ELLIOT PARK
NEIGHBORHOOD

The Metrodome, Prospects for a New Vikings Stadium, and the Future of Development in Elliot Park and Downtown East Neighborhoods

(Approved by the Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. Board of Directors July 11, 2011)

Whether or not a new Minnesota Vikings football stadium would be built on the present Metrodome site (or a proximate site in Downtown East) never has been the primary concern of Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc. EPNI has advocated for the full restoration and revitalization of Downtown East/Elliot Park (DEEP) as a complete community. The extent to which a professional sports facility or any other new development in the district contributes to the building of this complete community is the most significant issue. Following is a statement by EPNI regarding: the historical impact of the Metrodome on Elliot Park Neighborhood; the imperatives for building a complete community in the under-invested DEEP District; and the conditions under which a professional sports facility might help meet those imperatives.

The Metrodome

The Hubert H Humphrey Metrodome has had an almost unqualified negative impact on Elliot Park Neighborhood over the past 30 years. It was not planned to stimulate local economic development, and it has in fact blighted prospects for the creation of a cohesive urban neighborhood. An eerie sort of "radiation" zone exists around the Metrodome; the closest any kind of neighborhood development has dared approach the site has been warily along Washington Avenue. One watering hole and eatery huddles in the shadow of the Dome—otherwise, surface parking lots suffocate the landscape, while only the monolithic structures of the Hennepin County Medical Center presume to rival the Dome in overwhelming scale.

Identify any characteristic of good urban design and community living, and it is likely the Metrodome defies or destroys it: the street grid is severed, the pedestrian environment is dangerous, local businesses are all but non-existent, the dome structure itself is inhospitable and sealed off from its surroundings, and its roof periodically deflates, leaving the appearance of a gigantic parachute abandoned on the ground. The Metrodome's influence imposes upon even the finest-grained aspects of neighborhood life, right down to the 14- hour -7 -days –a- week parking meters that inhibit critical residential parking throughout much of Elliot Park Neighborhood; parking meters whose revenues apparently go not to the City but to the Metropolitan Sports Facilities Commission.

The Future of Development in Elliot Park and Downtown East

The Metrodome has not been the single cause of the vacancy that today characterizes so much of Downtown East and too much of Elliot Park. But it is symptomatic of a long-term neglect and abuse of urban core neighborhoods. Expansive parking lots and bulky parking ramps; wide pass-through one-way pair streets for freeway access; acres of hardscape surface devoid of greening and a welcoming pedestrian environment: each of these and many more indicators of urban disinvestment during the latter half of the 20th century have eradicated the existence of a once vital neighborhood and have suppressed its restoration.

In a series of planning documents and implementation initiatives EPNI has suggested ways Elliot Park Neighborhood and the Downtown East District can be recreated as important and vital sectors of the city's urban core. The *Elliot Park Neighborhood Master Plan* (2003); The *Elliot Park Neighborhood Design Guidelines* (2008); the Centennial Commons and DEEP Framework initiatives (2007 and ongoing) all have articulated the goal of building a complete community around the many remaining neighborhood assets.

The complete community is defined as a self-sustaining neighborhood with a unifying identity that offers a diversity of choices in housing, retail, entertainment and services; provides attractive public spaces; and is vitally connected to other sectors of the City. The complete community must offer a welcoming pedestrian environment, attractive places to safely gather and socialize, and affordable, convenient modes of transit. The particular standards, guidelines and practices for achieving these qualities of the complete community are fully presented in the various publications and initiatives explicating the principles of the Elliot Park Neighborhood Master Plan. Recent possibility of a new Vikings football stadium shouldering up against the northern boundary of Elliot Park Neighborhood has not been the motivation for these planning efforts. These visions for a new community predate and supersede all talk of a stadium venue.

Stadium or Not..... The Imperatives for Development

Regardless of whether or not a new Vikings stadium is built in Downtown East, EPNI has certain expectations for future redevelopment in the neighborhood and the district. These expectations, based on recommendations from our planning documents, would require a dedicated application of certain urban planning and design principles, and would minimally include:

- Incorporation of transit oriented development principles into housing, commercial, and infrastructure redevelopment.
- Careful attention to building size, scale, type and use according to established design guidelines.
- Shaping a quality public realm through infrastructure improvements and public/private landscaping and greening efforts to create a pedestrian friendly environment.
- Development of district parking strategies to lessen the impact of vast expanses of underdeveloped properties.
- Applying district energy strategies and district water management practices to promote local interdependence and to mitigate waste and pollution.

In addition, there are regulatory measures that should be undertaken by local government to encourage housing and economic development in Elliot Park and Downtown East:

- Rezone to reflect the true value of marketable land and properties. (This is being done through the new B4N Downtown Neighborhoods zoning classification, which will affect many properties in the DEEP district).
- Explore changes to the tax assessment structure for parking lots to discourage the continued underutilization of properties as mere corrals for caging idle automobiles.
- Apply increased standards for the improvement of existing parking lots through such methods as landscaping and the mitigation of the heat effects and water runoff of hardscape surfaces.
- Create incentives for owners of parking lots and other underutilized properties to participate in the benefits of redevelopment of their parcels.

Elliot Park Neighborhood, government jurisdictions, foundations and the private sector must all collaborate to realize the potential of the DEEP district by achieving:

- Significant new housing of all kinds to create the population density and capacities to support new economic and business development.
- Partnerships with major neighborhood institutions, such as HCMC, North Central University, and Augustana Care Corporation to ensure better integration of these institutions into the broader community.
- The promotion of the long history and rich tradition of the health sciences in Elliot Park and Downtown East to attract major reinvestment in the district.

All of the expectations, goals and objectives specified above should obtain whether or not a new professional sports facility is built in Downtown East.

And two other conditions pertain to the prospect that a new Vikings stadium is **not** in fact located in Downtown East:

- The abandoned Metrodome will be demolished immediately and not allowed to linger on life-support as a so-called "recreational" or second-rate event facility. The Metrodome structure disfigures the landscape of the most promising undeveloped sector of downtown Minneapolis. No purpose it might serve justifies its continued presence. The land on which the Metrodome squats is invaluable for the re-creation of a complete first-class urban center.
- If perchance the new Vikings stadium is located at the "Farmers Market" site in the North Loop of downtown:
    1) Existing surface parking lots in Elliot Park and Downtown East will not be encouraged or promoted as "remote" but convenient places to park for those coming to stadium events and catching the light rail at the Downtown East/Metrodome station.
    2) No new social services agencies or facilities will be relocated to the DEEP District.
    3) The Farmers Market will be well-served by relocating it to Downtown East/Elliot Park. Why not the former Metrodome site?

Consideration of the points presented in this statement should make it evident that the objective is not to "accommodate" a stadium, but rather to rebuild the Downtown East/Elliot Park neighborhoods. This is the current imperative if the central core of Minneapolis is to be able to compete as a complete community in the 21st century economy, as an attractive place in which to live and a prosperous place in which to do business.