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Urban Design Master Plan
Upper Landing - Saint Paul Minnesota

Summary Recommendations

November 2000

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Department of Public Works

Division of Parks and Recreation

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I. Introduction

Purpose

Simply stated, this Urban Design Master Plan document serves as Saint Paul's plan for development at the Upper Landing. The recommendations summarized in this plan are the direct result of two important, but interrelated factors:

- First, that this work is a more site-specific extension of previous studies which have already addressed the Upper Landing within a broader context and,
- Second, that this work brought together representatives from the City of Saint Paul, Xcel Energy, developers and planning consultants in a series of workshops and discussions to clearly understand and find solutions for the unique challenges of this site.

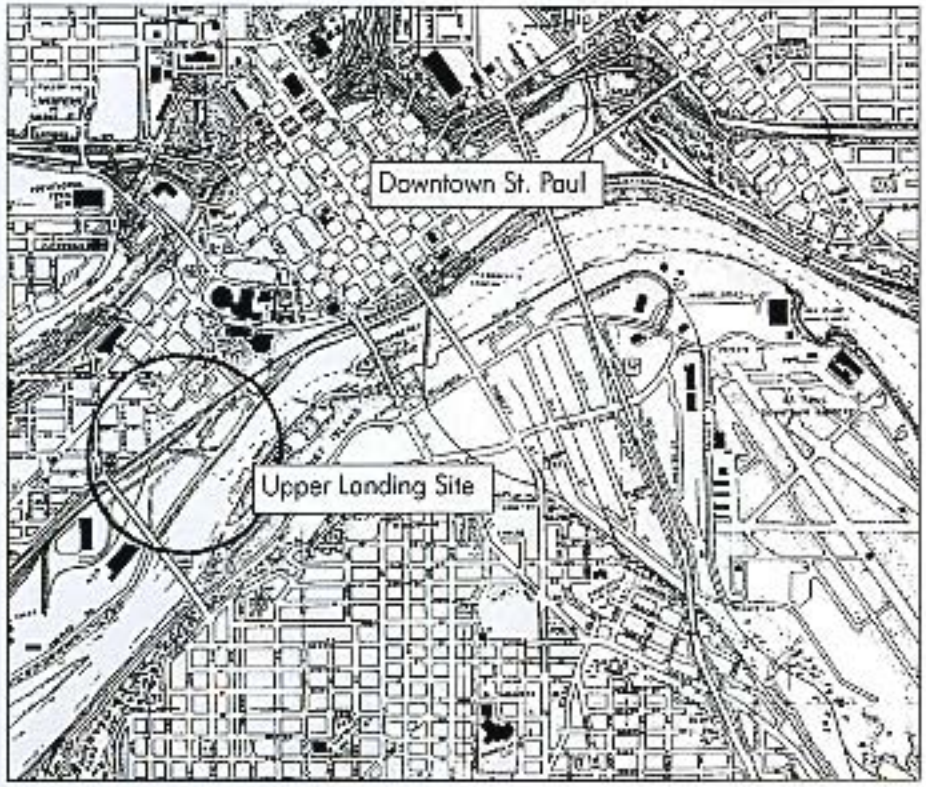
View of the Mississippi River Valley looking west - the Upper Landing site is in the upper right of this photograph.

Location

The Upper Landing site occupies an extremely important piece of Saint Paul riverfront property. Located between the High Bridge, Chestnut Street, the Irvine Park neighborhood and the Mississippi River, this site has undergone many changes over time. Once part of the river itself, the Upper Landing has been home to both industrial and residential uses. Its proximity to downtown, Lilydale/Harriet Island Regional Park, the East Bank Mississippi Regional Trail and a thriving historic Irvine Park neighborhood on the bluff sets the stage for one of Saint Paul's most exciting riverfront developments.

As noted in the Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework, the Upper Landing "presents one of the most significant opportunities to reintegrate and reconnect the Mississippi with the downtown core." To make this a reality, the Upper Landing site offers many unique opportunities:

- It will connect to a new regional trail, a new city park and a major plaza on the river's edge.
- It will invite people to the waterfront, provide new housing for a mix of incomes and may include some destination commercial/retail uses.
- It will integrate stormwater management into the site design, improving the integrity of the river and restoring damaged land on the flood plain.
- It will help form a new gateway into downtown from the west along new Shepard Road.



Location Map

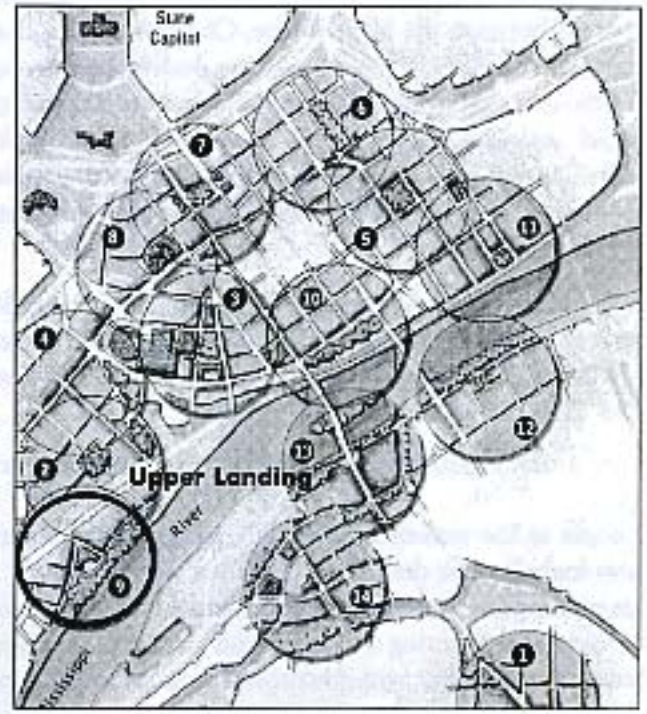
Framework Principles

It is imperative that redevelopment of the Upper Landing be exceptionally well executed. This will set the standard for a new, unique neighborhood on the riverfront and serve as a model for future development. The ten principles listed in the Framework form the foundation for an urban design approach to the Upper Landing and ultimately the implementation of a thriving, "urban village" on the Mississippi River. These principles include:

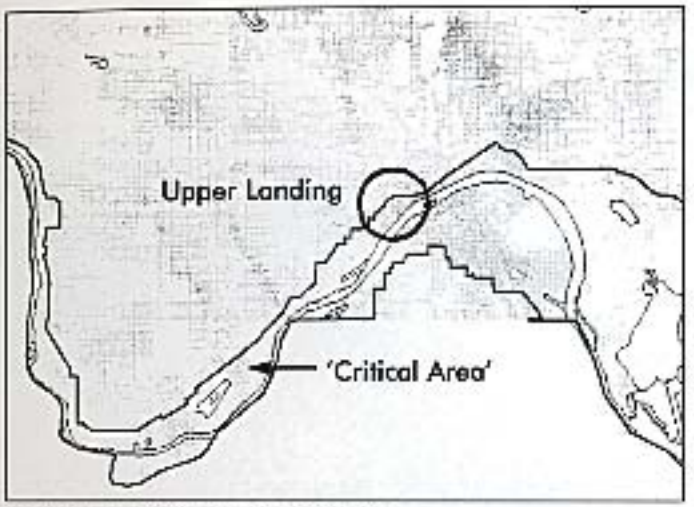
- Evoke a sense of place.
- Restore and establish the unique urban ecology.
- Invest in the public realm.
- Broaden the mix of uses.
- Improve connectivity.
- Ensure that buildings support broader city building goals.
- Build on existing strengths.
- Preserve and enhance heritage resources.
- Provide a balanced network of movement.
- Foster public safety.

In addition to the Framework, several other documents contain important guidelines and recommendations related to this site including the 'draft' Mississippi River Corridor Plan, the East Bank Mississippi Regional Trail Corridor Report and the Upper Landing Park Master Plan.

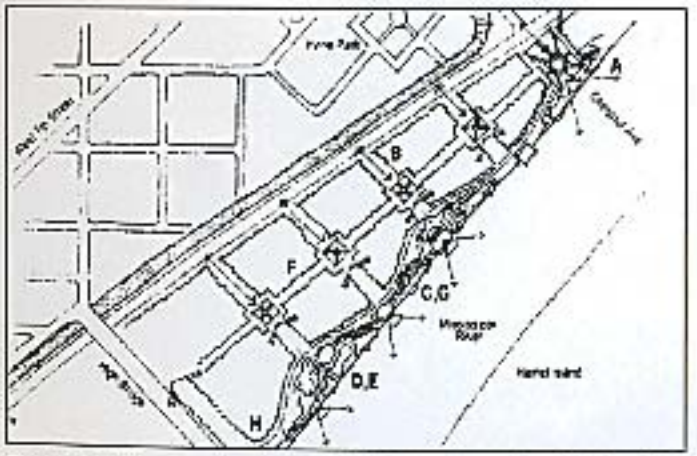
The vision for Saint Paul is of a system of interconnected urban villages in the lush green of a reforested river valley.



The Upper Landing will be one of many compact, dense and pedestrian-oriented urban villages located throughout downtown Saint Paul.



The Mississippi River 'Critical Area' in Saint Paul.



Suggested guidelines contained in the 'draft' Mississippi River Corridor Plan include illustrative plans for potential development at Upper Landing.

Urban Design Goals

Subsequent to the much broader vision established in the Framework, more specific design goals and guidelines for river corridor sites were developed in the Mississippi River Corridor Plan, a chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan. These are intended to balance the issues of development and preservation within the Mississippi River Critical Area (as established by the Federal Government). Currently in draft form, the Corridor Plan includes the following guidelines tailored to the unique location and conditions of the Upper Landing.

- Provide multiple connections to Shepard Road, an urban boulevard.
- Provide an anchoring public space that celebrates the Chestnut Street/Cathedral axis and arrival to the river.
- Provide view corridors through the site from potential lower bluff overlooks to the river.
- Create small blocks that can be developed incrementally.
- Create a series of linked public and private spaces oriented to the river, to Shepard Road and to other significant spaces, views and landmarks such as the High Bridge and downtown.
- Provide continuous public open space along the river's edge.
- Extend landscaped 'green fingers' into the new development blocks from the riverfront.
- Encourage plantings of native materials and naturalized massings to enhance or create natural habitats.
- Integrate stormwater elements with natural habitats, public open space areas and park/recreation opportunities.
- Reduce the rate and improve the quality of stormwater discharge.
- Re-introduce the 'urban forest' within the redevelopment area.
- Support a mix of active/passive recreational use with paths, over looks, seating areas, courts/fields.
- Provide visible/accessible connections to neighborhood and regional parks, trails and open space systems.

Master Plan Issues

Because of the unique geologic/topographic features of the Mississippi River Valley (both bluff and floodplain), the Upper Landing site is somewhat detached from the Saint Paul 'city fabric'. Located between the river and Shepard Road, the Xcel Energy High Bridge power plant and Upper Landing Park, this has significant implications related to access, character and 'fit'. A number of specific issues were discussed during the workshop process (see Issues Summary Checklist on pages 14 and 15) including:

- Defining the character for the Upper Landing.

  As an isolated, one-block deep development, it was agreed that the site should have a mix of housing types, ensuring that the overall character does not feel like a "project." This mix should reflect the diversity that incremental city-building produces. The site should be porous and public, providing as much access from Shepard Road, Chestnut Street and the regional trail as possible. Streets will be owned and maintained by the city.

- Treatment of the development edge.

  The Upper Landing stands alone on the riverfront and is highly visible from all sides. Each of these edges should be landscaped and present a green facade, with boulevard trees and understory plantings. The edge facing the power plant property should include additional screening with both landform and vegetation. Public streets and sidewalks will surround the development, including a continuous public promenade along the riverfront edge.

- Appropriate land use mix.

  The site should include a mix of housing types (townhouses, luxury condominiums, apartments) at a range of costs, with a mix of ownership and rental. Several types of commercial uses were also discussed, including a destination restaurant and small specialty shops. These commercial uses would be located in Block One (on the Chestnut Street, river and Walnut Street sides), with potential for additional retail on the Walnut Street side of Block Two.

Master Plan Issues

- Appropriate densities and massing.

  Buildings along the riverfront edge generally should be kept to 2-3 stories with front doors facing onto a public street or promenade. Buildings along the Shepard Road edge should present a taller facade - four to six stories depending on the location - with front doors opening onto an "inboard" street. The Chestnut plaza should be fronted by a building with enough mass to anchor the east end of the development and provide a strong edge to the plaza. Discussion ranged from three to five stories. Apartment buildings at the west end could be taller, as an edge to the power plant and High Bridge; six to eight stories for Block Seven and up to six stories for Block Six.

- Preserving key views to and from the river.

  River views are a primary consideration for this site, not just for those who will live here, but for those who are on the river, visiting the Science Museum, living in Irvine Park or walking along the bluff edge. Keeping building heights to appropriate levels, maintaining numerous openings along proposed streets, and 'stepping up' building massing as one moves away from the river are appropriate design responses. In addition, stepping the facades of riverfront housing back on Blocks Three through Six provides more distant views up and down river for those living in this new neighborhood.

- Stormwater Management.

  The favored approach is a combination of some detention/retention (temporary and/or permanent ponding) in open (green) spaces within the development. Subsurface sand filtration areas would also provide excellent filtration in recreational, lawn areas.