.

Public Realm:

- East/West street
 - 29th Street, south of the Midtown Greenway, should be restored (to the extent possible) as a continuous street to reconnect the street grid;

- Even as 29th Street is restored, design must include mechanisms that control driving behavior making the area tolerable to pedestrian users along the Midtown Greenway.
- North/South street
 - Nicollet Avenue should be reconnected to Lake Street, reconnecting the street grid and providing the opportunity for this to become the premier intersection on the west side of I-35W;
 - Uses on Nicollet Avenue south of Lake Street should include mixed-use commercial/residential development.
 - There is strong interest in the potential for developing a soccer stadium on the site of the former baseball park.
- Sidewalks
 - Sidewalks should accommodate pedestrian circulation and gathering.
- Bicycle paths and the Midtown Greenway
 - Should maintain its identity as a conduit for transportation, including bicycle, pedestrian, and potential transit services;
 - The Midtown Greenway should better integrate with the rest of the study area through: increased park frontage; inclusion of Greenway access facilities into the design of future development; direct linkages between the Greenway and Lake Street; and appropriate development for the Midtown Exchange section of the Greenway.
- Parks
 - In addition to identifying potential parkland along the Midtown Greenway, plazas and gathering places should be sought;
 - Consideration should be given to the construction of a 100-foot park like boulevard along Nicollet Avenue from the Greenway to Lake Street, connecting the two corridors as redevelopment occurs, although there is to be no implication of public funding committed to this purpose through the approval of this plan.

Private Realm:

- Mixed-use street frontages
 - Ground level street frontages should include retail/commercial uses, in multi-story structures.
- Development intensity
 - Should reinforce the principal of high-intensity development at nodes with less intense conditions in between the nodes;
 - Maintain the character of Lake Street as a commercial corridor;
 - Ensure that new development retains access to sunlight in the Midtown Greenway;
 - Ensure the compatibility of adjacent uses, such as single and two-family residential units in the Powderhorn neighborhood with any new mixed-use development that will occur between Columbus and 10th avenues;

Potential Development Scenarios

Combining the community identified objectives for the plan, the general development recommendations, and the urban design concepts allowed the preparation of more specific potential development scenarios for each district (pp. 24-25). Development scenarios are included for illustrative purposes only, to show what ‘should’ be built; they are not to be interpreted as what ‘will’ be built. There should be no interpretation of explicit or implicit intent on the part of any public body to commit to construction of any publicly finance infrastructure or amenity as shown in the development scenarios. Any references or illustrations to activity north of the Midtown Greenway may have been included as one of many suggestions for that area, but being outside the boundary of this planning area, are to remain unrecognized and not considered recommendations of this plan.

Development Guidelines

Further specification of what development should be and look like is provided through development guidelines (pp. 33-37). These guidelines provide greater detail and refinement to the general principles put forth by the planning participants.

Implementing Actions

Steps necessary to achieve the objectives of this plan are identified beginning on page 37. Implementation of the plan vision is expected to be largely opportunity-driven by the private sector in response to the ongoing public investments to the area. Redevelopment of this project area is likely to take more than 10 years as the activity needs to be driven by the private market due to the lack of public financial assistance capacity in the City of Minneapolis.

Two primary and far-reaching recommendations included in the plan are:

- Opening Nicollet Avenue and reconstruction of the Nicollet Avenue bridge to restore the intersection at Nicollet Avenue and Lake Street.
- The consideration of a form-based overlay zone to accomplish the higher intensity, mixed-use development scenario, very similar to the recently adopted transit station area overlay districts. Two options are offered:
 - Form-based requirements instituted as an element of a zoning overlay district encompassing the entire project area, with sub-area specific regulations for each of the three development districts; or
 - Separate mixed-use overlay district classifications reflecting the desired intensity of development for office, retail, commercial, residential combinations.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING DIVISION:

Recommended Motion: The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development – Planning Division recommends that the City Planning Commission **approve** the Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan of June 2005 and work toward the implementation of its recommendations, including completion of a rezoning study for the project area.