

## Area Plan Summary

# A Plan for Capitol Heights

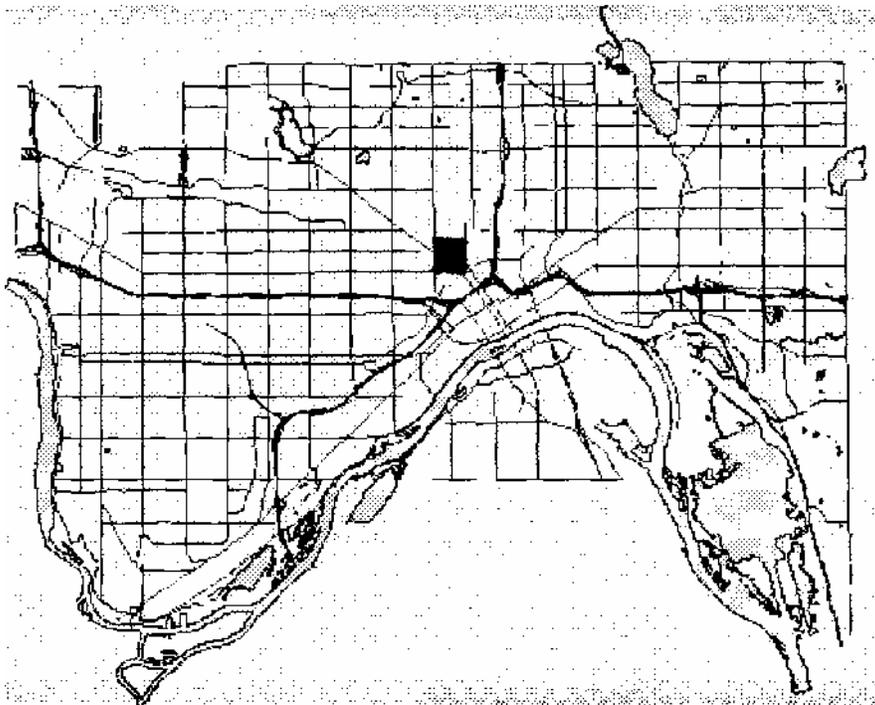
Addendum to The Comprehensive Plan for Saint Paul  
Recommended by the Planning Commission, December 17, 1999  
Adopted by the City Council, January 26, 2000

*This summary appends to the Comprehensive Plan the vision of A Plan for Capitol Heights for the revitalization of the mixed use neighborhood just north of the State Capitol. Key strategies include:*

- *the stabilization of bluffs and slopes throughout the area,*
- *the development of new housing on vacant and underutilized sites,*
- *the rehabilitation of existing rental and owner-occupied housing;*
- *the revitalization of Rice Street as a neighborhood "Mainstreet"; and*
- *the connection of the neighborhood with surrounding natural and cultural amenities.*

### **Location**

The Capitol Heights neighborhood is bounded by University Avenue, Marion Street, Pennsylvania Avenue and Jackson Street.



## Vision

Capitol Heights will be a mixed-use, mixed-income, medium density residential community, served by a neighborhood-scale commercial center on Rice Street. Located on the edge of the Capitol grounds and adjacent to two major medical facilities and the Empire Builder Industrial Park, the neighborhood will provide housing for employees, office space for related businesses, and restaurants and convenience retail serving its residents as well as the thousands of people who come to the area each day. It will draw strength from attractive and walkable connections to amenities such as the Capitol grounds, Cass Gilbert Park, downtown Saint Paul, the Mississippi River and the Minnesota Transportation Museum as well as bike trails linking the neighborhood to parks and scenic areas throughout the region and state.

## Specific Recommendations and Implementation Steps

### *Stabilize Bluffs and Slopes*

Plan recommendations relate both to stabilizing existing slopes where deterioration has resulted in failing retaining walls and to ensuring that future development protects the topography of the area. Most important is the reconstruction of failing retaining walls between Como and Winter and along Jackson where vacant HRA property is ready for new development.

### *Improve the Existing Housing Stock*

The Plan recommends that a series of different types of loans be developed to assist homeowners as well as owners of rental properties to make necessary improvements to their properties. Depending on the income of the property owner, below-market interest rates and the deferral or forgiveness of a portion of the loan would be offered as incentives.

### *Develop New Uses for Vacant and Underutilized Land*

There are four sites within the study area that present development or redevelopment opportunities. The development process for each site should include consultation with the Greater Frogtown CDC, District 7 Community Council and the Capitol Heights Block Club at key points. The sites and the related plan recommendations are:

**Lot V and Surrounding HRA-Owned Individual Lots** - Owned by the City of Saint Paul's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), Lot V is bounded by Como, Park, Capitol Heights and Cedar and is currently used for parking and snow storage by the State of Minnesota. The plan proposes the construction of up to 30 units of housing on the block with additional units on four nearby HRA/tax forfeited vacant lots. Up to twenty percent of the total number of units should be priced to be affordable to households with incomes below 60 percent of the regional median. Specific design guidelines, spelled out in the plan, emphasize integration of the new housing with the existing neighborhood fabric.

Lot Q - Owned by the State of Minnesota and used for parking, Lot Q, located south of Lot V and with views of downtown and the river valley, represents an exceptional opportunity for new housing development. The City should work with the State and potential developers of the site to both construct new housing on the site and address the State's need for parking

somewhere in the vicinity. Because of the site's prime location and the community's goal of maintaining a mix of incomes, it is recommended that the housing for Lot Q be designed for and marketed to moderate and upper income households. Design guidelines would be similar to those described for Lot V above.

**Bethesda Hospital Site** - On the Bethesda Lutheran Hospital campus, now owned by Health East, are two multi-story vacant buildings. Once used for hospital purposes and as a residence for nurses, the buildings are obsolete and HealthEast plans to demolish them. It seems likely that a new residential use for the site can be identified that would both meet community goals and be consistent with HealthEast's health care mission. Integrating that development with the new housing on neighboring Lots V and Q is a high priority.

**Travel Inn Site** - Currently an aging motel, the site is a key redevelopment opportunity. Multiple uses for the site, in conjunction with neighboring HealthPartners properties, might include: structured parking (for both the hospital and the State of Minnesota), district heating facilities, office/conference facilities and housing. Design considerations should include: improvement of the pedestrian environment of University and Jackson, active uses on the ground floor, an attractive link between transit on University and Jackson and surrounding uses, and a setback of 25 feet from the corner or a lower corner profile in order to reopen views of the Capitol dome from University Avenue.

### ***Revitalize Rice Street as a Neighborhood "Mainstreet"***

Rice Street should be reclaimed as the heart of the Capitol Heights neighborhood, providing goods and services to neighborhood residents as well as the work-day community. Key components of the revitalization strategy detailed in the plan include the development or redevelopment of three short stretches of the street, renovation of older buildings and their facades, streetscape improvements, and the addition of new restaurants or other services that might be attracted by the significant increase in the number of housing units in the area.

### ***Link the Neighborhood with its Amenities***

Capitol Heights is virtually surrounded by nearby amenities from Saint Paul's downtown and the riverfront to the proposed Transportation Museum to Como Park. It is also surrounded, however, by busy streets and expansive parking lots that make access to those amenities more difficult. The challenge is to identify the most important connections and then to treat them with landscaping, lighting, traffic controls and building design in ways that entice the pedestrian or cyclist to make the trip. A high priority is the construction of a bicycle path link between this neighborhood and the Gateway Segment of the Munger State Trail. The *Transportation Policy Plan* recommends an off-street bicycle path beginning in Capitol Heights and connecting with the existing Munger Trail at Cayuga. The new trail section would also create a link with proposed on-street bike lanes to Como Park, downtown, the riverfront and Lake Phalen.

### **City Action**

To encourage development according to this vision the City of Saint Paul should:

- Support appropriate zoning of the area by the CAAPB.
- With appropriate consultation, designate a developer for Lot V and surrounding parcels. Provide gap financing for the project's development, including the construction of the necessary retaining walls.
- Support acquisition of the Travel Inn site by an appropriate development interest and determine the feasibility of addressing State parking needs, currently met on Lot Q, on the site.
- Engage HealthEast in planning for the redevelopment of the vacant buildings on their Bethesda Hospital campus.
- Explore with the State of Minnesota the necessary preconditions to the development of housing on Lot Q
- Work with Rice Street businesses and community organizations on attracting new investment on Rice Street.
- Explore specific alternatives for traffic calming within the neighborhood.
- Construct the off-road bicycle trail link between Capitol Heights and the Gateway Segment of the Munger Trail.

### **Planning Commission Findings**

The Planning Commission finds that *A Plan for Capitol Heights* is consistent with *The Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan* and other adopted City policies.

### **Planning Process**

The Capitol Heights Small Area Plan was prepared by a task force convened by the Capitol Heights Block Club, the District Seven Planning Council and the Greater Frogtown Community Development Corporation. Membership included area residents, representatives of HealthPartners, HealthEast and the CAAPB. A special meeting was held with Rice Street business owners to identify their particular issues and concerns as well as to outline an appropriate revitalization strategy. Task force members also conducted a door-to-door survey to ascertain home improvements needs of area property owners.