



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: December 6, 2012

TO: City of Saint Paul Planning Commission

FROM: Neighborhood Planning Committee

SUBJECT: Shepard Davern Area: Planning Update and Zoning Study

Introduction

The Shepard Davern area is at the southern-most edge of Saint Paul, just across the Mississippi River from the MSP International Airport and the Mall of America, and easily accessible from Downtown Saint Paul via Highway 5 / West 7th Street or Shepard Road. This strategic location has been the focus of many planning efforts in recent years, as summarized below.

Shepard Davern Small Area Plan (1999)

- Includes the Shepard Davern Commercial and Shepard Davern Residential Overlay Districts.
- Plan elements include: design guidelines; mixed-use districts; streetscaping; housing goals; a reconfigured Shepard Road including increased access; and a new “gateway” into the city.

Shepard Davern Special Sign District

- Limits billboards; places stronger restrictions on nonconforming signs.

Fort Road Development Plan (2005)

- Includes transit- and pedestrian-oriented development standards, and encourages a mix of uses along the Fort Road corridor.
- Nodes are identified for denser residential development opportunities. The Gateway and Rankin nodes are both in the Shepard Davern area.

District 15 Neighborhood Plan (2005)

- Recommends amending the Shepard Davern SAP and overlay with two modifications: reducing the maximum allowed building height to five floors (from six) or fifty-five feet (from sixty-five) while continuing to enforce the forty-foot height limits in the Mississippi River Critical Area, and; eliminating convention facilities as permitted uses.
- Recommends a TN3 Master Plan to replace the design guidelines in the Shepard Davern overlay areas.

Great River Passage Plan (awaiting adoption)

- Three overarching themes: More Natural, More Urban, More Connected.
- Promotes increased access to the Mississippi River, with traffic calming and enhanced grade interactions along Shepard Road between Rankin and Highway 5; creating multimodal park access routes (green connections) between West 7th and Shepard Road; encouraging river-oriented redevelopment along Shepard Road; and creating new recreational facilities at the river’s edge.

With the profusion of planning documents covering the Shepard Davern area, as well as the two Shepard Davern overlay districts, the vision for the area has become muddled and development work is difficult. The *Shepard Davern Small Area Plan* is outdated, particularly in light of the more recent plans for the area. City staff, along with the Highland District Council, have identified key issues that should be addressed by a renewed planning effort for Shepard Davern.

Insufficient zoning/overlay districts

The existing Shepard Davern Overlay Districts (see attached map) exclude a number of commercially zoned properties along West 7th Street, and do not include the full area discussed in the Shepard Davern Small Area Plan (1999). These districts also include certain standards that have made it difficult to attract development, and may be prohibitive to the redevelopment of some of the properties in the area.

Since the creation of these overlay districts, the City has adopted new Traditional Neighborhood zoning districts which include many of the pedestrian-friendly qualities and design standards that are included in the Shepard Davern Overlay Districts. TN zoning districts may be a more straightforward and comprehensive replacement for these overlay districts.

Roadway issues

The Shepard Davern Plan of 1999 included a number of roadway adjustments for the area, including new pedestrian intersections on Shepard Road and West 7th. Circulation issues still exist, including issues with access to businesses along West 7th (both for pedestrians and motor vehicles), and with access to the river and Crosby Farm. The high levels of traffic on both West 7th and Shepard Road continue to create barriers between the residents and businesses in the area.

Greenspace and landscaping

There is a shortage of recreational and public green spaces in the Shepard Davern area, particularly with the high number of children living in the area. Many of the area's open spaces are either located in quasi-private courtyards or are largely inaccessible due to the traffic on Shepard Road.

To address these ongoing concerns, the Neighborhood Committee recommends initiating a zoning study and a district plan amendment to update the policies and development guidelines for the Shepard Davern area.

Geographic scope

The geographic limits of this zoning study and planning effort should include the whole Shepard Davern area. The existing overlay districts do not cover all of the area included in the Shepard Davern Small Area Plan from 1999, nor the whole area looked at as the "West 7th Street Area" in the District 15 Neighborhood Plan.

The Shepard Davern Special Sign District applies to *"the area beginning at a point where Shepard Road, Mississippi River Boulevard and West Seventh intersect, northeasterly along West Seventh Street to Edgecumbe Road, north on Edgecumbe Road to St. Paul Avenue, east along St. Paul Avenue to West Seventh Street, northeasterly along Homer Street, southeasterly along Homer Street to Shepard Road, southwesterly along Shepard Road to the point of the beginning."* This roughly corresponds to the area included in the 1999 Small Area Plan, and to the "West 7th Street Area" as identified in the District 15 Neighborhood Plan. Therefore this is the recommended area for study under this planning and zoning study.

Document scope

Using the City's Traditional Neighborhood zoning districts, most of the elements of the existing Shepard Davern Overlay Districts can be streamlined through a zoning study to create a more straightforward framework for the area. Because of recent planning efforts on the Great River Passage Plan and the strength of the Highland Park/District 15 Neighborhood Plan, the Neighborhood Committee recommends that the new Shepard Davern plan be composed as an amendment to the existing Highland Park/District 15 Neighborhood Plan rather than as a stand-alone Small Area Plan.

Task force formation

City staff will take the lead in the zoning study and writing the Neighborhood Plan amendment or Small Area Plan. A task force should be convened comprised of neighborhood representatives to guide the process, led by two co-chairs, one from the community and one from the Planning Commission. The full task force should be approximately 12 people, and will meet roughly once a month.

Neighborhood Committee recommendation

The Neighborhood Planning Committee recommends approval of the attached resolution to the Planning Commission. The resolution formally initiates the planning process and zoning study, and authorizes the formation of a neighborhood task force.