**West Side Flats Developers Roundtable**

**April 30, 2013**

**Key Input Themes**

**Building Heights**

* Concerns about limits on building heights, which is seen as limiting developers’ options and creating unpredictability for taller building proposals. Developers want to know what building heights will be accepted without causing a fight with the neighborhood.
* Some cities view stick-built buildings as being inferior to concrete construction. Since lower scale buildings are typically stick-built, height limits can be seen as resulting in inferior building quality.
* The current WSF Master Plan seems to guide future buildings all of a similar height, like the Upper Landing. Developers felt that variation of building heights within the neighborhood would create a more interesting and unique neighborhood.

**Property Control**

* Perceptions that most of the land is tied up/under the control of the City, HRA, Port Authority or large land owners. This perception is a barrier to attracting new developers.

**Unclear Development Context**

* Questions about potential nuisances from surrounding uses, including the airport and industrial area.
* The WSF area is perceived as an isolated island surrounded by other types of uses that aren’t necessarily compatible with a riverfront neighborhood.
* Developers want to see 4 things before they invest in a site/neighborhood: 1) vision; 2) neighborhood support; 3) infrastructure; and 4) how to “plug in.”
* Suggested that the WSF study area address the area between Plato Blvd and the existing neighborhood above the bluff, perhaps as a way to deal with the perception that the WSF is an island and disconnected from the existing neighborhood. Master plan should show developers how the WSF will be connected to the surrounding neighborhood.
* Perceptions that there’s nothing there right now, e.g. limited destinations, streets and parks, which is a deterrent to attracting developers.

**Improving City’s Vision & Guidance**

* Lack of public awareness of a vision for the riverfront, both WSF and downtown sides.
* Need for communicating a compelling vision for the WSF rather than just a dry planning document. Clear visual images of the vision and City’s commitment to investing in the appropriate public infrastructure, especially streets and parks.
* Current WSF Master Plan is viewed as too prescriptive, which makes the developer feel like they are starting from behind the eight ball. Developers prefer that the plan take a more “performance standards” approach, with guidance as to how buildings need to “perform,” independent of specific use.
* General support for mixed-use development with a range of housing types and prices. Vertical mixed-use development could be challenging in this area; may be beneficial to target horizontal mixed-use development. Master plan should give sufficient guidance for where commercial/office uses are desirable vs. residential, so that early residential developments aren’t isolated over time.
* Master plan could benefit from exploring more fully the opportunities for incorporating community/cultural facilities into the neighborhood, which the current Master Plan does not.
* Beneficial for the Master Plan to identify catalyst activities that the City will undertake to improve the WSF area to gain community support and commitment, as well as creating an emerging place that attracts developers. Identifying the implementation steps/tools that the City is committed to, at least in the next 5 years, can attract developers to consider the WSF.

**Potential Development Assets**

* Suggested that a huge corporation like U.S. Bank could potentially have an ongoing role in redeveloping the WSF, which has been the case in other cities.
* Developers view the WSF’s location directly across from downtown as a key selling point. Recommended that WSF be seen as connected and close to downtown, yet different – a transition area between downtown and the lower- density residential neighborhood on the West Side. Being next to and across the river from downtown is seen as an asset, similar to the East Bank across from downtown Minneapolis.
* Suggested that the City explore the potential for establishing an area-wide TIF district upfront rather than each new development project needing to get TIF-certified.

**Sustainable Development**

* Support for targeting sustainability techniques with WSF development, such as innovative stormwater management, geothermal and energy-efficiency; however, also cautioned that sustainability techniques can sometimes be out of sync with other development goals, e.g. solar energy with higher-density buildings, district energy with reducing energy costs.