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

Minutes February 18, 2011

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, February 18, 2011, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present:	Mmes. Merrigan, Perrus, Porter, Reveal, Thao, Wang, Wencl; and Messrs. Commers, Connolly, Fernandez, Gelgelu, Kramer, Nelson, Ochs, Schertler, and Ward.
Commissioners Absent:	Mmes. *Halverson, *Young, and Messrs. *Oliver, *Spaulding. *Excused
Also Present:	Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Lucy Thompson, Kate Reilly, Christina Morrison, Jessica Rosenfeld, Ryan Kelley, Patricia James, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes February 4, 2011.

Commissioner Porter requested that the word "timely" to be inserted into her comment on page 5 of the minutes.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Ward moved approval of the minutes of February 4, 2011. Commissioner Wencl seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Commers had no announcements.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Donna Drummond announced that Saint Paul has just been named one of America's dozen distinctive destinations for 2011 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. It recognizes Saint Paul for offering cultural and recreation experiences different from the typical vacation destination. It's presented to cities and towns that offer dynamic downtowns, cultural diversity, attractive architecture, cultural landscapes and a strong commitment to historic preservation sustainability and revitalization.

IV. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Highland Village Zoning Study - Adopt resolution recommending approval to the Mayor and City Council. *(Merritt Clapp-Smith, 651/266-6547)*

MOTION: ***Commissioner Wencl moved on behalf of the Neighborhood Planning Committee to recommend that the Highland Village Zoning study be adopted by the Mayor and City Council. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

Commissioner Wencl announced that the next Neighborhood Committee meeting is on Wednesday, February 23, 2011.

V. **PUBLIC HEARING:** Central Corridor Station Area Plans-Western, Victoria & Hamline Station Areas – Item from the Comprehensive Planning Committee. *(Jessica Rosenfeld, 651/266-6560, and Christina Morrison, 651/266-6546)*

Chair Commers announced that the Saint Paul Planning Commission was holding a public hearing on the Central Corridor Station Area Plans-Western, Victoria and Hamline Station Areas. Notice of the public hearing was published in the Legal Ledger on February 7, 2011, and sent to the citywide Early Notification System list of recipients and other interested parties.

Jessica Rosenfeld, PED staff, gave a brief overview of the process used to develop the plans, which included a steering committee, stakeholder interviews, roundtable meetings, and a series of day and evening workshops. The first drafts of the plans were based on input from the roundtable and workshop meetings, and were revised through discussions with the Steering Committee. The outreach process used for these plans was based on the process that was used for the adopted University Avenue station area plans with some adjustments based on feedback and the needs of these areas specifically, including emphasizing multi-lingual communications.

Christina Morrison, PED staff talked about the Steering Committee's major topics of discussion, including: (1) the scale of development, particularly at Victoria and Western; (2) sustainability; (3) alleys, parking and circulation, especially at the Victoria and Western Stations; and (4) personal safety.

Following the adoption of the HVW Station Area Plans, staff will work on updates to the Introduction and Moving Forward chapters of the full set of Central Corridor station area plans.

Commissioner Schertler asked why the area of change line was drawn where it was, going through the alley rather than along Sherburne.

Ms. Morrison said that at the Steering Committee had a lot of discussions about the area of change, weighing the benefits of whole-block development against the desire to preserve neighborhood character and limit change to just a half block north and south of University Avenue. The Steering Committee concluded that the line of change should stay at the alley, because it made sense given the character of the neighborhood.

Commissioner Schertler said that the area of change delineation seems to be based on the preservation of existing land use.

Ms. Rosenfeld said the area of change came from the Central Corridor Development Strategy process, which was the first time the community had to deal with light rail and how it would impact the neighborhood as a whole. For HVW, the Steering Committee refined the area of

change for the three station areas, but didn't rehash the philosophy of the area of change as a whole.

Ms. Morrison said that the Victoria Station area, where a lot of this discussion was focused, is the only place on the Avenue where there hasn't been a lot of erosion of neighborhood fabric with commercial uses or parking lots. There were definitely two sides to the debate over what the area of change should include, but the committee did a good job weighing the factors before making its decision.

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

The following people spoke. Interpreters assisted with the first four speakers.

1. Mr. Ahmad Hasan lives in Skyline Towers, located south of University Avenue in the Hamline station area. More than 1,000 people live there, who are mostly refugees that came from Africa and Asia. There is a lot of unemployment and a lot of elders at Skyline Towers. He would like to have a mall nearby where people can find jobs and where the community can get together.

2. Mr. Hadi Khalq said that the people who live in Skyline Towers need help finding jobs, and could gain skills through construction job placements. Many people do not know what the Central Corridor project is and whether it will benefit the community or not.

   Commissioner Connolly asked whether there are good examples of projects that make connections between community members that need jobs and jobs that need workers.

   Commissioner Ward commented that in Minneapolis there is an organization called Summit Academy, OIC, which has partnered with contractors and large construction companies to help connect low-income residents, particularly in communities with no construction experience and language barriers, with general contractors who can provide that training. Most HUD projects require Section 3 compliance and opportunities for small businesses.

   Commissioner Porter added that there is also an organization called Metropolitan Economic Development Association (MEDA) that was recently given funding to create a training program for the corridor to help build job skills. There is a seminar coming up in a couple of weeks and Commissioner Porter will give the Planning Director that information.

   Commissioner Thao said that Merrick Community Services has a Brownfield remediation program funded by the EPA where they train and place workers with some of the larger construction companies in town.

3. Ms. Zeinab Ahyusuf talked about the need for green space and a place for kids to play. She lives in the Skyline Towers, where there are many kids and single mothers. They need sidewalks, a place to walk, and somewhere the kids can play at in the cold.

   Commissioner Schertler asked whether staff has looked at a prioritization of parks needs along the Corridor.

Ms. Rosenfeld said that kind of prioritization was the purpose of the Parks System Plan, which will be described by Parks staff.

4. Mr. Esmarl Guye lives in the Skyline Towers and is concerned about safety issues. The station that is going to be built at Hamline is a bit far from where they live, and there are not sidewalks and proper lighting on the way to the station. St. Anthony is also unsafe – it needs a stop sign to help people cross the street.

5. Ms. Deb Lande from Common Bond Communities spoke about the Skyline Towers. Ten-years ago the management of Skyline was taken over by Common Bond Communities. She talked about how important Skyline is as a resource in Saint Paul and the Twin Cities. There are over 1,000 people (including 300 kids under the age of 18) who live in 500 units of housing and speak 20 different languages. They do not have any indoor play space, so the kids need a place to go in the winter. Common Bond has dozens of staff working in Skyline - there are half a dozen people in property management, a half dozen or more helping residents find and keep jobs, helping kids get good grades and graduate from high school. Common Bond is really embedded in the community, wanting to make it a vibrant community for everyone. Ms. Lande is asking the City to consider the 1,000 people who live there.

   Commissioner Ochs asked for the location and cultural history of Skyline Towers.

   Ms. Lande said Skyline Towers is located at 1247 St. Anthony, just south of the Hamline stop. Skyline was built in 1971, the same year Common Bond was started, and it started out as a high-rise building for seniors and students. The demographics shifted over time, and it has become a first stop for people who are new to the country. Eighty percent of the individuals who live in Skyline Towers now are East African.

   Commissioner Ochs said that it is important to have flexible spaces connected to these higher-density locations that serve as a place for new immigrants. And some of those larger social gathering places can also function as open space and provide the necessary amenities for a transit corridor.

6. Ms. Benita Warns, owner of Mister Michael's Recycle Bicycles, supports the effort to preserve and protect and enhance residential areas north of University Avenue, the new streets identified for Midway Market Place area, the bicycle routes on Pascal and Griggs, and the idea to add park space in the area. She also supports the idea of a bicycle route on Fuller Avenue with appropriate crossings at Hamline and Pascal, stating that Pascal needs a mid block crossing for bicycles and pedestrians. She opposed a bicycle route on Charles Avenue due to the lack of signalized crossings at major streets, and prefers a route on a street with traffic signals, like Thomas.

7. Mr. Hai Troung a resident and business owner on University Avenue. Mr. Troung opposes the inclusion of the World Cultural Heritage District concept in the plans, and that it is not supported by and inclusive to all businesses. He stated that thinks bike parking can conflict with green space, as he has been trying to put a bike rack at his business but green space needs to be removed to put it in. Truong requested that off-peak parking be explored soon in order to enhance pedestrian safety and support businesses.

He stated his full support of the bike routes, suggesting the establishment of more then just set routes like Aurora Avenue, and to explore streets that bike commuters actually use versus pushing them to a set route.

Commissioner Ward asked what the World Cultural Heritage District is and what is Mr. Troung's opposition.

Mr. Troung said he does not know what it is and it should not be included in the plan as marketing the station areas as the World Cultural Heritage District. He noted a group is trying to market the area's businesses as a World Cultural Heritage District, assuming that the businesses are involved. He is opposed to the name and marketing the district as a World Cultural Heritage District, and does not feel it is appropriate to include in the plan.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, noted the idea came from the community during the work on the Central Corridor Development Strategy and there were a number of groups who thought this might be an opportunity to brand the eastern part of the corridor as a destination. She noted that whether or not there is still support in the community for that it remains to be seen, however it has generated interest in the past.

Mr. Troung thought that the area was already branded "Frogtown" and opposed renaming the area.

Commissioner Ochs asked for an explanation of the relationship between off-street parking, pedestrians and safety.

Mr. Troung said because there is going to be two-lanes of traffic in each direction and no parking, pedestrians will be very close to moving cars and buses, creating an unsafe pedestrian experience. He noted that parked cars provide a buffer.

Commissioner Porter commented on the World Cultural Heritage District, saying that there have been on-going meetings, and both Commissioner Gelgelu and herself have attended those meetings. She suggested having the group present to the planning commission.

Commissioner Wang questioned if this forum is right for a University Avenue branding effort. She noted she has some problems with the designation and its use in the document, and the commission be talking about it in that context.

Commissioner Gelgelu said the World Cultural Heritage District sees the designation as an asset because of ethnic diversity that has changed in the past 10-20 years on the avenue. He agreed the group should present to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Fernandez recommended that if the World Cultural Heritage District were to present, they should also bring their supporting business owners. Commissioner Fernandez said the branding topic was brought up in many steering committee meetings, and he felt it was being forced on them.

8. Mr. Tate Danielson Castillo, with the Frogtown Neighborhood Association District 7,

said they are pleased with the inclusion of the Frogtown Farm concept. He noted it could serve Skyline Tower residents who could access it via LRT and a short walk. He stated that Frogtown hopes to create a space for demonstration gardening, to be able to sell food, to have an opportunity for community residents to learn back yard gardening and to have a community space to interact with one another. He also stated that they are very grateful the Victoria Theatre is mentioned in the plan.

He agreed with previous testimony that the World Cultural Heritage District is not appropriate in the plan, and that the branding should be a community discussion.

9. Ms. Annie Johnson, Community Organizer for the Union Park District Council, testified on behalf of their Land Use Committee, which recently voted in support of the Hamline Area Station Plan. The committee requested that another park be included in addition to the skate park, because teenage males are the typical users of a skate park. They requested that additional green space be included in the plan, and stated support for the finer street grid through super blocks. The Land Use Committee encourages methods that will strengthen the development opportunities that are east of Hamline Avenue.

10. Mr. Geoff Murphy, president of Old Home Foods, representing the property at 370 University. He stated that the building was built over 100-years ago, the façade is approaching 90-years old, and that in 2000 Old Home spent about $300,000 redoing the unique façade. He noted that it is not realistic to save that building, as it was designed as a single use property with many stepped levels throughout the property. The building is no longer maintained due to costs, and the area between the façade and the brick structure is unstable due to moisture. Old Home determined that the building was not safe so they moved their operations to New Brighton. Mr. Murphy stated that he understands the desire to save the building, and noted this would be a good spot for a park and ride or mixed-use retail.

Commissioner Ward suggested to Mr. Murphy that he might consider demolishing the building and selling the land. Mr. Murphy agreed.

Commissioner Connolly asked if the property had any historic designation.

Mr. Murphy said that he did not believe so; that they had done some investigating and it had not been listed with any type of historical status, but it had been inventoried as a potential historical site.

Ms. Drummond, Planning Director, said that the building has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but has not yet been officially designated either for the National Register or local designation.

11. Mr. Michael Dolan, part of the Old Home real estate team, said that it has been a challenge and he has shown the property to countless groups who have come away with the conclusion that the building cannot be reused.

12. Ms. Triesta Brown, a resident on Blair Avenue, generally supports the plan. She noted the new urban park needs to be adaptable to future needs, and that any destination attraction should not detract from the ability to provide basic recreational needs for all ages at this

site. She noted the alley enhancements and snow removal issues were a concern for her, and encouraged further study that is sensitive to the different needs of the property owners that share the alley space. She stated that the parking on University Avenue would affect the alley use and traffic function.

13. Francis Baidoo owns property at 449 Arundel, and shared concerns about parking. He stated that he has an alley behind his property which would be acceptable to expand, but that he opposes a 4-way stop at Arundel and Aurora due to existing traffic and parking demand.

14. Mr. Keith Johnson owns a business on University near Prior. He reiterated support for the Victoria Theatre and the study of off-peak parking as a buffer zone.

    Christina Morrison, PED staff, stated that the City is committed to studying the possibility of off-peaking parking after LRT is operational. It has been raised at both the steering committee and brought up many times throughout the Central Corridor LRT design process. The station area plans recommend doing a "systems plan" that would study related topics like alley circulation, snow removal, and on-street parking. She added that some of those things are starting to be explored now.

MOTION: ***Commissioner Kramer moved to close the public hearing, leave the record open for written testimony until 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, February 22, 2011, and to refer the matter back to the Comprehensive Planning Committee for review and recommendation. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

VI. Zoning Committee

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

Three items will come before the staff Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, February 22, 2011. They are Xcel Energy Parking Lot at 834 Rice Street (for building at 825 Rice), reconstruct pavement and storm water utilities; East Side Commons-York/Sims Site at 593 York, adjust storm sewer, curbs, expand parking lot, mill overlay existing parking, new playground, fencing and landscaping; and East Side Commons-Bradley Terrace Site Improvements at 850 Bradley, adjust grade, new catch basins, retaining walls, walks, small parking lot expansion and mill overlay existing parking.

NO ZONING BUSINESS

Commissioner Kramer announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, February 24, 2011.

VII. Parks and Recreation System Plan – Informational presentation by Parks staff Bob Smith and Kathy Korum.

Jessica Rosenfeld, PED staff, introduced staff from Parks and Recreation to talk about the Parks and Recreation System Plan that was recently completed. Ms. Rosenfeld worked on the Parks Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan and this is something that was called for in the

Comprehensive Plan as one of the implementation steps along with the parks vision. This Parks System Plan looks at some of the bigger issues strategically and looks at the facilities that Parks has in trying to figure out how parks can be a sustainable system. A handout from the Parks and Recreation Department was distributed with an overview of the Parks and Recreation System Plan.

Kathy Korum, Deputy Director for the Parks and Recreation Department along with Bob Smith, who was the project lead on this plan, provided comments. There are a few things in the plan that Ms. Korum wanted to highlight. She talked about the 2008 Vision Plan, which set the direction for Parks and Recreation in Saint Paul. The System Plan addresses the built components of the park and recreation system. The System Plan is necessary to assure that Saint Paul's Parks and Recreation System is economically sustainable. The goal of the System Plan is to transform the Parks and Recreation System into a 21st century system. Also the System Plan balances community needs and wants with financial realities, to ensure the system remains economically viable and responsible with tax dollars.

Bob Smith spoke about purpose, process and content. He said that the plan carefully and thoroughly inventories, evaluates and prioritizes park assets. This plan is recreation center centric; it calls for 19 recreation centers, which is a big change since 1985 when there were 50 centers. The plan also talks about school building partners and some building removals. That is part of the reason why they had large attendance at public meetings about the plan on the eastside. Mr. Smith showed a map that reflects this. He noted that this plan is citywide so it tries to be equitable. The plan touches on trails and the Grand Rounds; connectivity is a big part of this plan. The plan shows a need for further creativity to improve the grand rounds connections in the northwest corridor of the city. The plan also addresses golf courses; the plan mentions that there should be a minimum of two, there are four in the city currently. It addressed placement of dog parks, and upgrading certain athletic fields throughout the city. Finally there is a financial piece to this plan. It speaks to savings over the next 20-years of $20 million.

Commissioner Nelson noticed that the plan has very little discussion about aquatic sports. He said there is a little about improving Phalen and then there is something about splash pads, he asked if Mr. Smith could elaborate on this.

Mr. Smith said that it does address the updates at Highland and the future updates that are happening at Como for the aquatic facility. There is one indoor facility at Oxford and another indoor aquatic facility that belongs to the school district. They do want to further partner with school district to share facilities.

Commissioner Nelson said with regard to school district the plan talked about use of gyms, but nothing about pools. He suggested that pools be a part of it. All the pools that he has gone to are on exterior walls of the building, so even if it meant putting an addition on or something making it a public entrance that would be a relatively easy thing to do with these schools if there was a good way to partner and block off the rest of the school and leave the pool open for activities throughout the year.

Commissioner Thao lives in this northeast part of the city and she sees that most of the current aquatic pools are on the western part of the city. She would like that need addressed so the kids who will eventually go to Phalen will learn how to swim.

Commissioner Connolly asked about the plan for dog parks.

Mr. Smith said there are a few areas being considered for dog parks. He does not know what the rank or priority is but Lillydale has been mentioned. There are needs in the northwest area, the Pierce Butler area of Saint Paul, and the downtown area with a growing residential base. They have heard both advocates that want it and they've heard people who have said let's make sure the spaces are flexible to all. Parks does recognize there is a need for dog parks in Saint Paul.

Commissioner Reveal said that the notion of partnerships is critical. She asked about working with developers to provide more green space.

Ms. Drummond, Planning Director, said they have been working closely with Parks staff on the ideas for new park spaces included in the Central Corridor Development Strategy and the station area plans. The question is how that actually gets implemented and how do we work on new developments that might create some kind of public amenity? This type of amenity or open space might not have to be an official park but could meet a need.

Commissioner Ochs commented that he thinks it is very important to consider the Saint Paul school system as a viable partner. Also he feels it's ok to offer some specialty recreational facilities like skate parks that only serve a certain demographic, but build into the model some flexibility to respond to changing needs in the future.

Commissioner Perrus asked if the picture on the last page of the booklet that was handed out is a picture of a Splash Pad.

Ms. Korum said that is what a Splash Pad looks like. There is one at Lewis Park just off of Rice Street now. This will be the third summer for this splash pad and it is very popular with the young people. You have to push a button to turn on the water and it only stays on a few minutes then you have to push the button again to turn the water on again. It's the wet version of a play area. It's one way that they can offer water play as an option where there is not money or room for a pool. It is a great way to cool off in the summer. The water drains into a chlorine system where the engineers have to turn them on and off in the fall. It's a pretty comprehensive system that has been great so far.

Commissioner Kramer commented with regard to the search area for the Hayden Heights Recreation Center. The Frost Lake Recreation Center has closed, Prosperity is closed. With the search area there's left for a new Hayden Heights Recreation Center building no matter where it is put the problem is White Bear Avenue. There was talk about partnering with the library; but Hayden Heights Library is jammed packed, it is land locked. The library location is not realistic within the capital budget parameter. With regard to Duluth and Case Recreation Center again there's the same issue, if kids want to go to the Boys and Girls club they would be crossing Phalen Blvd and Johnson Parkway and the spacing looks good on the map but in reality it is not good.

Mr. Smith said that as the system evolves to become sustainable it creates gaps. Regarding Hayden Heights Elementary, they do not think that's a realistic option for permanent facility programming as it's small and they recognize that. They also realize that the library is right on the White Bear corridor, so it is open to ideas and suggestions and working with the community to figure it out. There certainly is a void and they have to address it.

Ms. Korum said if young people need a way to find a gym, as a system parks may need to look at transportation, rather then look at trying to figure out how to build more buildings that they can't afford to operate. So it's a balance between putting things on transit corridors and how kids can cross busy streets and where to put the gyms and where to invest in the athletic facilities. The plan at least provides the lens through which they look at what the options might be at the various sites.

Commissioner Porter asked how the plan addresses maintenance; a lot of the buildings are closed because of deterioration and age.

Ms. Korum said that one of the biggest costs is maintaining the facilities, replacing roofs, fixing elevators and redoing gym floors, etc. When the consultants went through the buildings they outlined maintenance costs. The day-to-day maintenance is one of the operating costs that parks have to consider, in terms of how many buildings they can manage.

VIII. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Chair Commers announced the items on the agenda for the next Comprehensive Planning meeting on Tuesday, January 22, 2011.

IX. Transportation Committee

No report.

X. Communications Committee

Commissioner Thao had no report.

XI. Task Force Reports

Commissioner Wencl announced that the Smith Avenue Plan Committee is having an open house meeting on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 at the Thompson Park Activity Center, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Commissioner Fernandez said that he has been hearing a lot about possible contingency funds that are available through the light rail. At some point he would like to have a Planning Commission an update on that. It seems like a big thing that is being discussed by a lot of different organizations along the avenue.

XII. Old Business

None.

XIII. New Business

None.

XIV. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:55 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 3-18-11
(Date)

Anthony Fernandez
Secretary of the Planning Commission

PED\Butler\planning commission\minutes\February 18, 2011