

## Highwood Plan Background

### Presentation to Totem Town Task Force of District One – November 9, 2016

#### Early Planning Efforts Prior to Highwood Plan

- 1968 Metropolitan Council Development Guide depicted Highwood as partially developed.
- 1970 Citizen's League Report "A River to Use and Enjoy" recommended Mississippi River and adjacent blufflands be declared a state Critical Area/protect steep slopes of Highwood.
- 1970 City prepares "A Comprehensive Plan for the Mississippi Waterfront in the City of Saint Paul."
- 1971 City initiates study to develop street and public services plan for Highwood.
- 1975 Metropolitan Council adopts recommendations for Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area Designation. Much of Highwood recommended as "Urban Open Space" District.
- 1976 Executive Order 130 – Gov. Wendell Anderson designates Miss R. Critical Area and protection of slopes and creation of a comprehensive plan for the Area. Cities along river required to adopt local rules.
- 1979 City completes a street and sewer study for Highwood "to guide development when and if it occurs, so as not to further strain the fragile ecosystems of Highwood." Adopted by City Council.
- 1980 U.S. Congress created a Metropolitan River Corridors Study Committee which issued a report in 1986 recommending a special federal designation for the corridor (same boundaries as 1976 Critical Area) including Highwood.
- 1980 City Staff Report "Highwood Development – Too Much Too Soon" to classify lands by suitability for development. It was also used as a guide for implementation of the 1979 Street and Sewer Plan.
- 1980 Original District One Plan approved by District One, the Planning Commission and City Council.
- 1985 District One Plan updated by a neighborhood-based planning committee and approved by District Council (Oct 28) adopted by the Planning Commission (Nov 22) and City Council (Dec 12.)
- 1988 U.S. Congress passed and President signed a bill creating the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area – a unit of the National Park Service "to protect, preserve and enhance the significant values of the waters and lands" and to "assure orderly public and private development."

#### Development, Adoption and Implementation of the Highwood Plan

- 1988 April City Council requests that District One Council form Highwood Task Force
- May Highwood Task Force formed with land, water and street subcommittees.  
16 Highwood community members, 4 District One Council members, 2 city staff.
- 1989 Jan Land Committee Report completed (addressing Totem Town) and adopted by the Task Force and incorporated into final plan.
- Feb Highwood Plan submitted to District One Council - formally adopted the Plan on 2/27/1989.

- 1989 April St. Paul Planning Commission Hearing at Battle Creek School (April 2, 1989.)
- 1990 July The City Council adopts a set of Highwood Development Policies to implement the Highwood Plan. The policies require amendments to city ordinances and the Comprehensive Plan. A moratorium on new development in Highwood established.
- 1991 May City staff presents set of proposed amendments to City Comprehensive Plan to District One to implement the Highwood Plan and the Highwood Development Policies  
 June District One Council Hearing Committee holds public hearing on proposed Highwood Amendments followed by District One Council meeting on June 24.  
 Nov City Council adopts Highwood Comprehensive Plan and ordinance amendments on 11/21/1991  
 Dec City staff prepares a summary of the new regulations and update on status of Highwood Development Moratorium. (The Moratorium expired on January 7, 1992.)
- 1992 Jan Development Moratorium expires in Highwood.
- 1995 April City staff provides a summary of "Highwood Development Policies and Regulations for Implementation." This document contains the same recommendation made by the Highwood Task Force and adopted by the City in 1990 (and still in effect today):  
"G8. In the event Totem Town becomes available for alternative uses, it should be designated as public open space with appropriate areas set aside as undeveloped natural areas representative of the region's ecosystem."

#### Most Recent Planning Activities and Recommendations

- 1997 "Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework" adopted by the City.
- 2007 "Great River Park Chapter of the "Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework" adopted as more specific guidance for implementing the development framework.
- 2007 May City launched a year-long collaborative planning process to create what was to become "The Great River Passage Master Plan" to guide protection, enhancement and future development along the 17 miles of Mississippi River in Saint Paul.
- 2009 MN DNR begins process of updating critical area rules – the process is still ongoing without resolution.
- 2011 June Draft plan rolled out for formal review, involving over 1000 people and many public meetings.
- 2013 April City Council adopts final Great River Passage Master Plan. Plan specifically addresses Highwood Bluffs. (go to <http://www.greatriverpassage.org/>) Blufflands immediately adjacent (to the West of Totem Town) are shown as areas for protection but not Totem Town specifically.
- 2014 Jan Ramsey County/District One holds public meeting to discuss possible closure of Totem Town.
- 2016 Jan District One hears from Ramsey County regarding updated plans and discusses creating a community-based task force to evaluate options for the future and make recommendations.  
 July Ramsey County Board votes to begin planning for a replacement facility for Totem Town. District One begins process for creation of Totem Town Task Force.  
 Oct First meeting of Totem Town Task Force held.

Highwood Plan  
Presentation at City Land use Committee Hearing  
January 16, 1990

My name is Dan McGuinness. I am a resident of the Highwood Neighborhood of St. Paul. I have served on the Highwood Task Force, a group formed by the District One Council at the request of the St. Paul City Council.

Our charge was to develop for District One and then City consideration, a plan for the ongoing development of this neighborhood - one of the earliest settled neighborhoods, but one that has become urbanized only recently. In fact there are still residents of the neighborhood who live upon the land they once farmed.

A 16 member citizen task force was formed in May of 1988 and, during a 10 month period it logged nearly 1000 hours working first as three separate committees - land, water, and streets, and then as a full task force.

During that ten month period, the task force, with help from city staff, private consultants, District One, and the watershed district, did extensive research about the existing land uses, topography, soil, water and geologic characteristics, previous planning efforts, and current plans and regulations in effect in the neighborhood.

On the basis of this research, the Task Force prepared a summary of its findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This information, in the form of a 150 page report and set of appendices, was adopted by unanimous affirmative vote of the members of the task force and only one dissenting vote from the audience on January 13, 1989. At that meeting three modifications were proposed to the report.

The report was presented on two separate occasions to the District One Council. The council, on February 27, 1989, after a lively discussion with the audience, and after including 3 amendments, adopted the report by unanimous vote of the District One Council.

During the last 11 months the residents of the neighborhood have continued to work with city staff and amongst themselves to learn more about each other's points of views, concerns, and where we agree and disagree. It has been a reasonable process in spite of a few jolts now and then - more often due to misunderstandings than serious differences. We are continuing with the process - as evidenced by this evenings meeting and forthcoming ones during the next few weeks.

The report that has been submitted to the City contains, in the beginning, a set of general recommendations dealing with land use and density, the provision of water, sanitary and surface runoff control services, street design, and protection and preservation of the steep slopes, vegetation, and natural character of the neighborhood.

Tonight you have before you, in summary form, the recommendations of the Task Force as well as the response from the City Staff. We hope there is an opportunity tonight for people to present additional information and points of view.

We on the Highwood Streering Committee, have some additional information that this Committee requested at our earlier meeting. We have a proposal that we hope will resolve one of the concerns that has been expressed regarding minimum lot sizes. We will present that information at the appropriate time.

I am not going to go through the recommendations now, as we will be doing that momentarily - section by section. But I would like to conclude with a couple of observations that I hope will provide a useful context for your deliberations as this report moves through the committee process:

1. The first observation is one that reflects the human element of the neighborhood. Like most residential neighborhoods in the City, Highwood has a population that is made up of a mixture of families whose parents and grandparents settled here - as well as more recent homebuyers and renters. Both the "oldtimers" and "newcomers" have an interest in maintaining both the character of the neighborhood as well as property values. Young families see the neighborhood as a good place to raise their children. Older residents enjoy a neighborhood that feels like home.



Because there are nearly 300 acres of land in the neighborhood that are vacant, about 130 acres of which are less than 18% slope, we are different than other more built-up neighborhoods. We have a number of vacant parcel owners - many who have owned their property for many years - who are very concerned that their property will be able to be developed in a manner that is economically feasible for themselves or subsequent real estate developers.

On the other hand, there are homeowners who are concerned that the remaining vacant land be not so extensively developed that both the existing character of the neighborhood, as well as potentially their own property values, are threatened.

The Highwood neighborhood - the people who live here - both oldtimers and newcomers, have been working during this planning process and continue to communicate and work together - to find the common ground that respects both objectives. We recognize that some compromise is likely, but, in doing so, we must not lose sight of the other important consideration that the Task Force has dealt with and must continue to consider. Which brings me to my second observation:

2. The second observation has to do with the environment of the neighborhood - the topography, geology, soils, groundwater, plant and animal life, and the protection of these valuable resources in an urban context.

The Task Force planning process sought to develop a plan that is a middle ground between no-growth and maximum growth. To do that we looked at the capacity of the natural resources to, quite literally as well as figuratively, absorb the impacts of human settlement.

As a result of a very deliberate process of looking at the environment and categorizing the land as suitable or unsuitable for development by current city zoning standards, and looking at issues such as surface water runoff, vegetative cover, topography, and the like, we were able to develop a map showing, on a parcel by parcel basis, which lands are still available for development and which are not, which of those parcels are vacant and which are not, and those which are currently served by sewer, water, paved streets, and stormwater controls, and those which are not. As a result of a very deliberate effort, we came up with the specific recommendations you have before you.

Having established that, we further developed criteria for developing those parcels that are able to be developed. Those criteria include minimum lot sizes and therefore maximum density for housing development in the neighborhood. Those criteria also include assuring that, even with development, environmental resources and human health and safety are cared for through recommendations regarding sewer and water, surface water controls, vegetative cutting, erosion controls, and street design, among others.

The Highwood environment and the Highwood people are the Highwood Neighborhood and give it its character and its quality. Our goal, through this plan for the future, is to protect and preserve the character and qualities of this neighborhood, for all of its people through controlled development.

In conclusion, I want to repeat to you a thought I had on Sunday as I walked through the neighborhood and then had again on Monday as I poured over aerial photos and topo maps of this community, this neighborhood:

"Our work is just beginning. What we have done to this point is create a vision of what we want this place to be. To forge it into reality, we need to continue to focus on the key assets that we have - recognize them and protect them - and secondly, we need to continue to build a strong constituency within the neighborhood for protection and sensitive development. What we are all about is not just adopting a plan, but sustaining a neighborhood. What we are all about is not just hammering out recommendations, but, in true community fashion - taking care of one another."

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