

1. Community Identity

The sixties were not very kind to the West Side Flats. After a couple of devastating floods some very poor decisions were made that turned a vibrant community into a nasty memory for many of its inhabitants. And then, after the area was protected by the floodwalls, residences were not permitted or were severely restricted. Instead the area was left to poor development decisions that have lasted into the new century, such as oceans of parking lots and poorly designed single story office and warehousing buildings.

The 1916 Map provides proof positive that the area had and I believe could have again, a vibrant community that included housing, employment opportunities, and crucial neighborhood services like grocery stores, restaurants, bars, and medical and dental offices. Yes, it was a short walk to downtown and the many opportunities that it provided, but the West Side Flats was a community in its own right and deserves recognition of that fact again.

The "once-in-a-life-time" opportunity to guide the development should focus first and foremost on the "more vibrant, connected, sustainable and prosperous Westside" and the future of the returning of residents to the West Side Flats. The fact that the return of another functioning neighborhood is good for the City of Saint Paul in general and good for the Downtown area is an added benefit, not the main reason for rebuilding and repopulating the West Side Flats.

And that is how it will relate to the other areas on the West Side of the River and the other side, as another vibrant neighborhood with a population that has full access to sustainable transit

systems, walk able and safe streets, community facilities, and nearby employment opportunities.

2. Land Use

I believe the original forty acres site should continue to be mostly residential in nature. Let us do what we can to support and include businesses in the store fronts that face the main streets. Let us provide pocket parks and walkways to help the new population take ownership of the neighborhood. If there is a possibility of something other than residential building in this area, let us make sure that the construction is of such so that the structure could be reused for multiple uses in the future rather than torn down and rebuilt.

The well designed and well constructed building idea should carry into the other area East of Robert as well. If that is to continue to be defined as an industrial Park let us make sure that those buildings can have many different lives during the next fifty years.

3. Built Form

The West Side Flats is where the River decided that it needed to spread out every so often. It is a flood plain. Trees will grow to 50-60 feet. The buildings on the Flats should not be any higher than the tallest tree to provided shade and wind resistance. If we expect the flats to return as a residential neighborhood, we should make sure that some of the

amenities, like lots of trees should be part of the mix. The buildings should have court yards and have windows and openings facing the street whenever possible.

The old flats plan called for various heights distributed throughout the 40 acres. I believe this is a good idea that should be placed into the new plan. I do not believe there is any place for any building higher than six stories on the flats.

4. Movement

When we finally realize that we have to stop building our cities with only cars in mind we will have the opportunity to spend creative hours on how to place mass transit throughout the neighborhood to assist the residents in getting to and from work and to those wonderful entertainment events. Something will be coming down Robert Street and will connect with the LRT to MPLS and other future routes. Buses will continue to roll down Wabasha and so forth. Bike paths will continue to pass through and around the West Side.

Perhaps there will be an opportunity to follow the River to the East next to the Airport and connect with the trail that continues on the River through South Saint Paul as one can do to the West of this area. The flood wall at this point is a huge barrier to any real connection to the River. The River can be touched only at Harriet Island and points to the West such as Lilydale Park.

5. Public Realm

I would hope that our planning professional would do the best things to provide a pleasant and safe environment for those thousand or more new residents on the Flats. That means, well thought out and well designed streets, boulevards and walk spaces, safe crossings for the heavily trafficked arterial routes, and ample opportunities to easily access the walkway at the Rivers edge over the flood wall. Yes, the River is the draw but only a few will have the view and the rest will have to be content with being within walking distance to view places. The focus should be on the livability of the neighborhood rather than the River.

I do not believe we should consider anything larger than Pocket Parks or Tot lots throughout the Flats. The income generating entertainment venue call Harriet Island will continue to cause parking and noise issue for the West Side in general and now especially for those that live on the Flats. Issues with parking and noise will be a problem in the future for that income producing entertainment venue and the neighbors to come. There is no need for a Ferris wheel or anything else to bring more "visitors" into the depths of the residential area of the West Side Flats.

The new West Side Flats should include spaces for passive recreation, green spaces that make this neighborhood desirable to all age groups. Unfortunately, access to and availability of the revenue generating entertainment venue called Harriet Island to this neighborhood population probably will not be sufficient to provide these necessary these attributes to those that live on the Flats.

6. Sustainability

Once again, I believe we will have to trust the planning professionals to provide this plan with the state of the art solutions to make this neighborhood as Green and environmentally friendly as possible. The concern with ponding areas was not a great of a concern as it is now, for instance.

All parking lots and all vacant spaces should be turned into urban gardening spaces for temporary usage. Gardening spaces should be available throughout the residential areas to provide for even more ownership of the neighborhood from those that live there. Other areas that are more commercial in scope should have larger garden plots near their buildings rather than oceans of dandelion free lawns. This would not only provide more ownership for the residents of the Flats but provide connection between the residents and the owners and employers on the West Side Flats areas.

All roof tops should be encouraged to provide either solar hot water resource or solar electricity to be used for each building without a penalty from the present power provider for the city of Saint Paul.

Subsidies should be provided to assist new businesses that would provide real jobs and create a demand for full time use of the subsidy for the neighborhood and the City. (Sports facilities provide revenue for a few and create serious congestion problems for everyone.) As mentioned before, all buildings should be created with a lifetime of uses before constructed. All buildings should try to attain the least amount of energy consumption for heating, lighting, and cooling.

Responses to Visioning Questions 14 March, 2013 Gjerry Berquist

Block clubs and use of the District Council System should be encouraged to promote and maintain the integrity of the uniqueness of the neighborhood, not just as a perceived or real extension of downtown Saint Paul. Please look again to the map of the West Side Flats of 1916. It was a real neighborhood then and with our help could become one again.