

2024



SAINT PAUL
PLANNING & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

**SAINT PAUL
PLANNING COMMISSION**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**



COMMISSION BACKGROUND

The Saint Paul Planning Commission is a 21-member advisory body made up of resident volunteers. These volunteers are appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. The Commission reviews and makes recommendations on city planning, including comprehensive planning, zoning studies, and zoning code amendments. The Commission has four subcommittees: Zoning, Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning, Transportation, and Communications and Nominations. The Commission's decisions are informed by the community vision established in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, City policies, and by specific and ongoing community input. The Planning Commission strives to continually engage the community, involving the people who live, work, and play in Saint Paul. The 2024 Annual Report provides a summary of the Planning Commission's major activities and accomplishments over the past year.

PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (PED) UPDATES

New Planning Director, Yasmine Robinson

In 2024 we welcomed Yasmine Robinson as the new Planning Director, taking over from Luis Pereira.

2024 National Planning Conference hosted in the Twin Cities

The American Planning Association hosted their National Planning Conference in the Twin Cities in the spring. Planning Staff were involved in tours and presentation sessions.

Equity Change Team update

In 2024, the PED Equity Change Team advanced goals from the 2024 Work Plan, focusing on reframing demographic questions on applications, developing an equitable development scorecard, continuing professional development, and providing space for team members to reflect on equity considerations in professional and personal life. The team meets monthly and is led by two co-chairs, working in partnership with leadership and the City's Equity Core Team.

ZONING COMMITTEE

The Zoning Committee hears requests for Rezoning, Conditional Use Permits (CUPs), Nonconforming Use Permits (NCUPs), Determinations of Similar Use (DSUs), variances, occasional site plans, and appeals of certain administrative decisions. Information on the administration of these zoning applications can be found in [Chapter 61 of the Zoning Code](#).

Rezoning: requests for amendments to a zoning district boundary or to a property's zoning district designation; reviewed by Planning Commission and then by City Council

Conditional Use Permits: requests for land uses that are subject to certain established conditions laid out in the Zoning Code; reviewed by Planning Commission

Nonconforming Use Permits: requests for pre-existing land uses that are not in conformance with the Zoning Code and are subject to established conditions; reviewed by Planning Commission

Determinations of Similar Use: requests for approval of land uses that are not listed in the Zoning Code but may be substantially similar to a regulated use. When not reviewed administratively by the Zoning Administrator, they are referred to and reviewed by the Planning Commission

Variances: requests for deviation from strict enforcement of Code standards, subject to established findings outlined in State Statute; reviewed by the Board of Zoning Appeals or Planning Commission

Site Plan Reviews: requests for approval of a site design; typically approved administratively but may be referred to and reviewed by Planning Commission

Appeals: review of an administrative or Planning Commission decision when it is alleged that an error was made; reviewed by Planning Commission or City Council

A total of 30 applications were submitted to the Zoning Committee of the Planning Commission in 2024, 3 fewer than the previous year. The five-year trend for total number of cases and type of cases is represented in Figure 1 below. Conditional use permits and rezonings were the most common type of zoning application in 2024, a continued trend from years past.

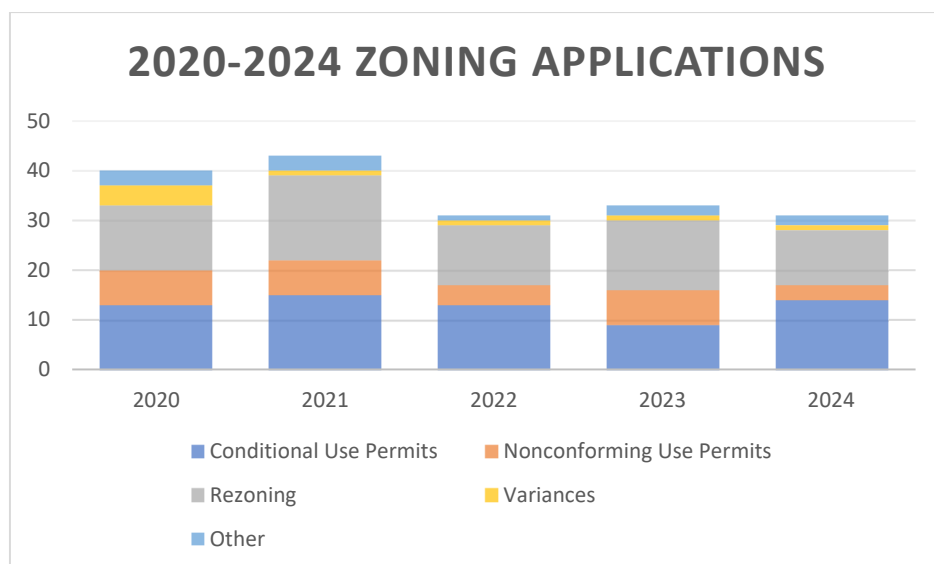


Figure 1: 2020-2024 Zoning Applications

Figure 2 showcases zoning cases by ward. Ward 6 fielded the most cases with 8. Ward 5 did not see any zoning cases at Planning Commission.

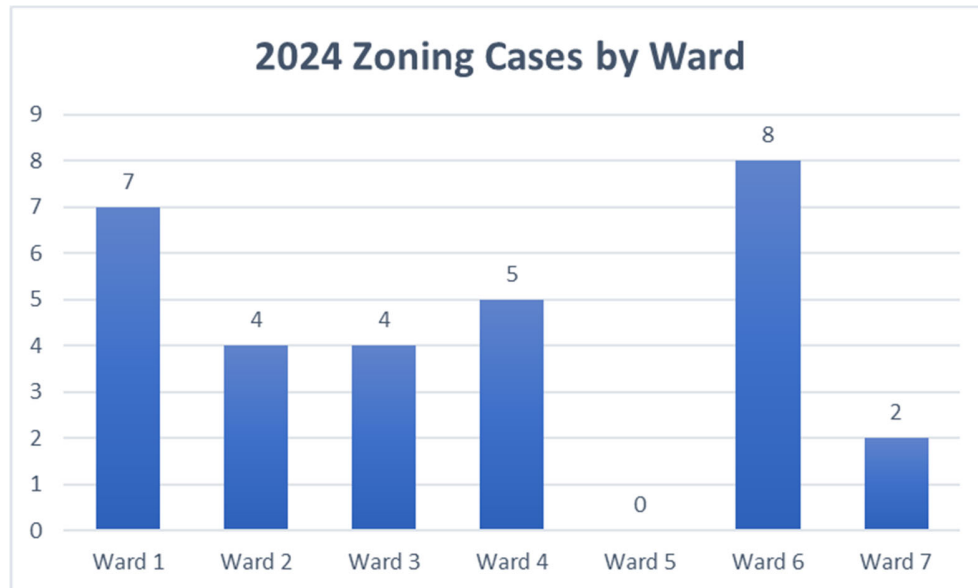


Figure 2: 2024 Zoning Cases by Ward

Figure 3 displays the spatial distribution of the different types of zoning cases heard at Planning Commission in 2024.

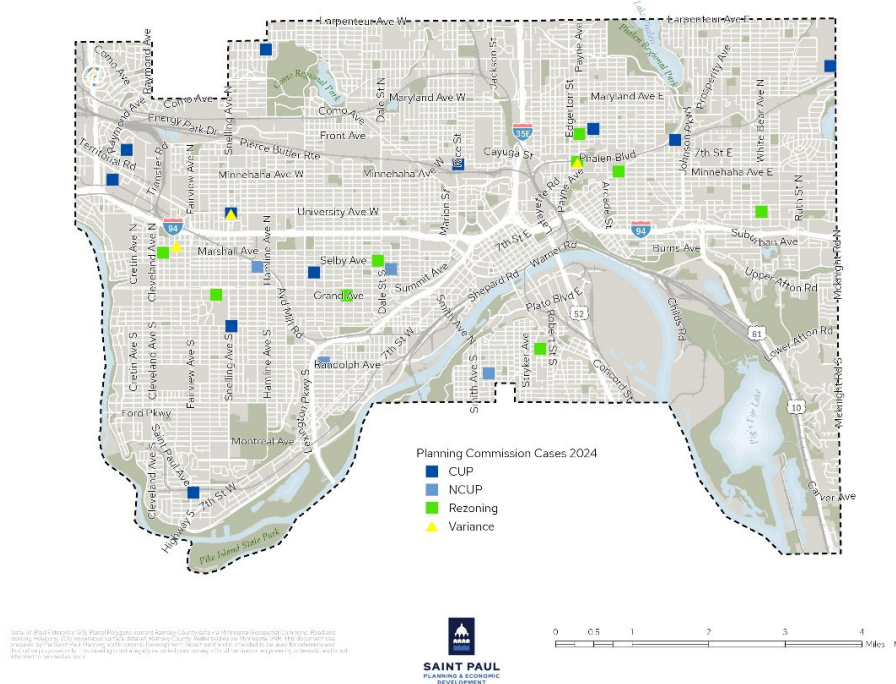


Figure 3: Spatial Distribution of 2024 Zoning Cases

COMPREHENSIVE & NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Comprehensive and Neighborhood Planning Committee (CNPC) advises the Planning Commission on zoning studies, the adoption of zoning code text amendments, as well as comprehensive and neighborhood planning district planning items. Planning staff conduct research and develop zoning studies that are prioritized as implementation actions of the Comprehensive Plan and/or the Administration. District Plans are reviewed and, following a public hearing and any updates, are recommended to the City Council to be adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan. The CNPC discusses both citywide and neighborhood projects.

ZONING STUDIES, CODE TEXT AMENDMENTS, AND POLICY STUDIES

Cannabis Zoning Amendment

Staff were directed to study cannabis and to develop Zoning Code amendments for new cannabis businesses in Saint Paul. In September 2024, the City Council unanimously approved zoning amendments that outline where different types of legal cannabis operations can locate in Saint Paul. These regulations will help support the local economy, promote public safety, and mitigate potential negative impacts to neighborhoods. The newly created Minnesota State Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) will begin licensing cannabis businesses in 2025 and cities will be partially responsible for regulating those new businesses.

East Grand Avenue Overlay District Adoption

In August 2024, the City Council voted unanimously to adopt zoning amendments that improve development flexibility, support small business, and enhance neighborhood walkability along the East Grand Avenue Corridor. The zoning amendments were prepared after a two-year research and outreach effort that included seven meetings with an advisory committee and technical analyses completed by City staff.

T District Zoning Study Update

Planning staff continued work on the T District Zoning Study that was initiated by the Planning Commission in 2022 and anticipates Planning Commission review of the zoning study and proposed amendments in early 2025. The intent of the study is to develop zoning code text amendments to the T Districts to allow pedestrian-oriented development flexibility along corridors, consistent with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The study will also examine a density bonus for affordable housing.

First adopted in 2004, the T Districts are intended to foster the development and growth of compact, pedestrian-oriented areas with a compatible mix of commercial and residential uses. T Districts are a prevalent zoning district designated for properties in walkable and transit-oriented environments (see Figure 4).

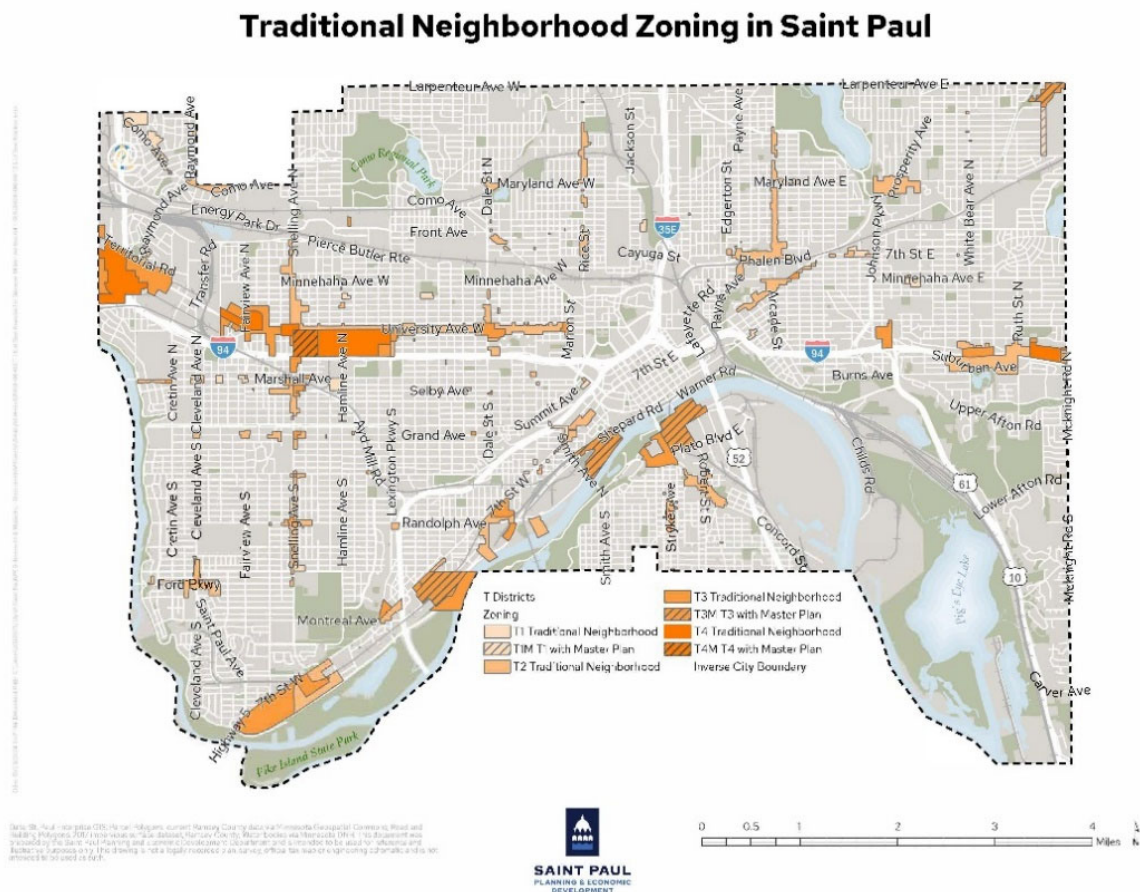


Figure 4: T District Zoning

Drive Through Zoning Study

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Drive Throughs Zoning Study and recommended a set of code amendments to the Mayor and City Council that would address problems with drive throughs (queuing that spills off-site, unsafe pedestrian access, etc.) and better align their design and implementation with City policies. The recommendation included a prohibition on new drive throughs associated with restaurants and coffee shops. The Mayor and City Council are expected to make a decision on the study in 2025.

MRCCA Local Ordinance

Staff work continued on the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) ordinance. A public hearing was held at Planning Commission in 2023. A revised set of rules that responds to the hearing comments will come before the Planning Commission in 2025.

DISTRICT AND SMALL AREA PLANNING

District 11 Neighborhood Plan

In 2024, the Hamline Midway Coalition prepared a draft update to their District Plan. PED worked with City departments to review and provide comments on the draft policies and community outreach approach, which the District Council then addressed before providing a final version for public review. In early 2025, PED staff will begin the public review process by presenting the draft District Plan update to the Planning Commission, City Council, and Metropolitan Council.

River Balcony Master Plan Addendum

The River Balcony Basis of Design Report was recommended by the Planning Commission as an addendum to the River Balcony Master Plan that was adopted in 2017. This allows the refined plans for the River Balcony to progress through the various phases of development as funding becomes available. The River Balcony is a 1.5 mile public path from Union Depot to the Science Museum that offers walking, seating, gathering, and places for public activities and is designed to be a catalyst for economic development.

OVERALL SITE PLAN

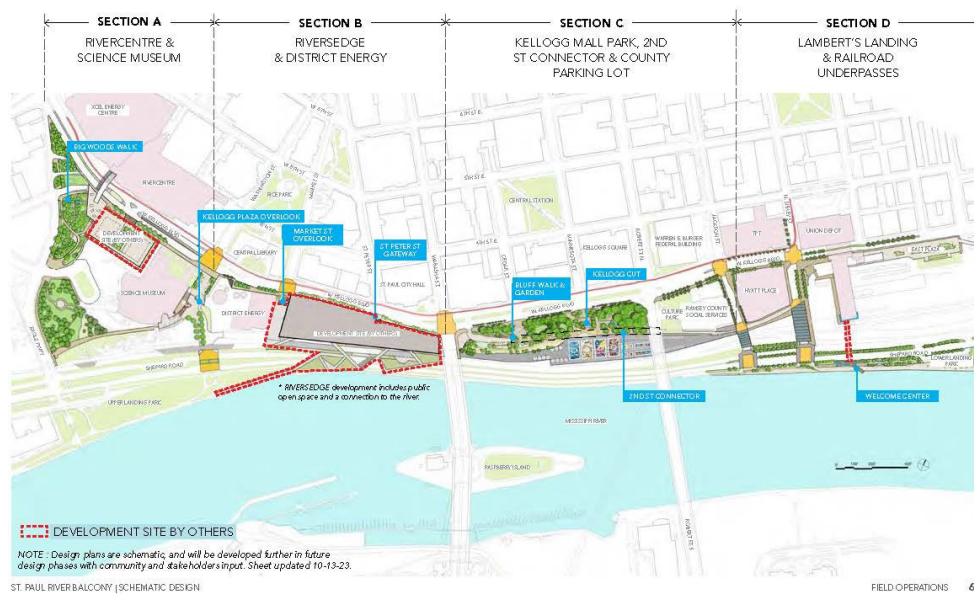


Figure 5: River Balcony Site Plan c/o River Balcony Project Team

LARGE DEVELOPMENT SITES

The Heights/Hillcrest Update

Sewer, water, district stormwater, geothermal, and other infrastructure was partially installed in 2024 to support the planned 112-acre mixed-use development. Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity began vertical construction on their 147 affordable ownership residences and Xcel Energy received final site plan approval for their new service center and fleet building. Full buildout is anticipated to have approximately 1,000 jobs and 1,000 housing units.



Figure 6: The Heights Construction c/o Habitat for Humanity

United Village Update (Snelling-Midway)

Development is underway at United Village (Snelling-Midway Redevelopment Site) after Planning Commission action on eight variances and a conditional use permit and staff review of five site plans. Two new parks opened in 2024, one featuring an accessible playground and the other featuring a plaza with a large loon sculpture. Preliminary site work has begun in preparation for two restaurants, a new office building, and new hotel north of the professional soccer stadium.



Figure 7: "The Calling" c/o of Bill Lindeke

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The Transportation Committee advises the Planning Commission, the City Council, and staff on transportation planning and project decisions, and creates a transparent public forum for such discussions. The committee's work helps better integrate land use and transportation decisions as they relate to zoning, neighborhood and comprehensive planning, and infrastructure investments.

Saint Paul Bicycle Plan

Public Works presented the citywide Bicycle Plan to the Transportation Committee and full Planning Commission in 2024 to receive their recommendations. The substantial update of the 2015 plan focuses on increasing the number of separated bikeways, incorporates network additions made in recent years, identifies new priorities/opportunities, and adds policy guidance for operations, maintenance, and funding to ensure a high level of service of the bike network. The City Council also approved in 2024 and, as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan, it is in the Metropolitan Council's review process.

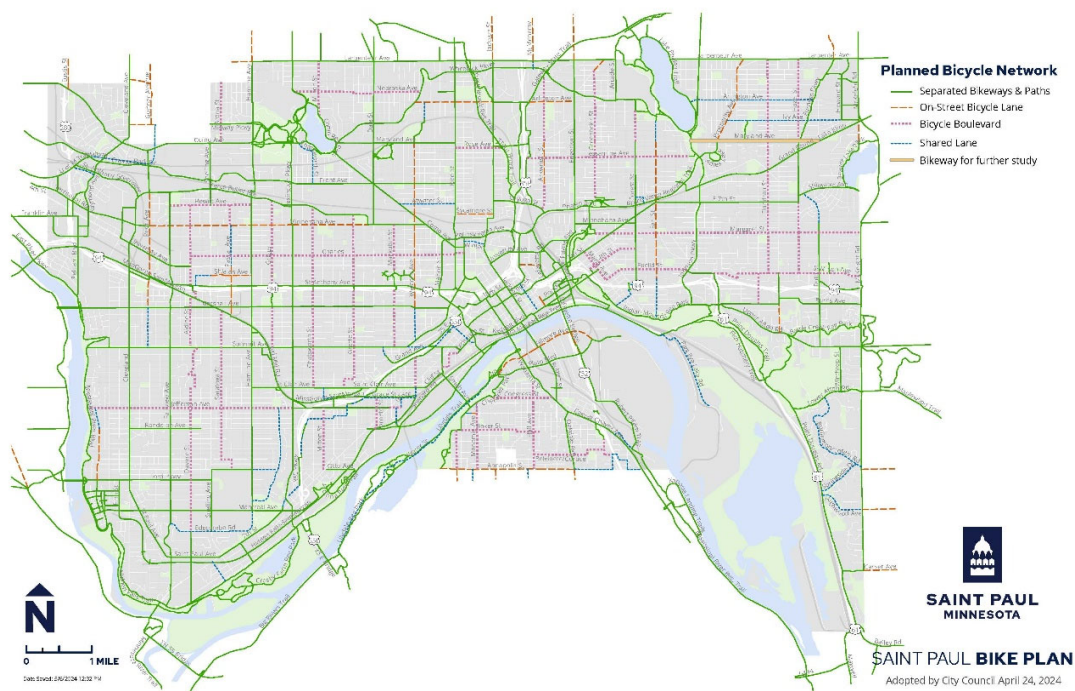


Figure 8: Saint Paul Planned Bike Network

COMMUNICATIONS & NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

The Communications and Nominations Committee aims to increase public knowledge and educate the community about the work of the Planning Commission. Committee members assist City staff with recruitment while reviewing and making recommendations of applications from members of the community to fill Planning Commission vacancies. Committee members also review and approve the Planning Commission Annual Report. The Committee provides more inclusive community engagement

efforts by supporting planning staff in developing and delivering planning-related training in the community. Mayor Carter has expressed a goal of having youth commissioners serve on every City of Saint Paul board and commission. To this end, in 2022, the Transportation Committee appointed two youth members (non-Planning Commissioners) to participate in the decision-making process, and in 2023, the Planning Commission appointed a youth commissioner. The Communications and Nominations Committee strives to ensure that younger voices are represented on Planning Commission committees. The Committee and City staff plans to prioritize additional youth recruitment in 2024.

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS SERVING IN 2024

2024 Planning Commission Members: *Kristine Gill (Chair), Nieeta Presley (First Vice Chair), Jeff Risberg (Second Vice Chair), Mauricio J. Ochoa Rosales (Secretary), Troy Hackney, Richard Holst, Nathaniel Hood, Ismael J. Khadar, Jake Reilly, Omar Syed, Elizabeth Starling, Simon Taghioff, Seanne Thomas, Ianni Houmas, Brian Martinson, Luis E. Ortega, Jacy Johnson Becker.*

Looking back – Highlights from 2019!

Five whole years ago, the Planning Commission and its committees in the review and approval process of the 2040 Comprehensive plan: Saint Paul for All! Over 2,300 residents were involved and over 1,200 written comments were received during the process. Commissioners reviewed and made changes and finally approved the plan in March of 2019! Also in 2019, the Gold Line plans were forming between St Paul and Woodbury, so we will see those come to fruition in just a few more months, this March. Planning Commissioners also reviewed small area plans for Stryker Ave, Frogtown, and Highland Park, as well as a Climate Action and Resiliency Plan that year.

2025 Goals for the Planning Commission

- Commercial Corridor Planning
- MRCCA Adoption
- HUD Consolidated Plan