

Hillcrest Engagement Details

March-April 2021

The following is a more complete summary of what the City of Saint Paul and its consultants heard during the recent input-oriented Hillcrest Master Plan engagement efforts, including 8 popup events, a conversation circle hosted by Councilmember Yang, and an online survey. Input on the draft Hillcrest Housing Policy via all efforts is presented separately at the end.

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Popups-Summary

168 engaged, 77 BIPOC* (*by observation) at 8 popups

51 prefer Hilltop, 24 prefer Jobs Focus

Most common Hilltop comments: Like more green, keeps high point, more natural, less industrial, better buffer from industrial for neighborhood to west, green space layout.

Most common Jobs Focus comments: Like more jobs, west edge buffer/integration with neighborhood, industrial located near McKnight, better tax base impact.

Most common comments about both: Concerned about too much development, too much industrial in a currently residential setting, traffic, too much housing/affordable housing, safety; Want affordable housing, want larger units (especially via the Shamrock Plaza popup), mixed-income housing.

Event-by-Event Summaries

Saturday March 27 along Furness Trail (various spots)

11am-1pm, 45 degrees and cloudy

26 engaged, 6 BIPOC*

7 prefer Hilltop, 5 prefer Jobs Focus

About Jobs Focus: Like more good paying jobs with better opportunities than retail, west edge buffer/integration with neighborhood.

About both: Concerned about trucks and traffic through neighborhood (x2), impact on quiet neighborhood, how people from Maplewood will cross McKnight, whether jobs will go to locals; want connection from west without having to go on Larpenteur, trail connection to site from Furness.

Thursday April 1 at Rose/Clarence Food Truck Court

11am-1pm, 35 degrees

8 engaged, 1 BIPOC*

3 prefer Hilltop, 3 prefer Jobs Focus

About Hilltop: Like its connectivity to allow access to jobs.

About Jobs Focus: Like that it has more jobs.

About both: Keep it as open space.

Friday April 2 at Maryland/Beaver Lake Park trail

5:20-7:30pm, 60 degrees and windy

17 engaged, 1 BIPOC*

12 prefer Hilltop, 0 prefer Jobs Focus, 1 prefers a hybrid, 3 prefer neither

About Hilltop: Like how it has more green (x5), keeps high point (x3), better buffer between industrial and residential (x2), has less industrial (x2), green space is more central where it can be used by all.

About Jobs Focus: Like industrial along McKnight.

About both: Too much industrial (x2), too much housing, too much development in general, keep it a golf course.

Saturday April 3 at Ivy/Furness

9am-12:20pm, 50 degrees and sunny

29 engaged, 5 BIPOC*

10 prefer Hilltop, 4 prefer Jobs Focus, 3 prefer neither

About Hilltop: Like how it keeps high point (x4), flow of green space rather than separated (x3), green space is central (x2), has less industrial (x2), more green space (x2), has more housing, more interesting layout, likely more tree canopy.

About Jobs Focus: Like tax base benefits/less subsidy (x3), industrial is near McKnight (x3), west edge (x2), fewer housing units.

About both: Too many people, too many apartments, buildings too tall, like the jobs, want less access to/from west, concerned about spec industrial being vacant, need stop signs on Ivy at Furness for safety of trail users, need consistent stop signs for streets crossing Furness.

Other: Deeply affordable housing is important (x2), need mixed income housing throughout (x2), avoid low-income housing (x2), need affordable housing ownership pathways for people of color.

Saturday April 10 at Hmong Village

10:30am-12:45pm

14 engaged, 14 BIPOC*, a couple via Hmong language, one via Spanish language

5 prefer Hilltop, 3 prefer Jobs Focus

About Hilltop: More natural (x2), fits the area better, park is centrally located, better separation of industrial from housing

About Jobs Focus: Jobs are the most important thing (x3)

Thursday April 16 at Shamrock Plaza (Lower Afton/McKnight)

3:30-4:15pm

10 engaged, 10 BIPOC*, most via Somali-English interpretation

1 prefers Hilltop, 0 prefer Jobs Focus

About Hilltop: High point is more natural and provides a good central gathering feature

Other: Need large units (3-4 bedrooms) in all housing types and affordable housing in all housing types

Thursday April 16 at Nebraska/Furness

4:30-6:50pm, 55 degrees

23 engaged, 4 BIPOC*

6 prefer Hilltop, 3 prefer Jobs Focus, 7 prefer hybrid

About Hilltop: Like how it keeps the high point (x4), has more green space (x2), active park location in center (x2), has less housing towards the southwest, has less industrial.

About Jobs Focus: Like the west edge design (x6), industrial towards McKnight, center spine street design, that Arlington doesn't extend into the site.

About both: Concerned about traffic (x5), too much industrial for this setting (x3), speeding traffic on Winthrop especially if it goes through to Larpenteur (x2), concerned about neighborhood safety (x2), avoid affordable housing (x2).

Note: A couple different clusters of people coalesced around a hybrid (per above preference tallies) that keeps the hilltop feature but looks like Jobs Focus south of it.

Friday April 17 at Hayden Heights Park

5-6:30pm, 55 degrees

7 prefer Hilltop, 6 prefer Jobs Focus

35 engaged, 31 BIPOC*, mostly teens-to-30s

About Hilltop: Like that it keeps the hill; green space separating industrial from neighborhood is good but insufficient

About both: Like that there will be good jobs (x2), needed housing of different kinds (x2); Want more retail (x2), farmers market, recreational spaces planned for the new residents, a place for big family picnics; Concerned about traffic, eliminating hills and trees, taxes going up, big buildings, noise.

Conversation Circle Summary

Tuesday April 6, 2021

CM Yang, Bill Dermody, and 7 invited residents

7 participants, 7 BIPOC* (*observed)

No preferences stated between the scenarios.

Strong themes of consensus:

- Affordable housing is very important
 - o rental *and* ownership
 - o apartments *and* senior
 - o including deeply affordable
- Local hiring for the jobs is very important
 - o including delivering on commitments

Other comments:

- Need transit to the site for job access
- The Port Authority should partner with minority developers
- Agriculture, farmers market, and pollution cleanup could combine for a “healthy food” theme for the site
- Look at coop ownership models to encourage minority ownership
- Concern about trucks’ impact on pedestrian safety elsewhere along McKnight (e.g. at Stillwater/Lakewood)
- Warehouses do not fit the area aesthetically – would be weird

Online Survey Summary

open March 16-April 18

136 responses

Race/Ethnicity: 6 BIPOC, 101 Caucasian, 29 other/blank/prefer not to answer

Year of Birth: 27 before 1956, 60 between 1956-1981, 46 between 1982-present, 3 blank

62 prefer Hilltop, 18 prefer Jobs Focus, 13 like components of both, 44 don't like either

(among BIPOC, 3 prefer Hilltop, 2 like neither, 0 like Jobs Focus or both)

What people like about Hilltop: More green space (58), preserves high point/topography (38), has more housing (25), green space locations/layout (17), housing locations/layout (13), thoughtful layout overall (8), west edge buffer (7), good mix of uses (6), light industrial location (4), has less industrial (3), has fewer through streets from the west (1).

Most frequent concerns/dislikes about Hilltop: Light industrial location (24), too much height/residential density (20), traffic (16), west edge (12), green space locations/layout (6), subsidy/tax impact (3), not enough jobs (3), poor connectivity to the west (2), layout generally (1), removes the most ecologically significant wetland (1), lacks direct bike connection to Arlington (1).

What people like about Jobs Focus: West edge buffer/design (29), housing locations/layout (23), light industrial location nearer McKnight (21), more jobs (19), more lower-density housing (14), green space locations/layout (6), better for subsidy/tax impact (5), layout generally (4), preserves the most ecologically significant wetland (2), better transportation connectivity to west (1), good mix of uses (1).

Most frequent concerns/dislikes about Jobs Focus: Lack of green space/wetlands (47), too much light industrial (43), lack of housing units or higher-density housing (16), loss of high point/topography (14), boring/ugly design (13), west edge lack of green buffer (9), truck traffic on McKnight (9), green space locations/layout (7), new housing too close to light industrial (3), housing layout (2).

Hopes for both: Improved multimodal (bus/bike/ped) transportation (8), affordable housing (7), more high-density housing than shown in either (6), community garden space (6), more community engagement (4), indoor gathering spaces (4), restaurants or exciting retail (3), more retail/restaurant space (2), put light industrial along Larpenteur (2), grocery store or farmers market (2), make street connections align with those (Arlington/Hoyt/Ivy) that have traffic signals at White Bear Ave (2), trail along Winthrop (1), jobs to East Siders (1), construction jobs to BIPOC people (1), orienting light industrial to nearby railway.

Concerns about both: Too much development/need more green (24), too much light industrial in this setting (23), extending Winthrop Street (10), crime/safety (8), too much med-/high-density residential in both (8), tax impact (6), poor/uninspiring master plan designs (6), affordable housing (5), tree loss (4), too big parking lots (3), property value impact (3), why pollution is being scraped rather than remediated in place to save trees (1), stormwater impacts (1), sustainability (1), if there will be enough parking (1), need for more Police/Fire services (1), wetlands impacts (1), safety at McKnight/Arlington intersection for drivers and walkers.

Want more details on: traffic impact and new signals (4), types of light industrial uses or jobs (4), building designs (4), landscaping plans (1), wages of jobs (1).

BIPOC spotlight:

(5 people, all born 1978-1992)

3 prefer Hilltop, 2 don't like either

Common themes for preferring Hilltop are more green space desired and better balance of land uses. Those who dislike both scenarios want more buffer from the west and find the design uninspiring compared to the Highland Bridge site.

Draft Housing Policy Input Summary

What We Heard Generally About Affordable Housing

There is a major split on opinions depending on race. Among BIPOC people, affordable housing is viewed as a major priority for the site and almost universally viewed positively (90%+). Among White people, there are strong opinions in both directions, with about 2/3 being opposed to affordable housing. A particular Common Bond project on Larpenteur east of the site was raised several times in a negative light. Crime, noise, and general delinquency seem to be the concerns.

What We Heard Specifically About Affordable Housing Priorities

Popups

One particular popup held with 10 mainly Somali-Americans (with interpretation) strongly emphasized the need for larger (3- or 4-bedroom) units in all housing types, rental and ownership. For many of them, this is the #1 most important issue for the entire project. Affordability of those units is also a priority.

Among those at other popups, opinions were split roughly 60% opposed to affordable and 40% in favor (although that's not the question we were asking – we asked about the draft policy, not whether to have affordable). BIPOC participants almost universally favor including affordable units. Some of those favoring affordable housing emphasize the need for *deeply* affordable ownership and rental homes.

Conversation Circle

CM Yang's conversation circle participants – all BIPOC – highlighted affordable housing as one of their two top issues (along with jobs for locals). They'd like it to include deeply affordable and a variety of types: ownership *and* rental, apartments *and* senior.

Online Survey

Among online survey respondents, 15 people stated general support for the Draft Housing Policy as presented. In regard to priorities:

- 12 want a stronger focus on affordable *ownership*;
- 5 want a focus on affordability in denser areas to allow for more affordable units;
- 3 want a commitment to *deeply* affordable housing;
- 2 want senior affordable prioritized; and
- 1 wants no senior at all.

Also, 2 people would like to see a more detailed policy (e.g. #s of units) and 1 person would like to see co-op ownership models explored.