



ANNUAL REPORT

SAINT PAUL
PLANNING
COMMISSION

2023



SAINT PAUL
PLANNING & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

COMMISSION BACKGROUND

The Saint Paul Planning Commission is a 21-member advisory body made up of resident volunteers. These volunteers are appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. The Commission reviews and makes recommendations on city planning, including comprehensive planning, zoning studies, and zoning code amendments. The Commission has four subcommittees: Zoning, Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning, Transportation, and Communications and Nominations. The Commission's decisions are informed by the community vision established in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, City policies, and by specific and ongoing community input. The Planning Commission strives to continually engage the community, involving the people who live, work, and play in Saint Paul. The 2023 Annual Report provides a summary of the Planning Commission's major activities and accomplishments over the past year.

ZONING COMMITTEE

The Zoning Committee hears requests for Rezoning, Conditional Use Permits (CUPs), Nonconforming Use Permits (NCUPs), Determinations of Similar Use (DSUs), variances, occasional site plans, and appeals of certain administrative decisions. Information on the administration of these zoning applications can be found in [Chapter 61 of the Zoning Code](#).

- Rezoning: amendment to a zoning district boundary or change of zoning district applied to a property; recommended by Planning Commission and approved by City Council
- Conditional Use Permits: approval of a land use subject to established conditions; approved by Planning Commission
- Nonconforming Use Permits: approval of a pre-existing land use that is not in conformance with the Zoning Code subject to established conditions; approved by Planning Commission
- Determinations of Similar Use: approval of a land use not listed in the Zoning Code but is substantially similar to a regulated use; when not approved administratively by the Zoning Administrator, referred to and approved by the Planning Commission
- Variances: allowance to deviate from strict enforcement of Code standards subject to established findings; approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals or Planning Commission
- Site Plan Reviews: review and approval of a site design; typically approved administratively but may be referred to and approved by Planning Commission
- Appeals: review of an administrative or Planning Commission decision when it is alleged that an error was made; reviewed by Planning Commission or City Council

A total of 33 applications were submitted to the Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission in 2023, a 6% increase from the previous year. The five-year trend for total number of cases and type of cases is represented in Figure 1 below. Conditional use permits and rezonings were the most common type of zoning application in 2023, a continued trend from years past.

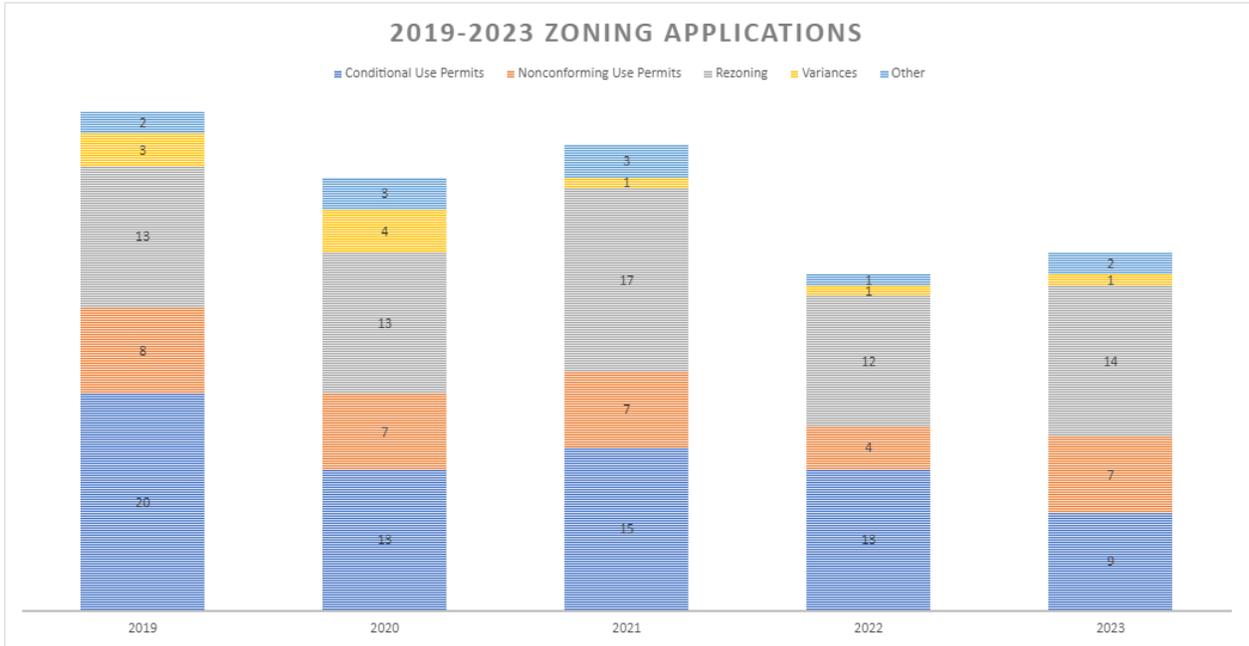


Figure 1: Zoning Case Applications, 2019-2023

Figure 2 showcases zoning cases by ward. Wards 4 and 6 were tied for the most zoning cases, while ward 7 did not see any zoning cases in 2023.

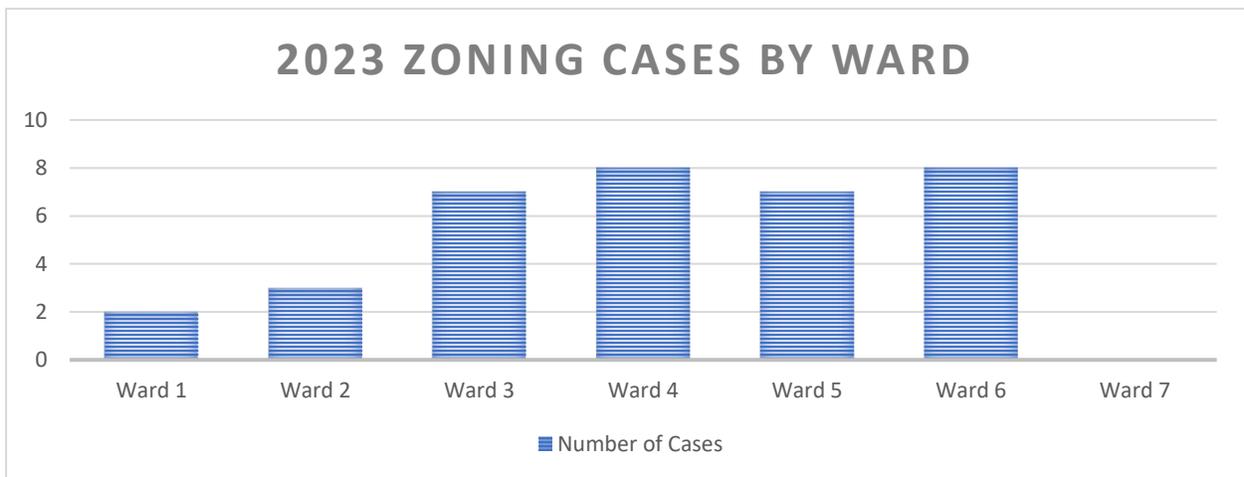


Figure 2: Zoning Cases by Ward, 2023

Figure 3 displays the spatial distribution of 2023 zoning cases by type.

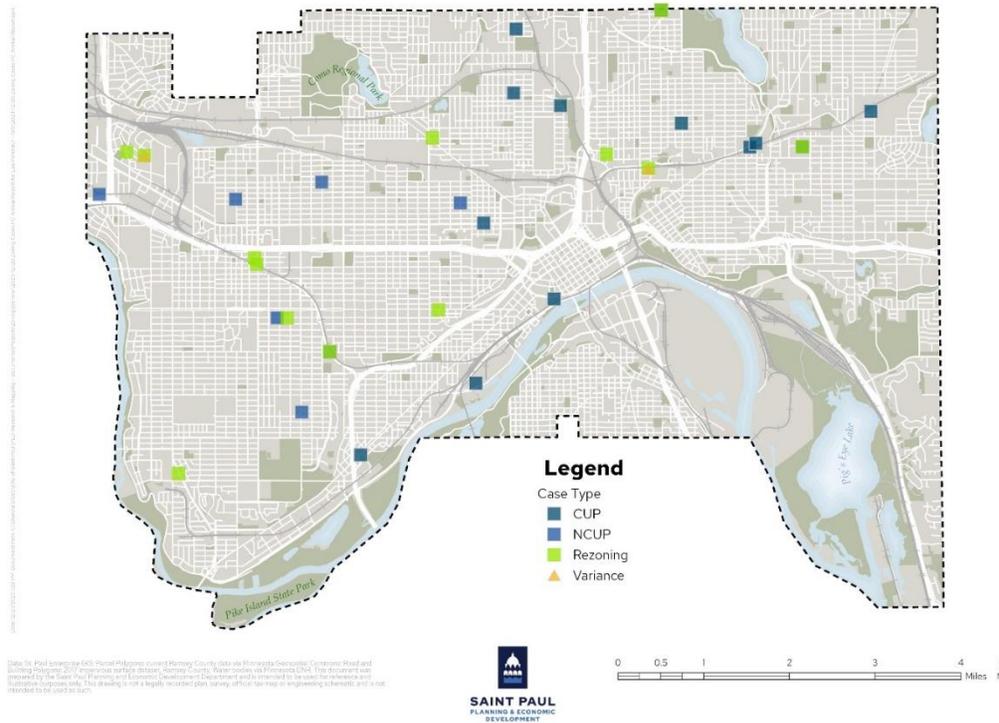


Figure 3: Zoning Case Distribution by Type, 2023

Figure 4 presents the number of Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals decisions appealed to the City Council from 2015 to 2023. The number of appeals to City Council is the lowest it has been in the past 10 years.

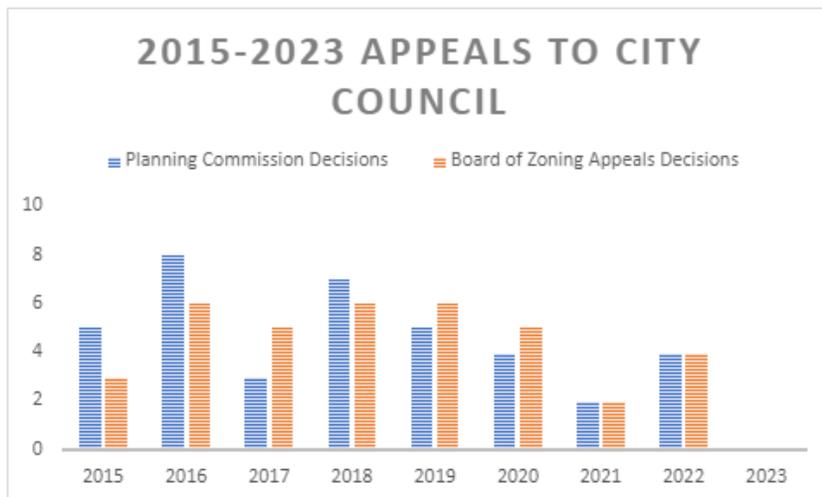


Figure 4: Appeals to City Council, 2019-2023

COMPREHENSIVE & NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee (CNPC) advises the Planning Commission on zoning studies, the adoption of zoning code text amendments, as well as comprehensive and neighborhood planning district planning items. Planning staff conduct research and develop zoning studies that are prioritized as implementation actions of the Comprehensive Plan and/or the Administration. District Plans are reviewed and, following a public hearing and any updates, are recommended to the City Council to be adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan. The CNPC discusses both citywide and neighborhood projects.

ZONING STUDIES, CODE TEXT AMENDMENTS, AND POLICY STUDIES

1-4 Unit Housing Study Update

In Fall 2023, Phase 2 of the 1-4 Unit Housing Study was completed after the Planning Commission recommended approval and the City Council adopted Ordinance 23-43. This ordinance increases zoning flexibility to support greater housing diversity in the city's single-family districts and in other low-density residential districts. The zoning amendments include a consolidation of seven residential zoning districts into three districts that allow for a greater variety of neighborhood-scale housing options. These options include, but not limited to, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), additional single-family homes, and townhomes. Also among the amendments is a density bonus option for providing affordable housing, family-sized housing, or for retaining a portion of an existing home. There are also updated regulations for ADUs and cluster developments, incentives for preserving existing housing, updated design standards, and new options for lot splits. The amendments went into effect on November 26, 2023. Staff is working on developing educational materials on the new zoning requirements, the development processes, and related topics.

East Grand Avenue Overlay District Update

The East Grand Avenue Overlay District (EGAOD) Zoning Study continued to progress in 2023. In the spring, Planning staff and the technical assistance consultant, Michael Lamb Consulting, LLC, concluded the Advisory Committee process. The Advisory Committee provided recommended development principles for consideration for Planning staff in developing Zoning Code text amendments to the EGAOD. Throughout the summer planning staff conducted case study research on comparable corridors in the Upper Midwest and used additional Advisory Committee recommendations and previous analyses to draft text amendments to the EGAOD in the fall. Planning staff expects the proposed text amendments will be ready for the Planning Commission to release for public review, including a public hearing, in early 2024, and City Council adoption is anticipated for late Winter 2024.



Figure 5: East Grand Avenue Looking East Toward Downtown Saint Paul

T District Zoning Study Update

Planning staff continued work on the T District Zoning Study that was initiated by the Planning Commission in 2022. The intent of the study is to develop zoning code text amendments to the T Districts, consistent with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The study also analyzes drive-thru sales and service uses and will propose a density bonus for affordable housing. First adopted in 2004, the T Districts are intended to foster the development and growth of compact, pedestrian-oriented areas with a compatible mix of commercial and residential uses. T Districts are a prevalent zoning district designated for properties in walkable and transit-oriented environments (see Figure 6). Planning staff anticipates Planning Commission review of the zoning study and proposed amendments in 2024.

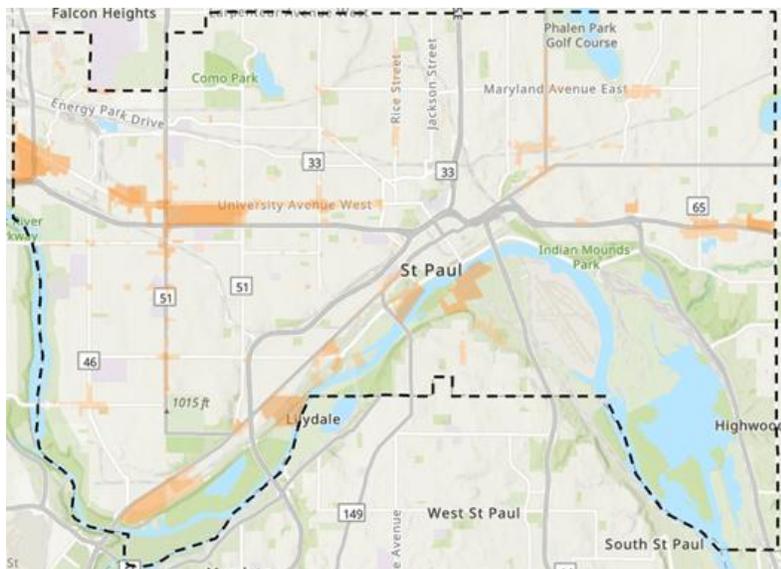


Figure 6: Properties Zoned Traditional Neighborhood (T1-T4)

CREDIT: CITY OF SAINT PAUL

MRCCA local ordinance

A Planning Commission public hearing was held on the draft local Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) ordinance in January 2023, following DNR conditional approval as consistent with state MRCCA rules in mid-2022. The MRCCA Rules divide the Critical Area into six overlay zoning districts and include specific zoning code provisions, definitions, and regulations that local units of government are required to adopt, along with the new overlay zoning districts, as amendments to local zoning to comply with the MRCCA Rules. The draft ordinance is largely based on a model Critical Area ordinance that the DNR created to help local governments update their local ordinances to comply with the MRCCA Rules. The model ordinance also includes optional language suggestions to provide better resource protection than the minimum in the MRCCA Rules, and includes clarification of rule provisions that may otherwise be difficult to administer. Planning staff continue to refine the local ordinance and will bring it back to the Planning Commission for final review and recommendation in early 2024.

Anti-Displacement and Community Wealth Building Study

The Anti-displacement & Community Wealth Building Study, supported by the Mayor, Planning Commission, and City Council, ended the year with City-recommended strategies for minimizing displacement risks for low- and moderate-income people and businesses, while simultaneously encouraging new housing production and business investment. While predominantly a technical study supported by a national and local consultant team with expertise in housing and small business policies, programs, and development finance, it also engaged community through surveys, direct business outreach, an open house, a community advisory committee of community development experts, and a City staff internal workgroup. The recommended strategies will be shared publicly in early 2024.

DISTRICT AND SMALL AREA PLANNING

Rondo Neighborhood Small Area Plan and Anti-Displacement Study

Between 1956 and 1968, the construction of Interstate 94 demolished the once vibrant Rondo corridor. Approximately 700 homes and 300 businesses were razed in Rondo to build the interstate, leaving the community torn in half and forever damaged by the destruction of the social, cultural, and economic center of the African American Community in Saint Paul. The direct impact of the construction of I-94 resulted in the Rondo community experiencing a 48% decline in home ownership, a 61% decline in population, and combined loss of \$157 million dollars of unrealized home equity value.

Although the Historic Rondo Corridor cannot be brought back exactly as it once was, Reconnect Rondo is leading an effort to reignite a vibrant African American Cultural Enterprise District anchored by a community land bridge. Reconnect Rondo began work on the Rondo African American Cultural enterprise district in 2022, and has worked with the community to determine the boundaries for a small area/master plan and their study context area (see Figure

7). The plan will guide future development in historic Rondo and beyond, and will provide the initial policy guidance for future development on the land bridge.

In addition to the Small Area Plan, several other related studies and projects are concurrently being produced by Reconnect Rondo's consulting teams. Although the concurrent studies are produced independently of the small area plan, aspects of those studies related to physical development will likely be integrated into the small area plan and vice-versa. The other studies and projects include the development of anti-displacement and community investment strategies, restorative development modeling, environmental and heritage preservation, and multi-use, energy efficient development prototypes.

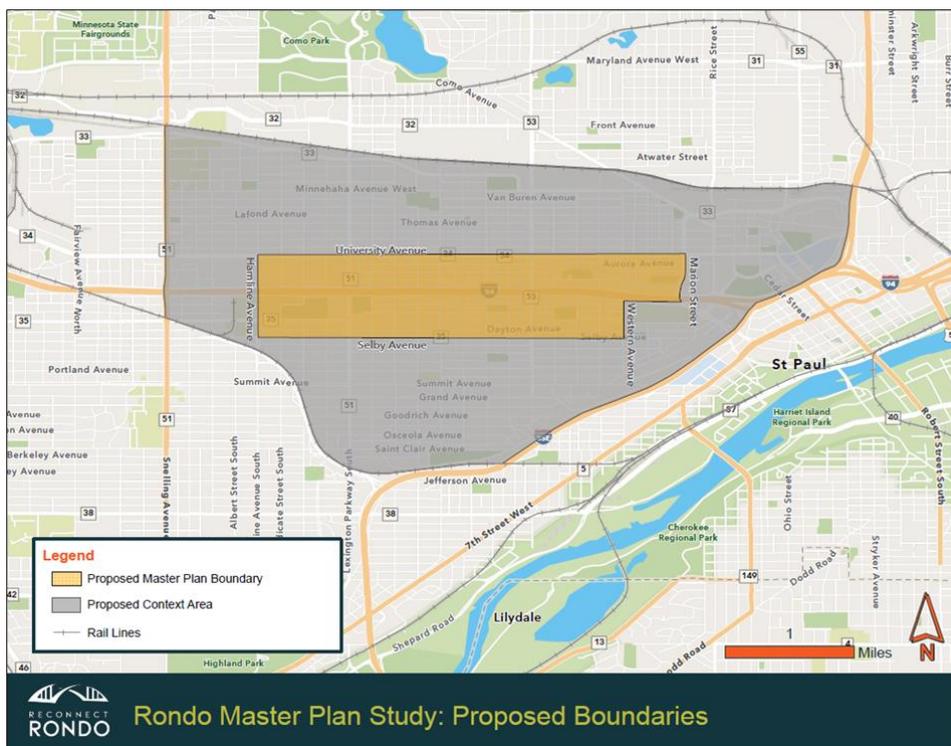


Figure 7: Rondo Study Areas

LARGE DEVELOPMENT SITES

Highland Bridge Update

Highland Bridge, a redevelopment of the 135-acre former Ford Motor Companies' Twin Cities Assembly Plant, continued construction in 2023. Throughout the year, Planning staff primarily focused on processing a package of amendments to the Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan in response to a proposed project by the University of Saint Thomas (UST). UST is proposing to develop an athletic complex for baseball and softball on 13.66 acres of land historically known as the Canadian Pacific (CP) rail yard parcels in the southeast corner of the

Master Plan area (Figure 8). Development of the CP parcels was not part of the original Ryan Companies development plan and was not anticipated in the original Master Plan, but a similar recreational use for southeast portion of the Highland Bridge site was envisioned. The proposal provides many benefits to the community, including increased vibrancy and activity, opportunities for neighborhood recreation, and economic development potential. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the amendments, which were adopted by City Council in July 2023.

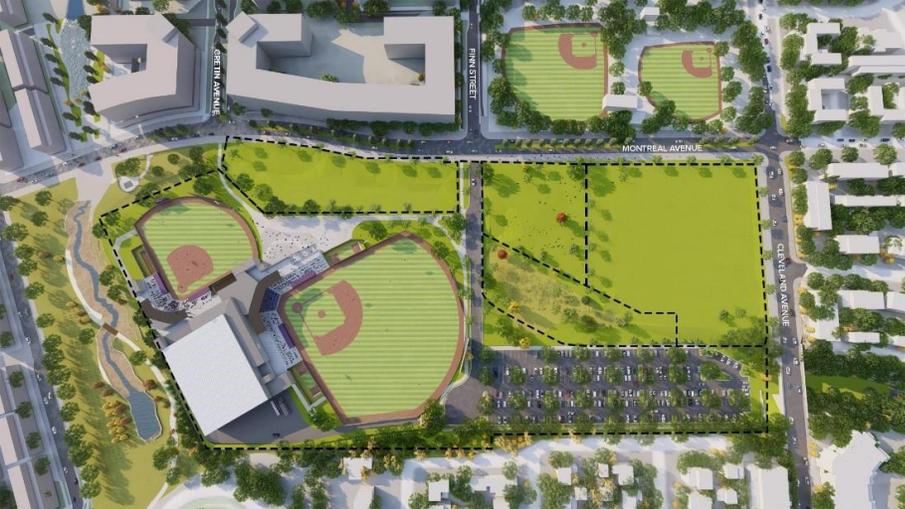


Figure 8: University of St. Thomas’ proposed athletic complex at the Highland Bridge Site

United Village Update (Snelling-Midway)

In 2023 Planning staff worked on a plat in preparation for redevelopment of a site that includes a hotel, office building, and restaurants. The plat dedicates rights-of-way for new roads and sets aside land for parks. A sculpture plaza and playground are planned for the parks.

The Heights/Hillcrest Update

The Heights, a redevelopment of the 112-acre former Hillcrest Golf Course on the East Side, received final plat approval and conducted pollution remediation and site grading in 2023. The Saint Paul Port Authority will develop the site’s infrastructure and light industrial parcels, while partnering with Sherman Associates, JO Companies, and Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity on the residential/mixed-use parcels. Xcel Energy is slated as the first industrial user. At build-out, there will be approximately 1,000 jobs and 1,000 housing units on the site.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The Transportation Committee advises the Planning Commission, the City Council, and staff on transportation planning and project decisions, and creates a transparent public forum for such discussions. The committee’s work helps better integrate land use and transportation decisions

as they relate to zoning, neighborhood and comprehensive planning, and infrastructure investments.

Saint Paul Bike Plan

In 2023, after over a year more than two years of input from the public, elected officials, and staff, a draft of the new Saint Paul Bicycle Plan was completed. A Planning Commission public hearing on the draft was also set for early 2024. City staff will review feedback from the public engagement period and incorporate this feedback into the final draft. Once the final Bicycle Plan is complete, and recommended by the Planning Commission, it will go to City Council for a public hearing and adoption.

Purple Line

Metro Transit's Purple Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project will connect downtown Saint Paul and Maplewood Mall, primarily with dedicated bus lanes. A 2023 study from the Metropolitan Council analyzed a potential modified alignment along Maryland and White Bear Avenues as an alternative to the previous Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that was to run along the Bruce Vento Trail corridor (see Figure 9). The new BRT route option will be compared to the existing LPA, with a formal decision expected in early 2024 by their Corridor Management Committee. The chosen route will be designed 2024.



Figure 9: Purple Line potential alignment, looking NE (left) and SE (right), at Maryland Ave and White Bear Ave

G Line, H Line

The G Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project released its corridor plan in October 2023 and was before the Transportation Committee that month. The route will run from Rice Street to Robert Street connecting through downtown on 5th/6th streets. The arterial BRT line will have ten-minute frequency and station amenities such as real-time heat information.

Summit Ave Regional Trail Plan

In response to presentations from the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Transportation Committee and Planning Commission recommended approval of the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan in 2023, which provides a vision for a grade-separated trail in the corridor (see Figure 10). Technical considerations, policy goals, and intense community engagement made for a detailed and complex evaluation. Additional trail and street design will be needed in conjunction with individual street reconstruction projects to implement the vision.

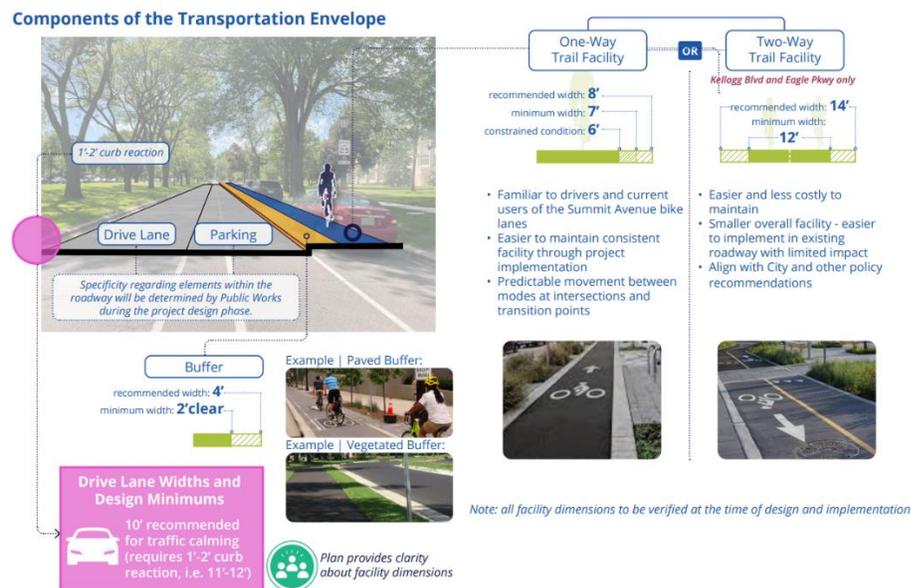


Figure 10: Summit Trail Approved Design Features

Rethinking I-94 Update

The Transportation Committee and Planning Commission received presentations on the Rethinking I-94 study from MnDOT this year. MnDOT took public feedback on high-level conceptual design alternatives for the I-94 corridor between downtown Saint Paul and downtown Minneapolis through October. Some of the design alternatives will advance into the corridor's Environmental Impact Statement for closer analysis in 2024-2027.

COMMUNICATIONS & NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

The Communications and Nominations Committee aims to increase public knowledge and educate the community about the work of the Planning Commission. Committee members assist City staff with recruitment while reviewing and making recommendations of applications from members of the community to fill Planning Commission vacancies. Committee members also review and approve the Planning Commission Annual Report. The Committee provides

more inclusive community engagement efforts by supporting planning staff in developing and delivering planning-related training in the community. Mayor Carter has expressed a goal of having youth commissioners serve on every City of Saint Paul board and commission. To this end, in 2022, the Transportation Committee appointed two youth members (non-Planning Commissioners) to participate in the decision-making process, and in 2023, the Planning Commission appointed a youth commissioner. The Communications and Nominations Committee strives to ensure that younger voices are represented on Planning Commission committees. The Committee and City staff plans to prioritize additional youth recruitment in 2024.

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS SERVING IN 2023



Outgoing Chair Luis Rangel Morales (Credit: Neighborhood Justice Center)

The Planning Commission members want to express our deepest gratitude for the outstanding dedication and leadership that Chair Rangel Morales has provided over the years. His service on the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) from 2016 to 2023, and on the Planning Commission from 2017 to 2023, reflects a remarkable commitment to the betterment of our community. His advocacy for community health, equity, and opportunity, along with his focus on housing choices and resilience, has left an indelible mark on our city. His ability to lead the Commission with his inclusive approach, providing space for commissioner voices, and offering his unique perspective, has contributed significantly to the collaborative and constructive atmosphere within the Commission. We extend our heartfelt thanks for his years of service, and we wish him the very best in all his future endeavors.



2023 Planning Commission Members, from left to right: (back row) Richard Holst, Jake Reilly, Luis Ortega, Jacy Johnson Becker, Ianni Houmas, Brian Martinson, and Nate Hood. (front row) Seanne Thomas, Nieeta Presley (Second Vice Chair), Kristine Grill (incoming Chair starting 12/22/23), Jeff Risberg, and Libby Starling.
Not pictured: Luis Rangel Morales (outgoing Chair, serving through 12/8/23), Simon Taghioff, Stephen Moore, Ismail Khadar, Omar Syed, Deborah Mitchell (served March 2021 to September 2023), Libby Kantner (March 2021 to September 2023), and Troy Hackney.