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**March 4, 2021**

Mayor Melvin Carter  
City Council President Amy Brendmoen and Councilmembers  
Third Floor – City Hall  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the Saint Paul Planning Commission, it is my privilege to send you and the residents of Saint Paul our 2020 Annual Report. A few notable highlights follow.

The fifth year of work to update the City's Comprehensive Plan continued during 2020. After extensive public input in 2016-2017, and public hearings and City Council approval to submit the document to the Metropolitan Council in mid-2019, staff finalized technical edits before the Metropolitan Council approved the City to put the plan into effect in November 2020. The City Council then formally adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan on November 18, 2020.

The past year has cast in sharp detail how important the Comprehensive Plan's priorities of community health, equity, and resilience are to Saint Paul. The Planning Commission has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting its processes to allow important development and policy work to continue via virtual meetings and online public input. Planning staff provided key support on efforts to serve unsheltered people through emergency housing work, help with the Bridge Fund to assist families and small businesses, reduce fees and regulations to make it easier for bars and restaurants to provide outdoor dining, and carry out environmental reviews related to pandemic-related federal assistance.

Important examples of the Planning Commission implementing the Comprehensive Plan this year include the RM Residential Multifamily Zoning Study, and progress on master plans. Examples of master plan progress include the creation of, and community input on, Hillcrest site land use approaches to inform the eventual site's redevelopment and master plan, and initial vertical development on the Highland Bridge site. The RM Study increases permitted density and applies design standards to RM districts across the city, and includes a density bonus for residential projects including either 10% or 20% affordable units.

The Planning Commission looks forward to working with Mayor Carter and the City Council in 2021 as we continue implementation of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Sincerely,

Luis Rangel Morales  
Chair, Saint Paul Planning Commission

# Saint Paul Planning Commission

## 2020 Annual Report

### About the Saint Paul Planning Commission

The Saint Paul Planning Commission is a 21-member advisory body made up of resident volunteers appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. The Planning Commission and its Zoning, Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning, and Transportation Committees take on municipal planning issues as required by law. The Commission reviews and makes recommendations on comprehensive planning and zoning issues, studies and amendments. It also holds public hearings where members of the public can be heard. This Annual Report provides a summary of the Planning Commission's major activities and accomplishments in 2020.



**SAINT PAUL**  
**MINNESOTA**

2020 was a difficult year. The Planning Commission and Planning staff from the Department of Planning and Economic Development adapted and proactively responded to the challenges presented by a global pandemic, civil unrest prompted by racial injustice, and an economic crisis. The recently adopted 2040 Comprehensive Plan sets a visionary framework to guide the City to a better future. The past year has cast in sharp detail how important the plan's priorities of community health, equity, and resilience are to those who live and work in Saint Paul. The Planning Commission has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting its processes to allow important development and policy work to continue. Planning staff provided key support on efforts to serve unsheltered people through emergency housing work, administer the Bridge Fund that helped 1,265 families and 380 small businesses, and reduce fees and regulations to make it easier for bars and restaurants to provide outdoor dining.

As we enter 2021, many of the challenges of the last year will persist and unique challenges will emerge, but the Planning Commission will adapt and do its best for and with the people of Saint Paul.



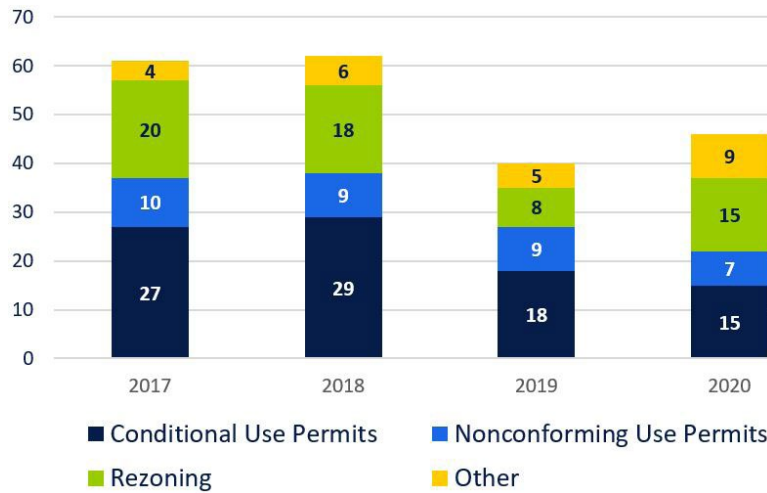
Source: Hope Breakfast Bar

# Zoning & Environmental Review

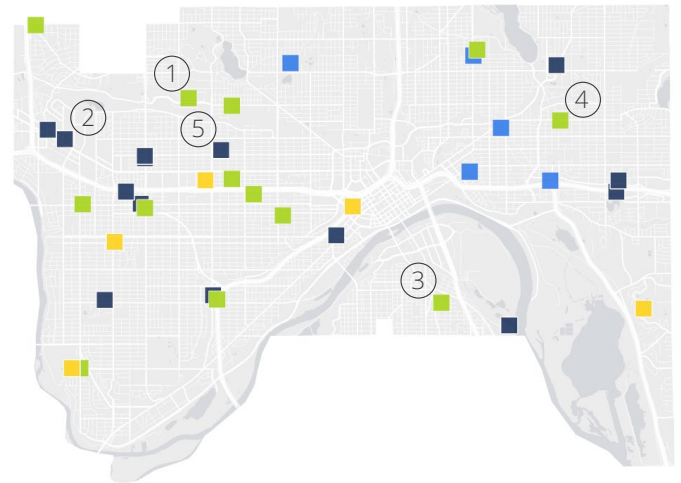
## Zoning Reviews

Zoning reviews constitute a large and impactful part of the work of the Planning Commission and are the counterpart to the longer-term planning work the Commission undertakes. Planning staff also conduct State- and Federally-required environmental reviews, another significant part of the team’s work program.

**Zoning Cases by Type, 2017-2020**



**Zoning Case Distribution by Type, 2020**



Source: PED Staff

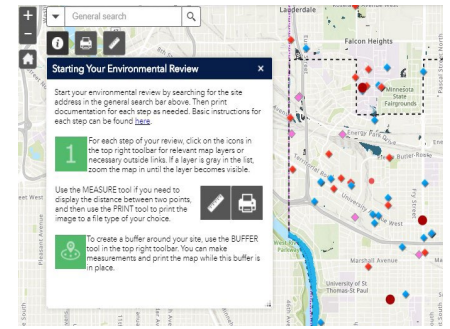
## Highlighted Zoning Cases

- ① **1015 Bandana Blvd W (Bandana Boulevard Housing Project)** is an innovative project that repurposed an existing, underutilized parking ramp to create new market-rate housing. The Planning Commission approved a conditional use permit and variance to facilitate the project. The lowest levels of the ramp will continue to be used for parking, serving both the new housing and the existing hotel in the adjacent historic Bandana Square roundhouse. The top level of the ramp (ground level along Bandana Blvd) will serve as an amenity deck and podium for the housing. (See images on following page.)
- ② **2225 University Ave W** received a variance for parking and commercial first floor use to allow a mixed-use, primarily residential project. The site is within in the Raymond Station Area, but zoned Industrial Transition (IT), which requires more parking than a non-industrial project within the station area.
- ③ **337 7th St W** was rezoned from T2 to T3 in January 2020. Later in the year a conditional use permit (CUP) for height and variance for parking were approved for the project. The Zoning Committee noted the novel and efficient use of automated, stacked parking. The Planning Commission’s CUP approval was appealed to the City Council, but ultimately upheld.
- ④ **1428 East 7th Street (The Parkway)** is a multi-family residential project that will have 60 affordable housing units. The long, narrow parcel was split-zoned and needed to be rezoned prior to development. The project also sought and received variances to increase building height, reduce parking and increase the number of units.
- ⑤ **545-555 N Snelling (Kimball Court)** is an existing supportive housing facility located on Snelling at Charles Avenue, just north of University Avenue. The Planning Commission approved a conditional use permit and variance to allow the expansion of the facility. An addition on the north side of the building will increase the number of beds, and provide more privacy, amenities and service space for residents.

# Zoning & Environmental Review (continued)

## Environmental Reviews

**Environmental Review Webmap:** This fall, the PED Research & Mapping Team produced a user-friendly online mapping tool to aid City staff and other parties in completion of Environmental Reviews. The webmap enables users to evaluate a property in its physical context, fulfilling HUD requirements to report nearby pollution hazards, noise levels, flood risk, and airport effects, as well as historic properties and other community elements.



Source: PED Staff

**HUD Environmental Review Online System (HEROS) Transition:** The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently launched the new electronic HEROS system for required federal environmental reviews of HUD-funded projects. Planning Commission staff facilitated the transition for Saint Paul — including navigating technical challenges and associated procedural challenges, which positions the City well to meet HUD’s future national mandate of all reviews to be submitted in HEROS, and meets HUD’s audit requirement for the City to transition ahead of the mandate.

**Environmental Reviews:** There were 60 HUD-funded projects that required environmental review completed as of November 6, 2020. Of the 60 reviews, 58 were completed in HEROS.

**“Tiered” Environmental Reviews:** A “Tiered Review” is an environmental review which creates efficiency by eliminating repetitive discussions of the same issues. A tiered review consists of two stages: a broad review of elements common to the type of project, and a subsequent site-specific review for each project. As the City transitions to HEROS, Planning staff are analyzing grant program and service areas to create Tier 1 reviews. Tier 2 reviews will be developed once Tier 1 is complete.

## Bandana Boulevard Housing Project

Existing



Source: Google

Proposed



Source: Pacific Ramp, LLC; Momentum Design Group

## Zoning Studies

While zoning applications considered by the Planning Commission's Zoning Committee have more immediate impact, it is through proactive zoning studies—initiated by the Commission itself or the City Council—that the Commission shapes the future development of Saint Paul. In addition to a number of ongoing studies, the Planning Commission concluded or substantially completed work on a number of zoning studies in 2020.

### Residential Multifamily (RM) Zoning Study

The Residential Multi-Family (RM) zoning districts were comprehensively overhauled for the first time since 1975 to better position them as tools for modern pedestrian- and transit-oriented development. The changes increase allowable density and apply many of the Traditional Neighborhood (T) district design standards to RM districts. Among the new regulations is a Floor-Area Ratio (FAR) bonus for provision of affordable dwelling units. Following Planning Commission review, the City Council adopted these text amendments during summer of 2020.



### District 14 & 15 Residential Design Standards

In 2015, the City adopted text amendments aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of out-of-scale new construction primarily in the Macalester-Groveland and Highland Park neighborhoods. Since adoption, there were numerous variances requested that the neighborhoods felt were unnecessary and a burden on homeowners, district councils and City staff. In response, the City adopted minor amendments to maintain the original intent, but significantly reduce the number of variances. Since the updates were approved by City Council in September 2020, there have been multiple examples of suitable projects that have been able to move forward without requiring variances.

### Definition of Family Study

In autumn of 2020, Planning staff brought the long-awaited study of the Zoning Code's definition of Family to the Planning Commission to release for public comment. In 1975, along with most municipalities around the U.S., the City of Saint Paul began using the definition of Family to regulate occupancy of dwelling units citywide based on the relatedness of occupants. Today this regulation is popularly seen as unnecessary, inequitable, and a barrier to Fair Housing conditions. [In January 2021, the Planning Commission recommended a new definition for adoption by City Council.]

### Parking Study

In 2020, staff continued to develop one of the most comprehensive set of proposed amendments to the Zoning Code, an overhaul to its off-street parking regulations. Staff is anticipating that in early 2021, two alternative packages of amendments will be brought to the Planning Commission for consideration. One set of amendments would eliminate minimum parking requirements from the code completely, and the other set of amendments would reduce minimum requirements by eliminating parking requirements near high capacity transit lines, exempting small commercial uses and affordable housing from minimum parking requirements, and allowing parking reductions for implementing travel demand management plans (TDMP). In both options, the proposed set of amendments would streamline and consolidate design standards for parking facilities and create new minimum bike parking requirements that are specific to land uses as opposed to the number of parking spaces. Staff has developed a new supplemental travel demand management guide to standardize the program, create a unique methodology for determining requirements, and guide the creation of a viable travel demand management plan.

## Transportation & Public Systems

City and regional transportation networks are half of the land use and transportation nexus that underlies much of the work of the Planning Commission. This includes both City-led projects and the support of initiatives of Ramsey County and the Metropolitan Council. The Transportation Committee coordinates Planning Commission input on these projects.

### Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)



Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit is a new 10-mile transitway planned between downtown Saint Paul and Woodbury, generally north of I-94 and within to-be-constructed bus-only lanes. It will provide frequent all-day service in both directions to better connect East Siders to jobs and destinations, with premium features like off-board payment, roll-on boarding, and real-time travel information. Both 30% and 60% engineering plans were completed by Metro Transit in 2020, with the latter reviewed by the Transportation Committee. Construction is scheduled for 2022 with service opening in 2024.

### B Line Arterial BRT (ABRT)



The B Line ABRT project was approved through Metropolitan Council to be extended to downtown Saint Paul along Selby Avenue. The new BRT Line will connect downtown to the A Line, Blue Line, and the Uptown neighborhood in Minneapolis via Marshall and Selby. The project was funded in 2020 with a State of Minnesota bonding bill.

### Network Next / F Line ABRT

Metro Transit's Network Next project proposed 11 new arterial bus rapid transit corridors for consideration in the coming years, including five in Saint Paul. The Transportation Committee provided input to Metro Transit on their preferred corridors (Rice/Robert and Como/Maryland) and how to weigh various factors like equity and ridership. Three finalist corridors were identified in December, and the region's next corridor (the "F Line") will be selected in April 2021.



Source: Metro Transit

## Neighborhood Planning & Redevelopment

Neighborhood and redevelopment planning are how the City coordinates planned or expected development with public investments in the public realm, both project-specific and district-wide. The work of the Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee also focuses on citywide policy within the Planning Commission’s purview, such as zoning studies to update regulations aligned with comprehensive plan goals.

### Hillcrest Master Plan Process

The Hillcrest Master Plan process to decide the 112-acre former golf course’s future forged ahead in 2020. After intentional public engagement, the Community Advisory Committee affirmed 20 “Community Priorities” that, alongside City and Port Authority policy and technical priorities, guided the creation of four site approaches. Public feedback, high-level infrastructure analysis, financial analysis, and wetland law considerations guided the creation of two finalist scenarios that in 2021 will undergo detailed infrastructure analysis and further public engagement to shape a final recommended plan for Planning Commission and City Council consideration.



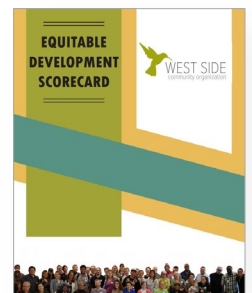
Source: Google, PED

### Highland Bridge (Formerly the Ford Site)

The Ford Site, now known as Highland Bridge, continued to make significant progress this year despite the pandemic. In April, the Commission and City Council reviewed and approved Ryan Companies second round of Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan (Ford MP) and zoning amendments. These amendments adjusted permitted dimensions for townhomes, simplified and clarified definitions, and allowed supportive housing in the F6 District. The Ford Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District Project Area was expanded to allow the use of TIF for transportation improvements and fund the connection from Highland Bridge to Hidden Falls Regional Park. The connection is named in many City-adopted plans including the Ford MP, Hidden Falls Master Plan, and the Great River Passage. The City also received a State grant for \$7.5 million to fund the central stormwater feature on the site. Additionally, construction of the infrastructure began on the site and the first few vertical projects were submitted to the City for review and approval.

### WSCO Equitable Development Scorecard

This year, after Planning Commission review and recommendation, the City Council formally recognized the West Side Equitable Development Scorecard as an addendum to District 3’s West Side Community Plan. The Scorecard is used by project developers and the West Side Community Organization to evaluate the neighborhood impact of a proposed development. Anchored by the questions “Who decides and who benefits?”, the Scorecard provides clear, standardized criteria in categories like Equitable Housing and Community Engagement that will guide conversations between a developer and local stakeholders, as well as Planning Commissioners and City Council members.



### Snelling Midway Development

Allianz Field, home to Minnesota’s Major League Soccer team, Minnesota United, opened in 2019. The balance of the super block site awaits redevelopment consistent with the master plan approved in 2016 to create a new transit-oriented urban village surrounding the stadium that includes retail, office, residential, hotel, entertainment, and public open space uses. Planning staff coordinated with the development team in 2020 in anticipation of zoning applications in 2021 that are needed to allow the master plan to be amended and implemented.

## Comprehensive Planning

2020 marked the culmination of a long journey with the adoption of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan. State law requires that, once a decade, all communities with the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area adopt a 30-year comprehensive plan covering land use, transportation, housing, parks, and water resources. The Saint Paul plan also addresses historic preservation, guiding the work of the Heritage Preservation Commission, and the 2040 plan included a chapter fulfilling new requirements stemming from recently adopted State rules regarding the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA). Once a plan has been drafted, a municipality is required to solicit comments from surrounding communities and jurisdictions before adoption. Once the plan is approved by the City Council, it is submitted to the Metropolitan Council. The Met. Council determines whether or not the plan meets the requirements in law for completeness, then approves the plan as consistent with Metropolitan Council regional systems plans.



Beginning in 2016, Planning staff, with guidance from the Planning Commission, began developing themes and goals for the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This work was rooted in public input—gathered through thousands of individual contacts across multiple rounds of outreach. After review by the Planning Commission, City Council, and the Metropolitan Council, the City Council officially adopted the *2040 Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan* in November. The plan will guide the City's action in key areas of Planning Commission work, including zoning applications, district and small area planning, and transportation planning until the City adopts an updated plan in ten years.





## Other Essential Work

The Planning Commission and Planning staff also support work in a number of other areas of significance to the long-term physical and economic development of the City of Saint Paul. This work includes both City-led projects and work with important partners.

### Saint Paul Trends

The Saint Paul Trends web tool will provide insight into trends and projects in economic development, housing and real estate development, and demographics within the City of Saint Paul. The Trends tool represents a wholesale refresh of PED's longstanding periodic Market Watch reports. The project will provide quarterly data and analysis, built as much as possible on the city's open data infrastructure. A new design will allow staff to easily incorporate new data from a parallel data platform PED is developing to track the department's many investments in this area. The Trends tool will inform staff, elected officials, and the public at large.

### Resilient Communities Project

The City is partnering with the University of Minnesota's Resilient Communities Project through a qualitative methods course to gain insights on how Saint Paul residents use workforce resources to find family-supporting jobs in job-rich sectors during a time of increasing unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Consolidated Plan

Every five years, the Department of Planning and Economic Development prepares a **Consolidated Plan**, a five-year document submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that serves as the planning guide for entitlements funded under the Community Planning and Development formula. The plan describes the city's housing market conditions, identifies affordable housing and community development needs, and provides strategies to address these needs. During the 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan development process, public engagement included outreach at Safe Summer Nights events, two public meetings, discussions at District Council meetings, and an online survey. The 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan was adopted by the City and approved by HUD in 2020.

## 2020 Saint Paul Planning Commissioners

Aquanetta Anderson	Christopher Ochs
Cedrick Baker *	Trevor Oliver
Anne DeJoy	Adrian Perryman
Dan Edgerton †	Nieeta Presley
Kristine Grill †*	Luis Rangel Morales ‡
Nate Hood	Betsy Reveal ‡
Tram Hoang	Jeffrey Risberg
Taqee Khaled	Antonio Rodriguez
William Lindeke †	Omar Syed
Kathy Mouacheupao	Wendy Underwood †
Garrison McMurtrey	Lue Vang *

The Planning Commission is staffed by the Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED)

Melvin W. Carter III, Mayor  
 Nicolle Goodman, Director, PED, August 2020-present  
 Kristin Guild, Interim Director, PED, through August 2020  
 Luis Pereira, Planning Director  
 Sonja Butler, Secretary to the Planning Commission

Served as: ‡ Chair of the Planning Commission  
 † Committee Chair  
 \* Officer

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