

Department of Community Planning and Economic Development
Small Area Plan/Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Date: September 16, 2013

Project Name: Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan

CPED Staff and Phone: Beth Elliott, 673-2442

Ward: 7

Neighborhood Organizations:

Citizens for a Loring Park Community

Current Comprehensive Plan Designations:

Growth Center: Downtown

Commercial Corridors: Hennepin Avenue, Nicollet Avenue, Lyndale Avenue

Background

The Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan

(<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/cped/projects/loringparkplan>) is a policy document produced by Citizens for a Loring Park Community (CLPC) to guide land use and development in the Loring Park neighborhood for the next 20 years. It builds upon the policy direction of *The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth*, the City's Comprehensive Plan. It is meant to articulate a vision for the neighborhood based on existing City policy and input from community stakeholders – both public and private - throughout the planning process. The City, public partners, and community organizations will use the plan to guide their own decision-making processes, implementing incremental changes to realize the full vision.

The plan examines the current conditions of the area, develops a future vision of what community members want the neighborhood to become, and then formulates specific policy recommendations that will help implement that vision. The plan itself builds on past planning efforts and public involvement processes.

The Loring Park neighborhood embarked on the master planning effort with funds through the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). They issued an RFP in April 2010 and went through a consultant selection process during the summer. The chosen consultant team included:

- Peter Musty – Peter Musty LLC
- Bill Weber – Weber Community Planning
- Tom Borrup – Creative Community Buildings
- John Lauber – Lauber & Co. Preservation & Community Planning

An introduction to the plan was presented in April 2011 to the Planning Commission Committee of the Whole with a return visit with draft recommendations in April 2013.

Public Participation

The process for this planning effort was based on the theory of collective efficacy and organizing an engagement process through creative strategies. The process kicked off in the fall of 2010 and consisted of several elements designed to ensure maximum accessibility, transparency and opportunities for community members to provide both formal and informal input, including ten topical focus groups, twelve stakeholder interviews, Thursday evening education forums, and Saturday morning planning workshops.

The Thursday educational forums and Saturday workshops were designed to work in tandem by giving stakeholders the opportunity to learn in a creative setting and then apply their knowledge during hands-on activities that following Saturday. The Master Plan Steering Committee met monthly throughout the process to guide engagement and provide direction on content issues. Additionally, planning issues were discussed at regular CLPC monthly committee meetings. This engagement process was multi-faceted and far-reaching in its ability to inform and engage the community.

The 45-day review period ran from March 19th to May 2nd and the comments received are summarized below. In order to promote attendance at the Planning Commission public hearing, CPED sent over 6,000 notices to all households and property owners in the Loring Park neighborhood. Additionally, CLPC advertised the public hearing to their email distribution list of 2,000 people, with all neighborhood condo boards, again to all property owners by email, hand delivered the notice to businesses along Nicollet Avenue and near Loring Park, to the neighborhood churches, to the Loring Business Association, and through an ad in The Journal.

Plan Summary

Two major components of the plan are the Discovery reports and content chapters. The Discovery reports include all the background and data analysis to set the framework for the policy recommendations. An introduction to the plan summarizes this background work, vision and goals, and the community engagement process.

The content chapters provide analysis of the issues facing the neighborhood, describes options, and outlines recommendations within the context of Cultural Assets & Economic Vitality, Land Use & Built Form, Protecting Historic Resources, Public Realm, and Sustainability.

The Implementation Plan chapter describes the broad steps needed for implementing the recommendations in the previous chapters. This outlines potential options for the implementation process; a more in-depth implementation strategy will be formulated once the plan is adopted.

Cultural Assets & Economic Vitality

While a chapter on arts and culture is not a standard component of most small area plans, the Loring Park neighborhood has a unique and strong history in the arts that should be celebrated

and perpetuated into the future. This chapter focuses on cultural assets as an identify-defining feature of the neighborhood and its people – from festivals in the park, to the concentration of historic churches, to the theaters in and surrounding the neighborhood.

Major plan recommendations include:

- Brand the neighborhood as a hub of the arts and culture.
- Focus public art efforts based on a list of priority locations.
- Identify funding and develop infrastructure for creative enterprises.
- Serve and connect students within the neighborhood.

Land Use & Built Form

This chapter highlights the future use of land and the form of the structures they inhabit within neighborhood districts with distinct built form identities.

- **Loring Village District.** Includes the area just east of the park through the neighborhood boundary on the east. It encompasses many of the neighborhood’s brick walk-up apartment buildings that give Loring Park its historic, dense feel. Loring Village also includes the Nicollet Avenue Commercial Corridor and Convention Center.
- **Loring Greenway District.** Recognizes the residential feel along the Loring Greenway walking and biking connection.
- **Hennepin-Harmon District.** More focused on the commercial and retail core of the neighborhood expressed through its character-defining features of the Harmon Place Historic District and MCTC.
- **Loring Hill District.** Comprises the area south of the park where you will find many historic mansions, walk-up apartments, and larger residential buildings stepping up a hill, a prominent feature of the district’s character.

Major plan recommendations include:

- Establish a new Activity Center that encompasses the area surrounding Nicollet Avenue and the Minneapolis Convention Center.
- Create more context-sensitive height parameters on Loring Hill.
- Recognize design guidance on Loring Hill based on the 2006 *Loring Hill Design Guidelines*.
- Provide more direction for parking, particularly district parking strategies and methods for minimizing the impact of surface parking.

Protecting Historic Resources

As one of the original residential neighborhoods in Minneapolis, Loring Park has an historic character that draws residents and visitors alike. Protecting that character is a significant goal of this plan. The neighborhood already contains a number of locally- and nationally-designated properties as well as the locally-designated Harmon Place Historic District. Based on past historic surveys, the plan identifies a number of properties that may have value for local designation. Additionally, the plan supports additional study of potential local historic districts - the Loring Greenway for modern landscape design, portions of Loring Hill mainly in the mansion area, and an Apartment District in the Loring Village district. This is consistent with a

historic resource survey from 2008 that was funded by the City of Minneapolis and the State Historic Preservation Office.

The plan proposes these potential districts may be best protected by formal historic districts but that conservation districts may be an appropriate tool as well. CPED staff is currently working on an ordinance for conservation districts but the main difference from an historic district is that conservation districts are used to help new buildings complement an area's existing character rather than preserve old buildings and landscapes. The type of district that best fits these neighborhood areas will be analyzed in the plan's implementation process.

Major plan recommendations include:

- Developers should use a Context-Sensitive Design Checklist when proposing new construction in areas with an historic character.
- Consider creating historic or conservation districts on Loring Hill, along Loring Greenway, and in the Apartment District.
- Adaptively reuse the mansions on Loring Hill, shopfronts on Harmon Avenue, and underutilized church buildings.

Public Realm

This chapter is a recognition of the extensive elements in this particular neighborhood that set the stage for positive experiences and interactions in the spaces in and around private properties. Not only is Loring Park itself a major destination for festivals and every day neighborhood use, the system of streets and paths throughout the neighborhood need to function for the immediate dense environment as well as drivers, transit users, bikers, and walkers entering Downtown. The plan recommends improvements to the public realm that make it not only safer but a more positive environment to experience. As with many adopted plans, it also emphasizes ways to better connect to surrounding neighborhoods and destinations.

While Minneapolis Public Works has reviewed iterations of the Public Realm chapter, they still have concerns about the specificity of some recommendations. Sections of this chapter recommend detailed changes to street infrastructure where other solutions may exist to achieve the same intent. Staff recommendations below help to resolve these concerns.

Major plan recommendations include:

- Support efforts for a Nicollet Avenue streetcar.
- Ensure that every public street is maintained as a complete street, including accommodations for all forms of travel.
- Make improvements to Harmon Avenue that include reducing traffic lanes, adding bike lanes, angling on-street parking, and increasing greenery.
- Improve Hennepin/Lyndale as they cross Groveland Avenue and 15th Street with clear crosswalks, countdown signals, landscaping, and public art.
- Improve walking connections to the North Loop, Elliot Park, and Stevens Square neighborhoods through the existing street system and by introducing a promenade through the park connecting to both the office core and the Sculpture Garden.

- Focus efforts on the periphery of the park by improving visibility into the park, exploring a continuous sidewalk around the park, and by creating safe crossings to the park.

Sustainability

Sustainability has been a major focus throughout the neighborhood planning process as a way to highlight how to improve a dense urban neighborhood for future generations as well as to educate property owners on actions they can take to make existing and new neighborhoods meet sustainability goals.

In 2010, CLPC began working with the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) on investigating how the new program LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) might be used as a tool in the small area plan to help an existing neighborhood such as Loring Park become more sustainable. This led to a 2010 study conducted in conjunction with the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). The study evaluated the Loring Park neighborhood's sustainability strengths and weaknesses based on the LEED-ND rating system.

In 2011, Loring Park was recognized by the Minnesota USGBC as a state case study pilot project in order to assist the neighborhood in acquiring LEED-ND certification. In 2013 the national office of the USGBC recognized the Loring Park Neighborhood as a national case study pilot project. A pathway to certification was agreed to and in 2013 CLPC was allowed to register the neighborhood as an official LEED project. The pilot will be used by the USGBC to further develop the LEED-ND program, or possibly to develop a new LEED for Existing Neighborhoods certification program. The neighborhood expects to acquire its certification as soon as the spring of 2014.

Major recommendations include:

- Receive LEED-ND certification of the *Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan*.
- Work to increase Loring Park's LEED-ND score.
- Guide projects and public realm investments toward achievement of goals.
- Establish specific high priority neighborhood-wide benchmarks for success.

Analysis – Considerations and Issues

Activity Center

The proposed Activity Center was a topic of much debate within the engagement process. Nicollet Avenue is currently a designated Commercial Corridor and has a low-scale commercial character much like the rest of Eat Street. Consistent with policies in the Comprehensive Plan, introducing an Activity Center into an area exemplifies a desire to have more nighttime activities such as entertainment uses, more overall housing density in an area, and establish a place that is more of a regional draw.

The benefit of an Activity Center is to better highlight the Loring Village District as a destination commercial area similar to Lyn-Lake and Uptown. The location of this proposed Activity Center emphasizes the benefits of Eat Street, particularly in its proximity to the Convention Center. The Convention Center is a significant regional and tourist destination that could expend more effort in leading people toward the restaurants and other amenities on Eat Street, and this Activity Center could play up that relationship.

Many of the challenges to a new Activity Center are the same impacts that come along with any Activity Center - more traffic, parking challenges, living near any active nighttime bar scene, and loss of local commercial establishments due to raising rent. Most Activity Centers are implemented through C3A zoning, a district that characterizes a walkable shopping area but also allows nightclubs and hotels. Additionally, some Activity Centers recently have experienced large-scale demolition of the low-scale local commercial spaces for new and denser mixed-use buildings. Because of the nature of the market, new buildings usually lease their spaces for higher than many locally-owned stores or restaurants could afford in order to make up for the construction costs. A new Activity Center in the Loring Village District could dramatically change the character of the corridor over time.

In order to balance these issues, language in the plan needs to be more focused and less general about the proposed Activity Center. Because the engagement process led toward this recommendation, staff is supporting this new Activity Center; however, CPED has concerns about the loss of character along this portion of Eat Street. With that in mind, staff is recommending a revision to policy 2.14 to better clarify appropriate uses along the corridor.

Land Use Plan Map

Staff is recommending deletion of one item from the Land Use Plan map in order to avoid confusion in future development review processes. The map includes a yellow hatch mark along Yale Place, Spruce Street, and Hawthorne Avenue. The hatch mark is placed over the Mixed Use future land use category as an indication that residential uses, rather than commercial, should be along those streets. Staff believes this could cause confusion when proposed developments come forward in any future development review process. Additionally, commercial uses along these streets were never identified as a concern through the community process.

Loring Hill Built Form

The Built Form Plan sets form-based standards for future development throughout the neighborhood. Loring Hill is uniquely challenged in this respect due to its original character as a mansion area that overtime experienced infill development ranging from 1960s three-story walk-ups to residential towers. It is important to the neighborhood to maintain the low-density quality near the mansions as well as the character of development leading up a hill. Current base zoning on the Hill is six stories with much of the area also covered with a Shoreland Overlay height of two and a half stories. Even though the more restrictive Shoreland Overlay height is the standard, some property owners argue a right to the six-story base zoning height. Many other residents and property owners feel the current height standards on the Hill are inadequate to

protect the original character and they desire a more nuanced approach to height.

The first set of plan recommendations for Loring Hill establish height primarily based on the character of the structures along certain streets - these recommendations can be found in the Built Form Plan map. Along Clifton Avenue is where you will find most of the original mansions with a significant amount of void space in between established by deep lawns and upper floors that step back. The height guidance for Clifton is three stories. Most of the rest of the Hill leading down to the park is guided for four stories to characterize the walk-up apartment buildings along Oak Grove and 15th Street.

Another set of related recommendations formally adopt the *Loring Hill Design Guidelines* from 2006. The intent of this plan is to pull the relevant sections from the design guidelines rather than direct the reader back to the original document. Staff has specifically clarified this intent with the plan's Steering Committee but the directives in the plan are still ambiguous as to what document a reader needs to review. Therefore, CPED recommends language to clarify that a reader does not need to seek guidance from a document other than the adopted *Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan*.

Checklist for New Construction

The Checklist for New Construction in the Land Use & Built Form chapter is particularly relevant to the City's development review process. A similar idea has been used in other adopted plans to establish standards for achieving plan goals when a developer seeks exceptions to the zoning code. In this plan, the goals relate to sustainability measures, historic preservation, context sensitive design, and parking. Previous iterations of this checklist required a developer to achieve ALL the goals as written but staff felt this could be infeasible. Therefore, the checklist has evolved to set a more realistic standard for achieving a balance of neighborhood development goals and will be used by both the neighborhood association and the City in review of development.

Implementation

As with all recently-adopted small area plans, this plan includes an implementation plan that outlines major recommendations and the partners that will be involved in implementing them. One of the first implementation processes will include a rezoning study where it is likely that new and unique tools will need to be created in order to adequately address recommendations, particularly on Loring Hill and along Nicollet Avenue. Protecting historic resources is also a timely issue and will require an evaluation in three parts of the neighborhood for the use of an historic district, conservation district, or other tool. The Minneapolis Public Works Department will also be a partner in implementing over time many of the public realm strategies, including changing the cross-section on Harmon Place to more effectively make space for bikes and additional on-street parking.

CLPC will have significant implementation responsibilities as well. They will continue to evaluate development projects but now have much more guidance to do so from this plan. They

will also take the lead role on furthering the plan's sustainability goals.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Hennepin County, and MnDOT will also be needed partners in implementing plan recommendations for properties and road systems they own.

Public Comments

Public comments in the 45-day public review period from March 19th to May 2nd mainly focused on height on Loring Hill. Most of the correspondence directed the City to support the plan's recommendations for height guidance on the Hill to the three, four, and six stories identified in the Built Form Plan map. The City received one letter in opposition to the height guidance from a property owner that focused on the original *Loring Hill Design Guidelines* inaccurately designating properties and therefore carrying these inaccuracies into the proposed Loring Hill height recommendations.

Other public comments related to edits to the Sustainability chapter, traffic calming around the park, and a desire to see a stronger focus on affordability and diversity in recognition of new immigrant communities in the neighborhood.

All of the official correspondence is attached to this staff report.

Future Related Actions

- **Comprehensive Plan changes.** This small area plan will be amended into *The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth*.
- **Rezoning study.** A rezoning study is required to bring future land use regulations in compliance with this adopted plan. While the whole neighborhood will be analyzed for zoning changes, focus areas will include the Nicollet Avenue corridor and Loring Hill.
- **Development review.** Future development proposals for property in the Loring Park neighborhood would require City Planning Commission review of development applications such as rezonings, conditional use permits, street vacations, and site plan review. The Planning Commission also has a role in recommending whether the capital improvement plan, proposed land sales - including those sold through the RFP process –and the establishment of redevelopment districts are in conformance with the City's Comprehensive Plan and the small area plan.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the City Planning Commission and City Council **adopt** the Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan as an articulation of and amendment to the policies found in the City's Comprehensive Plan and direct

staff to begin a rezoning study to implement the adopted policy with these changes:

- Add a sentence to the end of policy 2.14: *Nightclubs, however, should continue to be prohibited along Nicollet Avenue south of Grant Street.*
- Eliminate the yellow hatch marks on Yale Place, Spruce Street, and Hawthorne Avenue from the Land Use Plan map.
- Add language to the final sentence in policy 2.24 to clarify that all applicable policies for the *Loring Hill Design Guidelines* have been brought into the plan as follows: The wording of this master plan takes precedence *and all applicable policies have been added to the plan without a requirement to refer back to the guidelines document itself.*
- Clarify the paragraph on Foundation in policy 2.26: The appearance of future renovation or redevelopment in the Loring Hill district should be consistent with the *Loring Hill Design Guidelines* as ~~interpreted through~~ *included in this neighborhood plan.*
- Clarify the paragraph on Relationship of Buildings to Street in policy 2.26: To enhance the walking environment, frontage design and the relationship of buildings to the public sidewalk and street should follow the principles established in ~~section 2.6 of the *Loring Hill Design Guidelines*~~ *this plan.*
- Eliminate the paragraph on Architectural Standards in policy 2.26 as it requires the reader to seek reference from the *Loring Hill Design Guidelines* document when all applicable sections should be in the plan.
- In the Public Realm chapter on page 10, add this sentence to the introductory paragraph under the Streets section: *While recommendations provide a certain level of specificity, the City may need to achieve the intent of the plan through design solutions that serve current best practices and implementation practicality.*
- Because road functional classifications are set at the State level, eliminate policy 4.7 that requests a reclassification of Oak Grove Street in this plan.

Reference Materials / Attachments:

- Public comments
- Plan components:
 - Executive Summary
 - Land Use-Built Form Districts map
 - Land Use Plan map
 - Built Form Plan map
 - Public Realm Improvements map
- The official plan website:
<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/cped/projects/loringparkplan>.
- The Discovery Reports and additional Plan background:
<http://www.loringpark.org/masterplan.html>