



CITY OF SAINT PAUL
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DATE: April 3, 2014

TO: Neighborhood Planning Committee

FROM: Bill Dermody, City Planner

RE: Initiate Gateway Corridor Station Area Planning process, establish task force, and initiate zoning study

BACKGROUND

The Gateway Transitway Corridor, which is identified conceptually in the regional Transportation Policy Plan, is under study for Light Rail Transit (LRT) or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) from Saint Paul's Union Depot to Manning Avenue on the eastern end of Woodbury, generally running along the I-94 corridor. The study is currently in the scoping comment phase with a scoping decision due in June, at which time the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) work will commence under direction from the Washington County Regional Rail Authority (a responsibility that eventually transitions to the Metropolitan Council). Though the mode and precise alignment are still undetermined, it is clear that the proposed transitway represents a major transportation investment with significant opportunities for portions of Saint Paul. The City of Saint Paul can best optimize the transitway benefits through thoughtful planning and coordination, especially around proposed stations.

There are several reasons to initiate a station area planning process now rather than waiting until after the Draft EIS. First, the Draft EIS is contributing resources to the station area planning process in all cities in the study area, including a market analysis conducted by HR&A and, for the City of Saint Paul, design/graphics assistance of a nature to be determined. It is an efficient use of City resources to leverage these external resources. Second, the transitway's odds of receiving capital funding are improved by conducting planning now, which shows a commitment to the corridor and improves projected ridership numbers prior to submission of the project to the Federal Transit Administration in early 2015. Third, station area planning conducted now can leverage the outreach resources of FESTECC (Fostering East Side Transit Equity Conversations), which has received funding for continuing its transit equity-oriented organizing work in 2014, but not beyond. FESTECC is making a concerted effort to meaningfully involve underrepresented populations in transit planning processes, including the Gateway project and any associated station area planning.

The Gateway Transitway Corridor runs through geographic areas covered by several City-adopted plans: the *Sun Ray – Suburban Small Area Plan* (2004), the *Sun Ray – Battle Creek – Highwood District 1 Plan* (2004), the *Dayton’s Bluff District 4 Plan* (2009), and the citywide *Comprehensive Plan* (2010). Neither the District 1 Plan summary nor the District 4 Plan summary specifically addresses the Gateway Transitway Corridor, though District 1 did specifically address it in their Transportation Plan Update of 2012 (not yet officially adopted by the City), in which they generally support the Corridor and call for station locations and several related improvements that benefit the community. The Sun Ray- Suburban Plan summary does not address the Gateway Transitway Corridor or transit in general. The citywide Comprehensive Plan recognizes Gateway as part of a “preferred transit network,” identifies the Sun Ray/Suburban area as a “neighborhood center,” and identifies the land surrounding the I-94 corridor east of Kennard Street as being within a “mixed use corridor.” It is probable that portions of the affected plans will need to be amended or perhaps decertified through any station area planning process.

Staff has solicited applications for a Gateway Station Area Planning Task Force in anticipation of Planning Commission action. The solicitation has been publicized through the Dayton’s Bluff Forum newspaper, the District 1 newsletter, the Districts 1 and 4 Council leadership, the East Side Review newspaper, the East Side Area Business Association, and Engage East Side (a nonprofit organization).

A distinctive aspect of the proposed planning process is that non-binding, but plausible high/low population and employment estimates for each station area could be forwarded separately to the City Council (via Neighborhood Planning Committee and Planning Commission) ahead of full station area plan adoption. This approach may be necessary to allow the Draft EIS consultants to begin ridership forecasting in Autumn 2014, while the City of Saint Paul maintains its thorough public process for the full adopted area plans.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the NPC recommend approval of the attached draft Planning Commission resolution initiating a station area planning process, forming a task force that is representative of certain stakeholder groups and includes a Planning Commissioner as co-chair, initiating an accompanying zoning study, and authorizing plausible population and employment estimates to be forwarded by the task force ahead of the full station area plans.

Attachment

1. Draft Planning Commission Resolution

city of saint paul
planning commission resolution
file number _____
date _____

GATEWAY CORRIDOR STATION AREAS

INITIATION OF PLAN PREPARATION AND ZONING STUDY

AND FORMATION OF A TASK FORCE

WHEREAS, Minnesota Statutes 462.351 ff. and 469.002, subd. 14, grants a municipality the authority for the planning and redevelopment of lands; and

WHEREAS, Section 107.02 of the City of Saint Paul administrative code authorizes the Planning Commission to organize and facilitate the preparation of planning studies and to transmit its recommendations to the Mayor and to the City Council; and

WHEREAS, Section 107.04 of the City of Saint Paul administrative code authorizes the Planning Commission to appoint task forces as advisory bodies to study technical issues identified by the Commission and to report their findings to the Commission for its consideration; and

WHEREAS, a proposed transitway between Downtown Saint Paul and eastern Woodbury is currently being studied by other governmental bodies as part of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), with up to six (6) transitway (Bus Rapid Transit or Light Rail Transit) stations being considered in Saint Paul, including in the vicinities of Union Depot, Mounds Boulevard, Earl Street, Etna Street, White Bear Avenue, and Sun Ray shopping center; and

WHEREAS, a new transitway such as is being studied could have significant impacts on Saint Paul citizens and redevelopment of property near the proposed transitway stations, including positive benefits that can be best optimized through planning and coordination; and

WHEREAS, the Union Depot area is subject to the previously adopted *Downtown Station Area Plan* adopted in 2010 in anticipation of three (3) Green Line LRT stations located in Downtown Saint Paul, including one at the Union Depot; and

WHEREAS, the *Downtown Station Area Plan* is still relevant and sufficient to plan for transit impacts in the Union Depot area, including any additional impacts from the Gateway Transitway Corridor; and

moved by _____
seconded by _____
in favor _____
against _____

WHEREAS, the *Sun Ray – Suburban Small Area Plan* (2004), *Sun Ray – Battle Creek – Highwood District 1 Plan* (2004), the *Dayton's Bluff District 4 Plan* (2009), and the citywide *Comprehensive Plan* (2010) cover geographic areas that could be significantly affected by a proposed transitway in the Gateway Corridor, and therefore may require amendment (all plans) or decertification (*Sun Ray – Suburban*) in the course of creating new station area plans; and

WHEREAS, federal transit ridership models incorporate future land uses that are within adopted plans and for which zoning work has commenced prior to submission of the project by the Metropolitan Council to the Federal Transit Administration, anticipated in early 2015; and

WHEREAS, the Draft EIS consultants will start calculating ridership in Autumn 2014, which is probably before the City of Saint Paul will complete adoption of any station area plans; and

WHEREAS, the Draft EIS consultants' ridership work could commence with sets of estimated high and low potential population and employment numbers for each station area; and

WHEREAS, the station area plans will address topics such as land use planning and zoning, density and design of new development, housing, pedestrian connections, streetscape design, and parks and open spaces; and

WHEREAS, the station area planning process will also present opportunities to inform the transitway study being conducted by other governmental bodies with regard to preferred station locations; and

WHEREAS, an additional focus will be a zoning study to implement the planning recommendations in the planning study; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Planning and Economic Development, in collaboration with other City departments, will provide staff to facilitate the planning process, provide technical assistance and, with input from stakeholders and residents, will produce planning documents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission hereby initiates the formation of the Gateway Station Area Planning Task Force to assist the Commission in the preparation of station area plans along the Gateway Corridor for up to five (5) planned stations in the vicinity of Mounds Boulevard, Earl Street, Etna Street, White Bear Avenue, and Sun Ray shopping center; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission hereby initiates an accompanying zoning study, which can be completed concurrently with the station area plans or afterwards, with proposed rezonings in the zoning study that reflect the recommendations of the station area plans, and with the proposed rezonings, once adopted, becoming amendments to the Zoning Ordinance; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the chair of the Planning Commission appoint one member of the Commission to serve as co-chair of the Gateway Station Area Planning Task Force (with the other co-chair to be selected by the Task Force membership); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Gateway Station Area Planning Task Force include representatives from the following stakeholder groups:

- District 1 residents (at least 2)
- District 4 residents (at least 2)
- Business owners and operators (at least 1)
- Senior citizens (at least 1)
- Youth (at least 1)
- Racial/ethnic groups that reflect the affected neighborhoods to the extent plausible

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Gateway Station Area Planning Task Force may forward non-binding population and employment estimates to the Planning Commission prior to full station area plan adoption so that the Planning Commission may in turn forward a recommendation to the City Council for their consideration that would result in a resolution identifying said population and employment estimates that could be used by the Draft EIS consultants for preliminary ridership calculations; and

FINALLY BE IT RESOLVED, that the Gateway Station Area Planning Task Force will submit its recommendations to the Planning Commission for its consideration.