Saint Paul Planning Commission
City Hall Conference Center
15 Kellogg Boulevard West

Minutes September 21, 2012

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, September 21, 2012, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present:	Mmes. Merrigan, Noecker, Perrus, Shively, Thao, Wang, Wencl; and Messrs. Connolly, Edgerton, Gelgelu, Lindeke, Nelson, Ochs, Oliver, Spaulding, and Ward.
Commissioners Absent:	Mmes. *Porter, *Reveal, and Messrs. *Schertler, and *Wickiser. *Excused
Also Present:	Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Don Ganje, Department of Parks and Recreation; Lucy Thompson, Patricia James, Kate Reilly, Bill Dermody and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes for August 24, 2012 and September 7, 2012.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Thao moved approval of the minutes of August 24, 2012. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

and

MOTION: ***Commissioner Thao moved approval of the minutes of September 7, 2012. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Wencl announced that she and a number of commissioners and staff went on a boat tour of the Mississippi River yesterday that was organized by the Parks Dept. and Mayor's Office. This gave them a chance to preview the sites that would be the subject of today's public hearing. She noted that it was a very good tour and good use of their time.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Donna Drummond introduced new planning staff member Bill Dermody. He joins the other two new staff people who were introduced at the last meeting and now the planning staff is back up to its full complement.

At City Council there was public hearing on a proposed moratorium and request for a zoning study for west Grand Avenue. Between Fairview and Cretin. This is arising out of concern about a new student apartment that has been approved for the south side of Grand at Finn. The

ordinance implementing the moratorium will be up for final adoption next Wednesday at City Council.

IV. Zoning Committee

SITE PLAN REVIEW – List of current applications. *(Tom Beach, 651/266-9086)*

One item to come before the Site Plan Review Staff on Tuesday, September 25, 2012:

- Episcopal Home 2012 Addition, new mixed use with underground parking, 60 bed nursing facility, 50 units HUD senior housing, 64 unit assisted living, coffee shop at 1890 University Avenue.

Four items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, October 2, 2012:

- Gerdau, maintenance shop and lab additions at 1678 Red Rock Road.
- American Engineering testing, new testing lab building, revised plans at 5050 Cleveland Avenue North.
- Wedding Shoppe parking lot, new off site parking lot at 1212 Grand Avenue.
- Habitat for Humanity, new office building and parking lot at 1954 University Avenue West.

NEW BUSINESS

#12-098-579 Wilder Foundation – Rezone from RT1 & RM2 Residential to T1 Traditional Neighborhood. 911-941 Lafond Avenue between Victoria and Chatsworth.
(Kate Reilly, 651/266-6618)

MOTION: ***Commissioner Nelson moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the rezoning. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

Commissioner Nelson announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, September 27, 2012.

V. PUBLIC HEARING: Great River Passage Master Plan – Item from the Comprehensive Planning Committee. *(Lucy Thompson, 651/266-6578)*

Chair Wencl announced that the Saint Paul Planning Commission was holding a public hearing on the Great River Passage Master Plan. Notice of the public hearing was published in the Legal Ledger on September 4, 2012, and was sent to the citywide Early Notification System list and other interested parties.

Lucy Thompson, PED staff, reviewed the vision, key principles, goals, objectives and strategies of the draft Great River Passage Master Plan. The Master Plan is the result of nearly two years' work by City staff and a multi-disciplinary consultant team working with a community steering committee. She clarified the Planning Commission's role, which is to determine consistency of

the Master Plan with the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Great River Passage Master Plan is the City's new vision for how Saint Paul parks and public spaces along the riverfront will be developed, how these public spaces will relate to adjacent private development opportunities, and how riverfront parks will better connect to one another and to the city's neighborhoods. The scale of the vision is broad, and the timeframe for plan implementation is long - 30-50 years.

Commissioner Nelson added that what's being looked at today is the compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and whether there are any conflicts that may require some Comp. Plan amendments.

Ms. Thompson concurred. She noted that the Commissioners have copies at their places of written public comments already received.

Chair Wencl read the rules of procedure for the public hearing.

The following people spoke.

1. Mr. Kent Petterson is in favor of this plan. He urged the Commission to ensure on-going public input regarding the Great River Passage Plan, as well as area plans, district plans and park master plans that will address and implement the specifics of the big ideas in the Great River Passage Master Plan Mr. Petterson also submitted written comments.

2. John Yust is representing Councilmember Thune. He shares Mr. Petterson's concern about ensuring on-going community input to resolve specific issues or opportunities. As currently written, the Great River Passage (GRP) Master Plan is inconsistent with the District 9 Area Plan, which recommends a vertical connection from Irvine Park down to Shepard Road at Walnut. Mr. Yust also feels that the historic importance of Fountain Cave is not properly recognized in the GRP Master Plan, nor is it adequately considered in visioning for the future of the ADM site.

3. Tia Anderson is representing the Highland District Council. While the Highland District Council is supportive of the plan, there are a few concerns, including: 1) the length and complexity of the plan make it nearly impossible for neighborhood citizens and board members to thoroughly understand and formulate feedback; 2) the planning process was not very inclusive or reflective of citizen input; and 3) the recommendations for increased annual expense, expansion of the Parks Department structure, creation of new authorities and prioritization of funding for new Great River Passage projects raise questions regarding the fiscal soundness of implementing the plan at this time, given an already-strained City budget and a finite tax base. The Highland District Council will continue to review the recommendations of the plan and hope to be involved in the implementation of individual projects. The Highland District Council has submitted written comments and resolutions regarding the plan, which were received previous to this public hearing.

   Commissioner Edgerton asked about the process for taking what's in this plan through to implementation.

   Don Ganje, Landscape Architect with the City's Parks and Recreation Department, said that the process for implementing the GRP is the same as the City follows on any of the

Parks projects. As funding becomes available, City Parks staff organize a design advisory committee to advise Parks on park design and programming.

Commissioner Connolly asks how the process balances the needs and implicit property rights of someone who lives just a few blocks from the river with someone who might live halfway around the globe (resident vs. visitor).

Ms. Thompson said there are two ways to look at this issue. One is that the GRP Master Plan addresses mostly publicly-owned land, so private property rights at specific locations are not directly impacted. The second is that there is indeed a need to balance the impact of park visitors on those who live close to the Passage, since the Passage is a national/international resource that is located adjacent to and within Saint Paul neighborhoods.

Commissioner Noecker asked whether Parks is actively soliciting funds to implement the GRP Master Plan.

Mr. Ganje responded that Parks is continually looking for funding for their parks system. There is no dedicated source of funds to implement the GRP Plan, but they will continue to pursue funding, most likely on a project-by-project basis.

Commissioner Ochs asked Mr. Ganje to define what a legacy project is, and what a master plan is.

Mr. Ganje responded that a legacy project is a very long-term plan that implements a broad vision. An example is the HWS Cleveland plan for the Grand Rounds and the parks systems in both Minneapolis and Saint Paul. A legacy plan looks far into the future and tries to figure out where we're going to be 100 years from now.

4. Peggy Lynch is Executive Director of Friends of the Parks and Trails of St. Paul and Ramsey County. She said that the river is the city's greatest natural resource and making the river our front yard and encouraging access to the river will bring beauty and enjoyment to our residents and visitors to the community. They are pleased with the Great River Passage Master Plan as it outlines its vision and objectives to fulfill that vision. However, the sections starting with the Four Reaches spell out specifics, which they feel do not belong in the Comprehensive Plan. They also recommend that the proposal for an Environment Education Center at Watergate Marina be removed. The proposed Environmental Education Center is in the floodplain of the Mississippi River, and Saint Paul should not be building an education center in the floodplain. In planning for development near the river, we must respect the hydrology of the river. The Friends want to continue to work with the Parks Department as the plan is further developed and implemented. They think the vision in the Great River Passage will enhance the city. Ms. Lynch has submitted written comments as well.

5. Paul Labovitz is Superintendent for the National Parks Service/Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA). The MNRRA is one of 397 units of the national parks system. He congratulated Saint Paul for the Great River Passage Master Plan. The vision for what the Saint Paul riverfront should look like over the next 30-50 years fits nicely with the goals of the National Park Service (NPS), which is concerned with what

the river is going to look like in 100, 500 or 1,000 years. The NPS constantly wrestles with maintaining a balance between protecting a natural resource and making it accessible to people from around the globe. The National Park Service is very excited about the concepts presented in the Great River Passage Plan.

Commissioner Ward encouraged Mr. Labovitz to participate in the discussions at the district council level in order to help residents understand how this long term planning process works.

Mr. Labovitz said that he attended and provided testimony at three district council meetings about the Great River Passage over the winter, and part of his congratulations on the public process was his ability to see first-hand the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation's efforts to reach out. Mr. Labovitz stated that he would be glad to talk more about what they can do to help the City.

6. Katie Nyberg is Executive Director of the Mississippi River Fund (MRF), the charitable non-profit partner of the National Park Service. Ms. Nyberg stated that the mission of the MRF is to connect the people of the Twin Cities to their national park. There is no better place to do that than in Saint Paul. The MRF Board wholeheartedly supports the plan and its concepts. They are pleased with the level of community engagement over the past two years. They have the utmost faith in the City to continue to work with communities and residents to make sure that details on specific projects are worked out.

7. Dan McGuiness is a board member of the Lower Phalen Creek Project and the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation, but spoke on his own behalf. He encouraged adoption of the GRP Master Plan as an amendment to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan. The current version of the master plan is a result of a long and deliberative process. He offered three guidelines as the Plan is adopted and implemented: 1) It is not only about what you see from the land looking toward the river, but what you see from the river as well. 2) Take care of what we have and keep the health of the river in mind. 3) This city's strength is derived from the interwoven fabric of people, neighborhoods, and district councils, elected and appointed public officials and professional staff. We all need to be committed to taking care of this place we love – the great City of Saint Paul and the Great River Passage that is its central feature. Mr. McGuiness also submitted his written comments.

8. Kelly Jameson, representing the St. Paul Port Authority, thanked the Parks Department for the process that this plan went through to bring it to its current form. The draft before the Planning Commission today is a collaboration of many different interests and is a really good plan for the Mississippi River area. However, the Port Authority has two concerns: 1) The Port Authority appreciates that the Working River is recognized as a part of the "more urban" principle in the Plan, but has some concerns over a couple of the areas designated as River-Oriented Redevelopment Opportunities. There are some businesses in the Crosby Lake Business Park that are not located on the river and should not be required to be river-oriented to remain where they are. 2) For the Riverview Industrial Park, the Port feels that the Plan's recommendations to increase density and land use mix in Riverview are premature, and should be addressed as part of the upcoming update of the West Side Flats Master Plan and Development Guidelines. The Port Authority's written comments will be emailed following this public hearing.

9. Don Arnosti represents the National Audubon's Society members both across the state of Minnesota, but particularly the Saint Paul Audubon Chapter. Mr. Arnosti was very impressed with the efforts made to engage diverse people, communities, district councils and residents. Audubon supports the balance between more natural, more urban and more connected which is reflected in the Great River Passage Master Plan; supports the vision of the Gorge, Pig's Eye and Lilydale as more natural; and urges the Planning Commission to adopt this master plan. Audubon has confidence in the City and Parks Department to work further with communities and individuals to work out the specific details as projects move forward. Audubon and the local chapter will participate in the development of some of those details.

10. Austin Aho is the business owner of Stand Up Minnesota, which offers stand-up paddle board tours on the Mississippi River. Small companies like his have a lot of passion and commitment to the river to improve natural resources and people's access to them. He would like to see opportunities for input from private organizations as plans and projects evolve.

    Commissioner Edgerton commented that he has heard a lot of confusion as to the process for adopting and implementing the GRP Master Plan. Perhaps a graphic (like the one showing the adoption process) showing what happens after the Plan is adopted would be helpful.

11. Whitney Clark is Executive Director of Friends of the Mississippi River. They have participated very extensively in this process and generally have been pleased with the process. Overall, FMR is very supportive of the major thrust of the plan. The current draft contains some excellent ideas for the restoration of Hidden Falls and the creek below the falls, but it does not contain any language relating to the restoration of Hidden Falls Creek on top of the bluff, and they would like to see that. At Watergate Marina, they are concerned that the plan does not currently contain language that speaks to the limits of new development on that site. They request additional plan language to state that the site will be sensitively designed and scaled to minimize intrusion on the natural characteristics of the park and river. Also, Island Station is not sufficiently detailed in terms of how it connects to West 7th. There remain some details to work through, but Friends of the Mississippi River are confident the City is well on its way to advancing a plan deserving of the rich history, diversity, beauty and ecology found throughout Saint Paul's riverfront. Mr. Clark will submit written comments via email after the public hearing today.

12. Patrick Seeb is Executive Director of the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation. The Riverfront Corporation supported, assisted and provided staff capacity to the City of Saint Paul Parks Department during this process, particularly around community engagement. What really distinguishes this work from anything else that has happened along the river is that this looks at the entire system and tries to understand how all parts of the system work together to create and take advantage of this international resource. This work builds on 20 years of reinvestment in the Mississippi River. While this is primarily a Parks plan, it does so with the idea of the role parks play in economic and community development. He thanked everyone for their time and attention to this issue.

13. Jeff Jones is a new member of the steering committee for the Lower Phalen Creek Project focused on building a world class interpretive center at the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. Mr. Jones looks forward to the day when downtown really embraces the river. In regards to Mounds Park, all summer the park is full of people on the weekends, and there is a small detail on a page in the document that talks about restoring the views from overlooks. The plan calls for strategic management of overlook views along the river, which is great for residents because some of the people who come to Mounds Park may not realize that there is a river down there.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Merrigan moved to close the public hearing, leave the record open for written testimony until 4:30 p.m. on Monday, September 24, 2012 and to refer the matter back to the Comprehensive Planning Committee for review and recommendation. Commissioner Ochs seconded the motion. The motion carried with 1 abstention on a voice vote.***

VI. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Commissioner Merrigan announced that the next Comprehensive Planning Committee meeting on October 2nd has been cancelled and rescheduled to October 9, 2012.

VII. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner Merrigan announced that the next Neighborhood Committee meeting on Wednesday, September 26, 2012 has been cancelled.

VIII. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Spaulding announced that at their last meeting they discussed the Complete Streets Design Manual. There was a lot of good input from community members and City staff from a variety of perspectives who deal with street design issues so that all modes could be embraced in street design going forward. The next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, September 24, 2012 has been cancelled.

IX. Communications Committee

No report.

X. Task Force/Liaison Reports

None.

XI. Old Business

None.

XII. New Business

None.

XIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:19 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary
Planning and Economic Development Department,
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Drummond
Planning Director

Approved October 5, 2012
(Date)

Daniel Ward II
Secretary of the Planning Commission

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