



Greater East Side Community Council

8/24/20

To: Bill Dermody, City Planner
Hillcrest Citizen Advisory Committee
Councilmembers Yang, Brendmoen, Jalali, Prince, Noecker, Thao & Tolbert
Mayor Melvin Carter

The Greater East Side (District 2) Community Council at its August 19, 2020 board meeting unanimously approved a motion to strongly urge the Hillcrest Community Advisory Committee (CAC), PED staff and consulting team to develop one additional development plan for the Hillcrest Development site without the restriction of "saving" one specific hilltop.

The current four plans developed by PED staff for consideration are dominated by one, singular, hilltop feature purported to be the highest point on the site, a modified hill in the northwestern section. Staff has determined that this hill is the significant, irreplaceable feature that the sight plan rules requires to be saved regardless of the other hilltops intermixed in the site that are as high if not higher. We understand that the City Council will determine if this singular hilltop will be the defining feature of the development. Our concern is that the determination will not be made until after the Community Advisory Committee is disbanded. If the final proposal is rejected, PED staff and/or possibly the owner of the site could make a recommendation for approval without neighborhood engagement. In this scenario, this limits the options and the potential for community recommendation. It was the neighborhood's belief that the only limitations on visioning for the Master Plan was the City's recommendation of the creation of one thousand jobs and one thousand new housing units on the site.

The choice of that specific hill when wetlands, green space and trees are arbitrarily moved in all four proposals is confounding. There was never a monument accessible to the public outside the course notifying the public that this "irreplaceable feature" even existed. There is no person alive today who has ever picnicked there, skied there, tobogganed there or were a part of a community festival on that specific hilltop. It has no connection to the community.

The neighborhood has no strong feelings "for" or "against" this specific hilltop or the amount of space intended for passive & active greenspace. To determine that this feature is so important as to limit the visioning process for the CAC is a travesty especially when the City has placed such a high emphasis as late on community engagement and transparency of process. The CAC must be able to review what a site plan would look like if it were to maximize the potential of the site to be the best place to live and work and play in Saint Paul. Our preference would have been that there were four plans that started with that position and one plan that showed the City Council what it would settle for if it determined "the hill" was a significant irreplaceable feature. Giving the current proposals we urge the CAC to not make any recommendation on a Master Plan until it reviews at least one plan that did not have this severe restriction.

Sincerely on behalf of the Greater East Side Community Council,

Lisa Theis, Program Director