

HILLCREST REDEVELOPMENT URBAN DESIGN WORKGROUP

Meeting Minutes | Thursday, February 17, 2022

Attendees

- Andrew Wise
- Donna Peterson
- Jennifer Brannen
- Rachel Finazzo Doll
- Julie Guzman
- Monte Hilleman
- Laurie Siever
- Jess Vetrano
- Tiffani Navatril

Meeting Summary

1. Arts & Employment District
 - a. Goals of the Port Authority are first and foremost to create jobs that provide adequate salaries and a good living, expand the tax base to reduce burdens on existing residents, and advance sustainable development to build the best buildings we can for the future
 - b. Very few of residents in the Hillcrest area work there, and those who work there tend to live elsewhere – our goal is to reverse this and attract jobs that will go to area residents
 - c. Light industrial developers do not need a beautiful building to function – they need an efficient building – but zoning codes have required items that intend to enhance the architectural characteristics and make these buildings better to look at
 - i. We can do better. Right now, the result still doesn't lead to the best pedestrian experience to walk by/live by/interact with
 - ii. The Port wants to go even further and make these buildings something people want to live near
 - d. Livability, environmental stewardship, and financial viability are the interlacing goals that we are trying to achieve with these buildings
 - i. Livability is enhanced with a layered landscape between the building in the street
 - ii. Strategically placed artwork replaces obsolete unnecessary/unsuccessful architectural requirements and maximizes a developer's investment in their building without compromising use
 - iii. Solar panels can be incorporated into the building facades as well as functional, architectural interest
 - iv. Rooftop solar will also be incorporated to maximize otherwise unused roof space
 - e. Visual renderings of how the streetscape and this proposed arts and employment district would feel to passersby were discussed, with the caveat that in real life there would be more trees than can be included in renderings without blocking everything
 - i. These renderings had to be developed in advance of any design to present the quality of the development the port is trying to achieve, so it is important to acknowledge that they do not represent final designs

- f. Local artists should be included in this process, and community-curated themes will be pursued and facilitated by the eastside arts council
 - i. Port has a history of sourcing local artists and connecting them with projects, and will plan on coaching developers that are selected for this site to include their art on the buildings
 - ii. The owner/user breakdown has not be established yet, but the covenants are what guide what developers can do once the Port Authority doesn't own it any more

2. Blocks

- a. Comprehensive plans guide the identification of the Hillcrest site as a location for a neighborhood node for both Saint Paul and Maplewood, and this is to specifically forward Saint Paul's goals to create a 20-minute city
 - i. Maplewood is also planning to rezone/densify this corner of their city in their 2040 plan
 - ii. Both plans are addressing the shortage in relation to the housing demand in the Twin Cities
 - iii. This "Node" defines just a combination of uses that creates walkability and energy in an area, and will likely include apartment buildings with ground floor retail – parking for this would likely be below the building, and potentially somewhat behind the buildings
 - iv. New housing would prioritize families, and could roughly include 2,000 new residents based on the proposed densities, but exact future populations are unknown
 - 1. Senior housing could be part of this as it was identified as a priority in a recent market study
 - 2. Ownership models have not yet been explored
 - 3. Unit mixes would be categorized more as an advisory item rather than a requirement as it pertains to the covenants
 - 4. The more information the Port collects regarding what the neighborhood preference is for certain development types, the more they can seek out developers that can fulfil those goals
- b. Configuration of the blocks is based primarily on the surrounding street network, the required depths set forth by the zoning code, and the physical constraints of the site, particularly the wetlands
- c. Strong community desire was expressed for this neighborhood to prevent/discourage through-traffic
- d. Light industrial parcels were highly influenced by the wetlands in order to maintain the largest, most flexible scale
- e. Wetlands themselves require dredging to deal with mercury contamination, except one in the center which we will attempt to retain as is, the other two that need to be saved are the one that is of the highest ecological designation (manage b) and the largest one in the south
- f. Howard is the node, but isn't necessarily the main traffic intersection
 - i. There could be a stop light but that is dictated by the county traffic engineer
 - ii. Industrial traffic will be disincentivized to use this intersection
 - iii. Traffic projections assume 500 new vehicles – lengthy analysis completed by other parties
 - iv. Entrance patterns could be dictated by this group to some degree
- g. Zoning regulations (Traditional neighborhood district design standards) apply to both blocks and streets

- h. Saint Paul Parks Department will be working on their own planning process for the park on the Hillcrest site, and that will likely start later this year
- i. Potential Areas of Influence
 - i. How they work together to make a block (corners and entry points)
 - ii. Their scale and density – how step backs in buildings or accessory dwelling units increase density without an increased “feel” of density
 - iii. Their internal circulation – driveways, alleys, intersection of internal circulation with ROW

3. Homework Recap

- a. Julie -- Inviting, color pops, front entry, neighborhood vibe as opposed to urban, expression of character, jigs and jags in façade
 - i. “Node” intriguing concept but hard to google – doesn’t need to have a Starbucks
- b. Andrew – flat and boxy building but balcony use has created architectural interest and the sense of jigs and jags – provides interest from interior perspective as well
 - i. Penetrating through a larger building to connect both sides to the public realm – in relation to buildings along Larpenteur – Porosity
 - ii. Providence, Rhode Island pedestrian/bicycle bridge connected two previously very separated neighborhoods and created new neighbors and an exciting link – it is a bridge but there is also opportunity to gather/program space on it
- c. Susan – was inspired by Jennifer’s homework submission last week, and liked the breakdown of three distinct pedestrian zones in the ROW, vs a very disorderly pedestrian space where it is difficult to know where you should go
- d. Rachel – Also liked the neighborhood node concept, and how in the greater east side there isn’t a lot of opportunity for places to sit/gather. Furness is great but doesn’t invite staying. Space that can be reinvented by the people who use it.
- e. Donna – lighting and safety Pinterest board – safety should be a major priority
- f. People love water

4. Streets

- a. Review of planning documents that impact street design
- b. Three types of streets in Master Plan
 - i. Neighborhood node – prioritizes pedestrian experience
 - ii. Light Industrial – need to support truck traffic while facilitating an enjoyable pedestrian experience
 - iii. Neighborhood – smallest streets, very quiet and pedestrian-oriented
- c. Complete Streets best design practices are the basis of both St. Paul and Maplewood’s Street Design manuals
- d. Sustainability requirements – we need to make space for them in the street section (district energy, district stormwater, district stormwater)
- e. Traditional Neighborhood District Design Standards
 - i. On-street parking helps buffer pedestrians
 - ii. Everything behind the curb is a likely area of potential influence for this group
- f. Potential Areas of Influence

- i. Behind the Curb
 1. Public Amenities can be in boulevard zones and frontage zones
 2. Pedestrian Zone (i.e., sidewalk) needs to be clear
 - ii. Public Amenities
 1. Street furniture!
 2. The character of the site elements can help with wayfinding. Sense of place
 - iii. Planting strategies
 1. Diverse plantings vs. turf grass, shade levels, green stormwater infrastructure, slope stabilization
 - iv. Nodes and Intersections
 1. Create areas that have clear program, sitting, walking, retail, etc.
 - v. Paving Strategies – can help define space, make transitions to temporary uses easier
 - vi. Traffic Calming Measures
 1. Lots of different methods to calm traffic down to keep pedestrians safe and enjoy their walking experience
5. Mini Streets Charrette
- a. Participants took out their tape measures to start understanding the size of their physical being, and how that relates to the size of typical elements in the public realm. This exercise was intended to get participants ideas flowing about how a preferred public realm should be organized.

Homework

- Email images and descriptions to your ideal places to Tiffani, Andrea, and Monte
- Come prepared to Meeting Four with printouts of ideas that reflect your areas of interest.