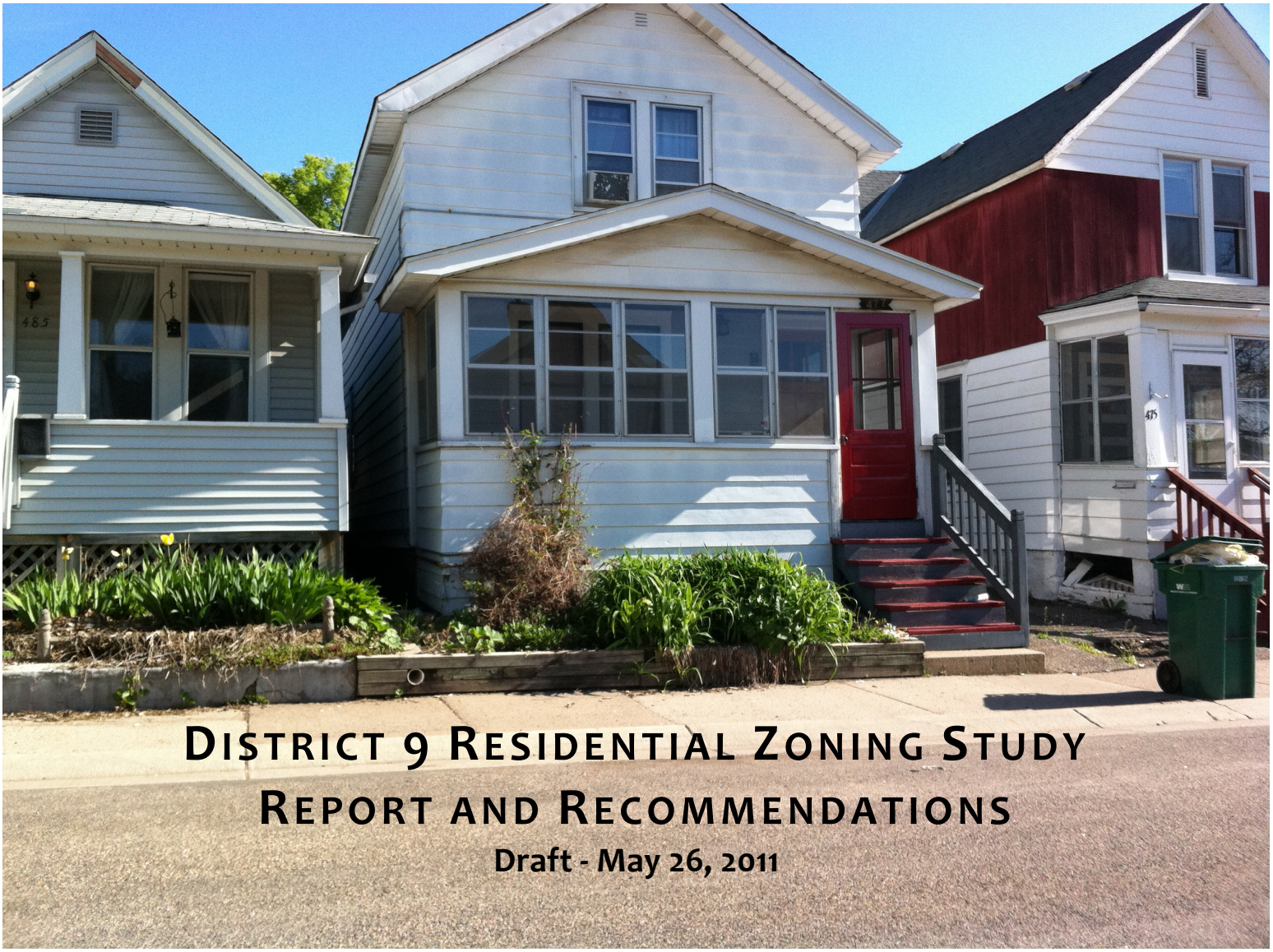

District 9 Residential Zoning Study
Report and Recommendations

Draft - May 26, 2011

BACKGROUND

On October 27, 2010, the Saint Paul City Council passed a resolution requesting a zoning study of rezoning the area of District 9 bounded by Grand Avenue to the North, Interstate 35E to the Northwest, Smith Avenue to the East, Shepard Road to the Southeast and Grace Street to the South. In its resolution, the City Council expressed concern about residential structures originally constructed as single-family homes that have subsequently been converted into duplex or triplex homes leading to serious adverse affects when these converted homes are no longer owner occupied or where such converted homes are not occupied for extended periods of time.

The purpose of the zoning study described in the resolution is to "assess the impact of converting single-family homes into multifamily residences [in the study area] as well as to make any recommendations regarding down-zoning or any other amendment(s) to the City's official controls which would preserve the prevailing character of the said neighborhood." A moratorium on the issuance of zoning and building permits or approvals that would permit an existing single-family home in the study area to be converted to a two- or three-unit dwelling is also in place.

PLANNING PRECEDENTS

The District 9 Area Plan, adopted by the City Council on July 7, 2010, envisions a growing community that integrates new housing units into the existing density of the community, maintains the existing housing stock, and retains its character. The plan addresses a number of housing issues of concern to District 9 residents, as well as key strategies related to residential zoning:

> 1. Maintain the character of existing residential areas by keeping zoning appropriate to residential neighborhoods.
> ...
> 3. Study rezoning the area of District 9 bounded by Grand Avenue to the North, Interstate 35E to the Northwest, Smith Avenue to the East, Shepard Road to the Southeast and Grace Street to the South to assess the impact of the conversion of single family homes to multi-family residences and consider downzoning with the intent to prevent future conversions of single-family homes and require deconversion of homes designed as single-family when the property has been vacant for 365 days.

The Land Use Plan, adopted as part of City of Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, describes Established Neighborhoods as places characterized almost entirely by single-family houses and duplexes, as well as scattered small scale multi-family housing, and states that the character of Established Neighborhoods should be maintained (LU-1.5). Most of the land within the study area is designated as Established Neighborhoods. The density goal for Established Neighborhoods is 3-20 units per acre.

The Land Use Plan also designates two kinds of corridors for growth – Mixed-Use Corridors and Residential Corridors. Mixed-Use Corridors are thoroughfares that are served by public transit and include areas where two or more land uses occur in close proximity. West 7th Street, which runs through the heart of the study area, is designated as a Mixed-Use Corridor. Residential Corridors are street corridors that run through Established Neighborhoods and are characterized by medium-density residential uses. Western Avenue, which runs north-south through the study area, and Saint

Clair Avenue, which runs east-west, are designated as Residential Corridors. The density goal for Residential Corridors is 4-30 units/acre.

The City of Saint Paul Housing Plan, adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan, includes policies on increasing housing choice across the city to support economically diverse neighborhoods (H-1.1). These choices should include a mix of rental and ownership units, a range of housing types, and diversity of income levels.

STUDY AREA TODAY

EXISTING LAND USE

The study area today consists largely of single-family houses with some duplexes, triplexes, and larger multifamily housing. There are two large institutional uses in the study area: Jefferson Elementary School and the West 7th Community Center. West Seventh Street runs diagonally through the study area; because it is commercial/mixed-use character, properties along West Seventh are not being examined in this zoning study. Magic's Auto Repair (237 Richmond) is not a residential use, but is currently zoned RT2. The study area is bounded by 35E on the north and by railroad tracks and the river to the south.

Staff used a combination of field work and Ramsey County data to create a map of the existing duplexes, triplexes, and apartment buildings in the area. More duplexes and triplexes are identified in Ramsey County tax records than were found by staff in the field; many of the duplexes and triplexes identified in Ramsey County records are tax forfeited and are in the process of being returned to their original use as single-family homes. A map of current residential land uses, prepared with assistance from Fort Road Federation staff, is attached (Map 1).

Figure 1: Banfil Street

The street and block pattern in the study area is unique. Single-family lot size varies significantly, from very small (360 Emma is just 880 square feet) to fairly large (506 Harrison is 16,588 square feet). Twenty-two percent of the residential lots in the study area are 4,000 square feet or fewer. The median lot size is 4,797 square feet. There are very few alleys in the study area, and many of the streets dead end at the highway, railroad tracks, or West 7th. Streets like Banfil and Superior are very narrow and lack boulevard areas, and have very small setbacks from the street (Figure 1). There are a number of vacant houses in the area, many of which are being rehabbed (Figure 2).

Figure 2: 26-32 Douglas

EXISTING ZONING

Most of the study area north of West 7th is currently zoned RT2, except the Winslow Commons property on Western (zoned RM3) and Osceola Commons (RM2). South of West 7th, the area west of Dousman is zoned RM2, while the area to the east of Dousman is zoned RT2. A map of the current zoning is attached (Map 2).

The RT2 townhouse residential district provides for two-, three-, and four-family and townhouse structures, along with civic and institutional uses, public services and utilities that serve residents in the district. It is intended to provide for a variety of housing needs and to serve as zones of transition between one- and two-family residential districts and multiple-family residential districts and business districts. The district recognizes the existence of older residential areas of the city where larger houses have been or can be converted from single-family to two-, three-, or four-family residences in order to extend the economic life of these structures and allow the owners to justify the expenditures for repairs and modernization. The RT2 district further provides for housing that has many of the amenities of single-family dwellings arranged in a low-density, multiple-family pattern.

The RM2 medium-density multiple-family residential district is intended to provide for more extensive areas of multiple-family residential development and a variety of congregate living

arrangements, as well as uses that serve the needs of the multiple-family residential districts. It is intended to provide for comprehensive development of multiple-family uses and a balance of population concentration near major thoroughfares, transit, and related facilities.

The RM3 high-rise multiple family residential district is intended to provide sites for high density multiple-dwelling structures adjacent to high-frequency transit service and high traffic generators commonly found in the proximity of major shopping centers and areas abutting major thoroughfares and expressways. It is also designed to serve the residential needs of persons desiring apartment-type accommodations with central services as opposed to the residential patterns found in the RM1 and RM2 multiple-family residential districts. The high-rise nature of the district is provided to allow for greater density with lower coverage, which will in turn result in more open space.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, and apartments are a part of all of Saint Paul's neighborhoods, and provide a valuable range of housing choices for the community. Staff was directed to assess the impact of conversions of single-family homes to duplexes and triplexes in the study area.

The conversion of single-family homes to duplex/triplex uses may impact the surrounding neighborhood. In some cases, the impacts of duplex/triplex conversions are physical – conversions may necessitate the addition of new exterior housing features, such as external staircases that change the appearance of the house (Figure 3). Duplexes and triplexes that are used as rental housing may have negative impacts on neighbors if they are not well managed or adequately maintained, but in these cases the negative impact stems from poor management of rental property rather than duplex/triplex conversions.

The actual number of duplexes and triplexes in the study area seems to have decreased dramatically over the last 25 years (down from 163 duplexes and triplexes in the area in 1986 to 90 in 2011 – a 45 percent decrease). In recent years, at least, there have not been many conversions of single-family homes to duplexes/triplexes.; there are only eleven duplexes/triplexes now that were single-family houses in 1986.

Figure 3: 295 Goodhue

Staff performed a field assessment of whether existing duplexes/triplexes

are original or converted single-family houses (Map 1). Classification of duplexes/triplexes as converted or original was based on field observation of house form, entryways, porch configurations, etc. (Figure 4). In cases where it was not clear that a property was originally built as a duplex/triplex, staff assumed the property was converted. Twenty-one percent of the area's duplexes /triplexes appear to be original.

Figure 4: 373 Goodrich (top) and 204 Ann (bottom)

Under the current RT and RM2 zoning, parcels must meet minimum lot size standards to accommodate multiple units. For a new duplex, or a conversion of a one-family house to a duplex, the lot must be at least 6,000 square feet and 50 feet wide. For a new triplex or conversion to a triplex, the lot must be at least 9,000 square feet and 50 feet wide. Yard setback requirements and lot coverage maximums must also be met. Map 3 shows parcels in the study area that are large enough and have sufficient lot widths to accommodate a duplex under the current zoning (setbacks and lot coverage were not considered in the analysis). Of the 758 parcels that are currently zoned RT2 or Rm2 in the study area, 109 parcels meet the lot-size requirements for duplexes (14 percent). Again, however, there does not appear to be significant development/conversion pressure on these lots in the current market.

PROPOSED ZONING

R4 zoning is a good fit for most of the study area. Map 4 shows the proposed zoning. The R4 one-family residential district provides for an environment of predominantly low-density, one-family dwellings along with civic and institutional uses, public services and utilities that serve the residents in the districts. R4 zoning reflects the current land use of predominantly single-family homes, and makes sense given the area's many small lots, lack of alleys, and narrow roadways. 44 duplexes/triplex properties would become nonconforming under the proposed R4 zoning.

There are some places where staff recommends zoning other than R4:

1. Parcels that are currently being used for multifamily housing. There are a number of four-plexes in the study area that would become nonconforming under R4 zoning, and are instead generally proposed to retain their current RT2 zoning or be downzoned to RT2 from RM2. The Superior Street Cottages at Duke/Superior would also retain their RT2 zoning (Figure 5). There are a few exceptions where the multifamily housing is built on small lots and where RT1 zoning seems to be a better fit, like 371 Sturgis (a four-plex on a 3,049 square foot lot).

Figure 5: Superior Street Cottages

2. Parcels containing original duplexes/triplexes or parcels in areas where there are three or more duplexes/triplexes or multifamily-housing properties clustered together. These parcels are generally proposed to be downzoned from RT2 to RT1. The RT1 two-family residential district provides for an environment of predominantly low density one- and two-family dwellings along with civic and institutional uses and public services and utilities that serve the residents in the district. The district recognizes the existence of older residential areas of the city where larger houses have been or can be converted from single-family to two-family residences in order to extend the economic life of these structures and allow the owners to justify the expenditures for repairs and modernization. 281 Banfil is an exception; Banfil's unique street character, lack of setbacks, and small lots make R4 a better choice (Figure 6).

3. Parcels with larger multi-family housing. The Winslow Commons parcel is proposed to retain its current RM3 zoning. Osceola Commons would retain its RM2 zoning, and Henry Courts would be rezoned RM2 from RT2.

4. Parcels close to West 7th and along Smith north of West 7th. Many of the parcels close to West 7ththat are zoned for residential uses may over time transition to other uses. Twenty-two parcels are proposed to be rezoned to TN1 and 22 are proposed to be rezoned TN2. The TN1 traditional neighborhood

Figure 6: 281 Banfil

district is intended to provide for compact, pedestrian-oriented mixed-use areas of limited size, with a variety of residential, office and service uses that primarily serve neighborhood needs. It is also intended to serve as a transitional use of land along major thoroughfares, between commercial or industrial districts and residential districts or other less intensive land uses. Properties proposed to be rezoned to TN1 include Magics Auto Repair shop (237 Richmond – Figure 7) , the Salvation Army property (397 Smith), MacDonald Montessori (175 Western), and St. Stanislaus church (398 Superior).

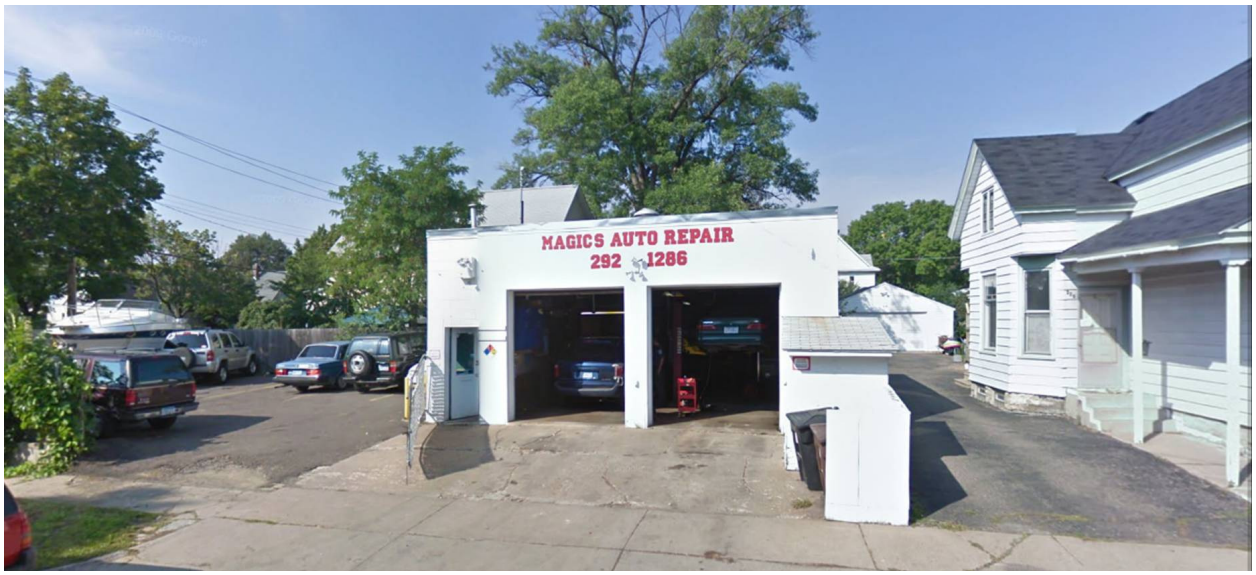

Figure 7: 237 Richmond

The TN2 traditional neighborhood district is designed for use in existing or potential pedestrian and transit nodes. Its intent is to foster and support compact, pedestrian-oriented commercial and residential development that, in turn, can support and increase transit usage. It encourages, but does not require, a variety of uses and housing types, with careful attention to the amount and placement of parking and transitions to adjacent residential neighborhoods. Properties proposed to be rezoned TN2 include some small business uses along Michigan east of Western that are currently zoned B3 and the apartments along Western south of Michigan.

5. Parcels that are currently split zoned. There are a few parcels in the study area that are split zoned between two or more zoning categories. The Degidio's parcel at 425 W. 7th is currently zoned B2 and RT2. The RT2 portion of the parcel is proposed to be rezoned B2 to match the remainder of the parcel. The Mancini's parcel at 535 W. 7th is split between RT2, B2, and VP zones. The proposed zoning changes the RT2 portion of the parcel to VP to reflect its current use as parking. 317 Goodhue is currently split zoned RM2 and B3. The proposed zoning does not change the B3 portion of the lot but proposes RT1 for the balance of the parcel.

6. Railroad parcels. There are a few railroad parcels along the southeastern boundary of the study area that are currently zoned RM2. These parcels are proposed to take on the zoning of the parcel to the south of the study area - OS between Colborne and Western and I2 between Western and Saint Clair.