

# District and Small Area Plan Guidelines

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*Previously Revised - August 8, 2001*  
*Last Revised – September 24, 2010*

The Saint Paul Planning Commission



CITY OF SAINT PAUL  
Department of Planning  
and Economic Development

## Area Plan Guidelines

We are most likely to achieve city and neighborhood goals when city and neighborhood plans have shared objectives and mutually supportive recommendations. The ability to obtain resources for implementation of an area plan is apt to be severely limited if the plan does not result in a shared city/neighborhood vision and commitment recognized by the Planning Commission and the City Council.

There are two types of plans created in the City -- “district plans” for one of the 17 planning districts or “small area plans” for a smaller geographic portion of Saint Paul—a neighborhood, planning district, special district or study area. The plans are adopted as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan following a formal preparation process with the community, city staff and the Planning Commission.

**It is the Planning Commission’s intent with this addendum plan preparation and adoption process to:**

- Support effective neighborhood planning;
- Ensure recognition and implementation of city policies in local planning;
- Provide for meaningful neighborhood/city dialogue;
- Inform city-wide planning with strong understanding of local area objectives;
- Provide for clear recognition of action commitments needed from non-local players, particularly city government, for realization of neighborhood objectives; and
- Encourage efficiency and identification of priorities when all players are struggling with limited resources.

Attention to the following guidelines during plan preparation will help ensure that these intentions are met. These guidelines are not intended to suggest the total scope of a district or small area plan addendum, only to highlight items of particular importance to the Planning Commission for implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. These guidelines will be used by the Planning Commission in its review of district and small area plans. They will also be used—particularly the process guidelines—in allocation of staff time for plan support.

This document includes the following information:

1. Purpose and Use of District and Small Area Plans (p. 3)
2. District and Small Area Plans Process (pp. 4-9)
3. Requests for District and Small Area Plans (p. 10)
4. Plan Content (pp. 11-12)
5. Format for District and Small Area Plans (pp. 13-14)

## Purpose and Use of District and Small Area Plans



### Purpose of a District Plan

1. Provide a 10-year vision, policy priorities and strategies to guide growth, investment, and development in the district
2. Provide a process for community engagement to discuss and set priorities for the future of an area, consistent with and assisting to implement the Saint Paul Comp Plan at the neighborhood level
3. Incorporate into the district plan key strategies or policies from existing, older small area plan(s) within the district, if the small area plan(s) is no longer needed as a stand alone document, and then decertify the old small area plan(s)

### Purpose of a Small Area Plan\*

1. Respond to crisis or threat (perhaps even a development moratorium), or to create a strong vision for new development/investment in an area
2. Articulate vision to guide growth and reinvestment in an area
3. Provide a process for community engagement to discuss and set priorities for the future of the area, consistent with the Saint Paul Comp Plan
4. Update an old plan for an area that still needs a development vision/plan
5. Synthesize existing and overlapping plans for an area, as appropriate

\*An area can vary in size and geography and include portions of different planning districts

### Use of Adopted District and Small Area Plans

1. Articulate Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan priorities at the local level
  2. Provide development or investment vision and clear action plan for better implementation of plan priorities and strategies
  3. Set rezoning direction and/or begin a rezoning process
  4. Guide PED, Public Works, Parks, and DSI decision making on a neighborhood level
  5. Focus neighborhood efforts and programs
  6. Set investment priorities for private, public and non-profit sectors.
- CIB/Star grants
  - HUD
  - Met Council
  - DEED, MHFA, other state agencies
  - Foundation grants

## **District and Small Area Plan Process**

If a District or Small Area Plan is intended for adoption as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, the organization leading the planning effort should observe the planning guidelines that follow and consult with appropriate staff from the Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development (PED) early in the process to discuss how the guidelines can be met.

The steps for creating a District Plan and a Small Area Plan are similar, but where they differ, it is noted below.

### **Plan Initiation**

Prior to starting the planning process, the neighborhood organization leading the planning process is requested to submit a **work plan to PED outlining the goal, major issues to be addressed, proposed time line, staff and financial resources, community engagement process, and expected outcomes of the plan.** PED staff will be available for comments and technical assistance during this step, to a limited extent.

This information will be used to prioritize and schedule PED staff for assistance on the plan. *Note: Greater active community participation in a planning process will increase the prioritization of the project when evaluating the delegation of City staff resources.*

### **Plan Participation and Roles**

District and Small Area Plans must meet the following criteria in order to be considered for adoption (as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan) by the City Council.

***Broad-Based Community Participation.*** A plan should be the product of broad-based community participation. Aspects of participation/representation include:

- representation of the community on the plan task force (residents, businesses, major institutions, major land owners, other interest groups within the area including business associations and community development corporations, and community members or organizations involved in previous planning efforts for the area)
- participation of, and communication with, residents and key organizations throughout the process
- district council and other community association endorsement
- participation of key public interests (City, schools, etc.)

***Technical/Professional Support.*** Technical capability for the research, facilitation of participation, communication with stakeholders, and generation of solutions is an important consideration in the preparation for planning work. Many organizations should consider seeking grant funds to hire appropriate consultants or creating formal institutional partnerships for advanced student assistance.

***Planning Commission participation.*** All Small Area Plan projects must establish a Steering Committee of key stakeholders in the planning area. The Steering Committee will be established under formal resolution by the Saint Paul Planning Commission and will be co-chaired by one community representative and one appointed Planning Commissioner. PED staff and the Planning Commission will assist the community in the process of advertising, soliciting, and selecting Steering Committee members.

All District Plan projects must establish a Steering Committee of key stakeholders in the planning area. However, the Steering Committee does not need to be established under formal resolution by the Saint Paul Planning Commission or be co-chaired by a Planning Commissioner. If the community feels that formal appointment of a Steering Committee by the Planning Commission and with a Planning Commission co-chair is desired, then it may submit this request to PED in its work plan.

***City staff participation.*** PED staff can provide only minimal assistance in the process of plan preparation, due to limited staff resources, and therefore the roles and expectations for City staff engagement should be identified and agreed to at the beginning of the project, to determine where they can provide the best added value.

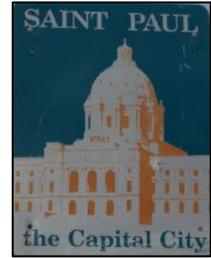
The assigned PED staff person will be engaged with the lead community organization throughout the plan development process to ensure that:

- key staff from other City departments are aware of the plan and providing appropriate information or review
- the plan considers key topics and policies identified by the City
- the plan strategies are consistent with the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan
- the plan includes relevant investment, development or zoning requests
- the plan is prepared to fit the standard plan addendum format

***Implementation Potential.*** Organizations and individuals whose effort and resources are needed for implementation of the plan should be identified for each strategy and noted in the implementation matrix at the end of the plan. There should be evidence that they have some “ownership” of the plan and commitment to their implementation responsibilities. Land use and development recommendations must be consistent with the zoning ordinance unless feasible and acceptable rezoning is proposed.

## **Plan Preparation**

The process for creating a district or small area plan for City Council adoption will vary depending on the scope of the plan, potential stakeholders, and resources available to assist in plan preparation. However, the following basic steps can serve as a guide:



### **Request Plan Initiation:**

1. Determine that a plan is desired or needed based on community interest or City recommendation, either as a required update to an old plan or to address an important issue or investment framework.
2. Consult with City Planning staff to consider what type of plan, update and process are appropriate.
  - Identify the neighborhood organization that will lead the planning effort, partner organizations and other technical or financial resources to assist.
  - Determine if the planning effort will be a 2-step plan process, resulting in a community plan and a shorter plan addendum for adoption by the City, or if it will be a 1-step process resulting directly in an addendum document for City adoption
  - Consider if a reduced process and timeline are appropriate for updates to existing small area plans that do not require much modification.
3. Prepare and submit a work plan to PED outlining the goal of the plan, major issues to be addressed, proposed time line, staff and financial resources, roles of participating organizations, and expected outcomes of the plan.
4. PED will use this information to prioritize and schedule PED staff for assistance.
5. Meet with assigned PED staff to discuss work plan, roles, and steps for review and adoption of the plan addendum by the Planning Commission and City Council. Ensure that expectations, roles and next steps are clear.

### **Establish Steering Committee or Planning Commission Task Force:**

6. Determine with PED staff if a plan steering committee or task force with Planning Commission engagement is desired or needed.
7. Determine desired size and composition of the group. Consider what skills or background would be helpful and if key stakeholder groups or organizations should be represented. Decide if and how the group will be advertised and how group members will be selected.
8. Send out solicitation for members, if needed, review replies and select the group. (If it is a PC task force, PC chair or Commissioner will be involved in selection.)
9. Initiate formation of the group with PED staff and the Planning Commission.

### **Conduct the Planning Process:**

10. Formally announce start of planning process in the community and provide information on general process, timeline, and opportunities for public engagement.

*The following steps will vary from process to process, but should include these general components:*

11. Conduct regular meetings with Steering Committee or Task Force, in subcommittees if appropriate, throughout the planning process to:

- identify strengths and weaknesses of the planning area
- identify key issues and opportunities
- review Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan strategies and local implementation opportunities
- prepare for and debrief from large public meetings
- draft general plan content and chapters
- meet with City staff, as needed, to discuss plan progress and questions

12. Conduct at least three (3) widely publicized public meetings to solicit input on key issues and opportunities related to all topic chapters and to review draft priorities and strategies. Public meetings may be organized in different ways and City staff can offer suggestions or assistance if desired.

13. Meet with City staff periodically during the planning process to discuss issues, questions, and ideas. City staff will observe, or participate if appropriate, in the public meetings, as well as Steering Committee / Task Force meetings if needed.

### **Prepare Draft Plan:**

14. Use all input from the planning process to draft the plan document. If doing both a full plan and addendum plan, these documents may be drafted concurrently or sequentially. Only the addendum plan will be submitted to the City for considered adoption.

15. Submit an early, perhaps incomplete, draft addendum plan for informal review by City staff and a Planning Commission (PC) committee prior to formal submission of the final draft. This will provide for some City staff / Planning Commission / neighborhood dialogue on important issues before completion of the work.

16. Prepare final draft plan.

17. Submit final draft plan to lead neighborhood organization Board for review and approval to submit to the City.

18. Submit final draft plan to the City for review and adoption

### **Plan Review by Planning Commission:**

19. Plan is sent by PED staff to the Neighborhood Planning Committee of the Planning Commission for preliminary review.

20. Neighborhood Planning Committee reviews the plan and may suggest possible revisions, which PED staff will discuss with the lead community organization.

21. When the Neighborhood Planning Committee feels that the plan is ready, it will

recommend the addendum plan for review and public hearing at the Planning Commission.

22. If the Planning Commission finds that the plan generally meets guidelines and is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, it will schedule a public hearing on the plan
23. Public hearing at the Planning Commission on the addendum plan. PED staff will make a short presentation on the plan and its consistency with Comprehensive Plan. The lead neighborhood organization, community members, and stakeholders are invited to speak.
24. Following the public hearing, the draft plan will return to Planning Commission committee for consideration of the public hearing comments and possible additional revisions to the draft plan.
25. The committee will then recommend the draft plan to the full Planning Commission.
26. Planning Commission votes on recommending the plan to the Mayor and City Council for adoption as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan. (If the Planning Commission finds significant deficiencies with respect to these guidelines or finds plan recommendations in conflict with the Comprehensive Plan, it may decide to recommend nothing to the City Council for adoption and/or to request revisions in the plan.)

**Plan Review and Adoption by City Council:**

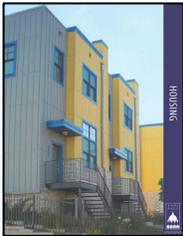
27. Plan addendum is sent to City Council for review. The City Council may hold a public hearing on the plan if there are elements of the plan that are still controversial or warrant special discussion; if there are no outstanding issues or concerns, the City Council may recommend the plan for adoption on its “consent” agenda.
28. City Council reviews the plan and the Planning Commission’s recommendation and, if appropriate, will adopt the plan, with or without modification, as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan.
29. Following City Council approval, formal adoption of the plan as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan is contingent upon review and approval by the Metropolitan Council.
30. Following City Council and Met Council approvals, the area plan will be published as an addendum to the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan and made available on the City’s website.



The Plan review and adoption process takes a minimum of four months if there are no major issues or revisions. If there are, the process will take extra time to work through.

## **Status of Adopted Plans**

According to state law, zoning must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Plan updated at least every ten years. Thus, small area and district plans that are adopted as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan must also be up-to-date and consistent with citywide plans.



### **Availability of Comprehensive Plan and Addendum Plans**

The city wide chapters of the new Comprehensive Plan are published as a set and posted on the City's website. Area plan addenda that are approved by the City as components of the new Comprehensive Plan will be published individually and posted on the City's website.

### **Adopted Addendum Plans**

District or Small Area plans adopted as addenda to the Comprehensive Plan will retain their status as originally adopted until they are ten years old. Upon their ten year anniversary, they will expire unless another course of action is determined.

### **Ten-Year Review of Plans**

By the tenth anniversary of its adoption, any District or Small Area Plan addendum must be reviewed to determine its future, which will be one of four options:

1. Recertify as is;
2. Update and re-adopt;
3. Amend remaining relevant strategies and policies into another existing plan, such as a district plan for the area; or
4. Decertify.

As adopted plans near their 10-year anniversary, City staff will consult with the organization that led the planning effort for the plan on options and an desired course of action. A recommendation will be made to Planning Commission on which course of action to take, and Planning Commission will make a final determination to recertify, update, amend or decertify the plan.

## **Requests for District and Small Area Plans**

Contact the PED Director of Planning, Donna Drummond, if considering a District or Small Area Plan process. A PED Planning staff contact will be identified for a preliminary conversation with district council or community representative(s) about ideas, needs and options for the plan process.

Once a preferred process has been identified, submit a Work Plan to PED outlining the goal, major issues to be addressed, proposed time line, staff and financial resources, community engagement process, and expected outcomes of the plan.

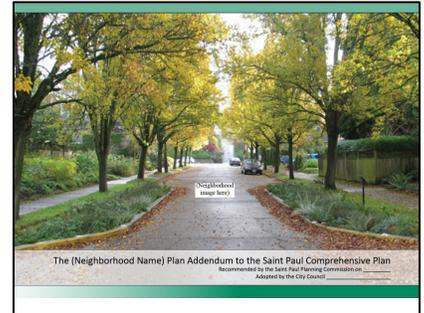
Send plan requests and Work Plans to PED and the Planning Commission at:

Saint Paul Planning Commission  
c/o Director of Planning  
Department of Planning and Economic Development  
25 W 4<sup>th</sup> St, Suite 1400  
St Paul, MN 55102  
[donna.drummond@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:donna.drummond@ci.stpaul.mn.us)

## Plan Content

### Plan Template

All District and Small Area Plans to be adopted by the City Council should be organized in a standard format and manner, consistent with the template provided by PED staff. This template is intended to be a framework for efficient and effective communication of plan priorities and implementation. The main elements to be included in each plan are outlined below.



1. Introduction – Why was the plan done, by what process, and who was involved?  
What is the general vision and main goals for the plan?
2. Topic Sections (mirrors Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan chapters):
  - ⇒ Land use -- zoning recommendations, land use vision and priorities
  - ⇒ Transportation
  - ⇒ Parks and Recreation
  - ⇒ Housing
  - ⇒ Water Resources
  - ⇒ Historic Preservation
  - ⇒ Other (optional)

Each chapter should begin with a vision and general objectives statement for that topic and follow with numbered action strategies for implementation.

Strategies within each section that relate to larger principles of...

- 💰 economic sustainability,
- 🌿 environmental sustainability, or
- 🚶 social sustainability,

...may be marked with a corresponding icon.

If any of these three principles is, in itself, one of the key topics of the plan, then it can be included as its own topic section.

If there are a number of strategies that do not clearly relate to the Comprehensive Plan chapter topics, such as utilities or crime prevention, they may be included in an extra section, to be named according to the theme or simply as “other” if the section covers a variety of strategies.

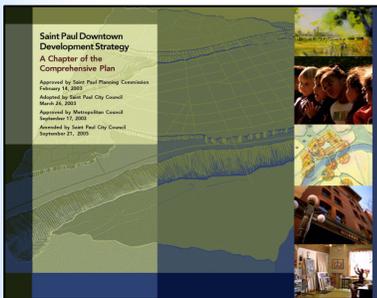
Photos, data or graphics that illustrate the topics being addressed can be included in the chapters and will add some visual interest to the plan.

3. Implementation Section – list strategies from each topic chapter and for each identify the priority or timeline for implementation and responsible parties

### **Key Strategies from Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan**

District and Small Area Plans may be done for general or specific purposes and are essential in refining and implementing city development objectives and Comprehensive Plan priorities as they apply locally, based on local needs and opportunities. At the outset of the planning process, PED staff will provide a list of key strategies from the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan which should be addressed, if applicable, in all plans.

### **Existing Plans**



During the planning process, existing plans for the study area and pertinent City plans should be reviewed. PED staff can assist in evaluating if and how to update, amend, merge, or decertify overlapping plans in the study area. The plan should include an explanation of the other plans that were reviewed during the process and the future status of those plans in relation to the new plan being adopted.

### **Adjacent Areas**

New plans should be compatible and mutually reinforcing for adjacent areas, including neighborhoods, business, natural areas, other special districts, and corridors. Plans should address significant characteristics and goals of adjacent areas and issues of compatibility.



### Implementation (1-2 pages)

In a table, list each strategy, responsible parties, and timeline or priority for implementation

Strategy #	Strategy - summary name	Implementers	Timeline / Priority Level
L1	Rezone x area	District x, PED, PW	Summer 2010
L2	Work on streetscaping		
T1	Maintain on-street parking		
T2	Signal at Acorn and Oak		
PR1	Etc		
PR2	...		
H1	...		
H2	...		
W1	...		
W2	...		
HP1	...		
HP2	...		

### Graphics or Data

Include the following, as appropriate, located by areas of related text or in appendices.

#### *Maps*

- ▢ study area (in all plans)
- ▢ land use and community assets -- schools, parks, libraries, etc. (in all plans)
- ▢ zoning (in all plans)
- ▢ opportunity and reinvestment areas (if applicable)

#### *Data*

- ▢ Basic census info (in all District Plans and as applicable in Small Area Plans)
- ▢ Background data that illustrates an important strength, need or opportunity (if applicable)
- ▢ Table of property rezonings sought (if applicable)
- ▢ References to other key documents, data or resources (if applicable)

#### *Diagrams/Photos*

- ▢ photos of key items referenced (at least 1-2 in all plans for visual interest)
- ▢ design concepts (if applicable)
- ▢ development and investment areas and concepts (if applicable)