FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Protecting, restoring and enhancing the metro Mississippi River and its watershed since 1993.

106 W. Water St., Ste. 600 | St. Paul MN 55107-2032
(651) 222-2193 | fmr.org | info@fmr.org

October 28, 2026

Dear Commissioners:

We urge you to recommend against the requested comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning for 600 Main St. SE. The proposed development threatens the longstanding vision for 600 Main to be public parkland at the entrance to the Stone Arch Bridge.

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) represents over 6,000 advocates, members, and volunteers who work to protect and enhance the natural and cultural assets of the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. Since 1993, FMR has been an active partner in planning the future of Minneapolis's riverfront at sites like 600 Main.

Long planned as parkland

Changing this property's future land use and built form designations would contradict decades of thoughtful planning for this parcel.

For the past 140 years, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) has patiently implemented Horace Cleveland's vision that everything between Grand Rounds parkways and the waterfront, including 600 Main, should be public parkland with open views to and from the water.

Except for a few river-dependent industrial uses (hydropower facilities, railroads, etc.), 600 Main is now the only privately owned parcel between the parkway and the river for miles up- and downstream. Changing the proposed comprehensive plan designation doesn't make sense in this context.

The vision for this site to be parkland has even been shared by the applicant. In 2003, Steve Minn, the current owner of 600 Main, proposed trading 600 Main to MPRB for parkland, stating in a letter, "We believe the MPRB would derive much greater benefit for either parkland and/or parking supporting the present and future recreational needs of the riverfront." This parcel swap never came to fruition.

In 2008 Mr. Minn applied to rezone the parcel for a planned development. The Planning Commission denied the project twice; Mr. Minn appealed to the council twice and was denied both times. He then filed a lawsuit against the city and lost.

Since then, the city and MPRB have only further clarified the intention for 600 Main to be parkland. The city's 2021 Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) ordinance, the 2016 update of MPRB's Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park Master Plan, and the city's 2040 Comprehensive Plan all reaffirm that this site deserves special consideration as eventual parkland. Thousands of hours of community engagement went into these planning processes.

It's not a mistake that multiple government bodies have protected this parcel in very recent plans and ordinances; those plans reflect the long history and public values here. The plans recognize the potential for 600 Main to serve as a welcoming gateway to the city's most iconic and visited riverfront feature: the Stone Arch Bridge.

We also share Owámniyomni Okhódayapi's vision for a riverfront that reverses the harms of riverfront privatization and industrialization. As Owámniyomni Okhódayapi stated in its recent letter to MPRB,

> "The Minneapolis riverfront is Dakota homeland, and the River herself is a relative that holds profound cultural, spiritual and ecological significance. For generations, colonization, industrialization and commercialization separated Dakota people from sacred places along the River and converted lands and waters that had sustained relationships among people, plants, animals and the River into resources for private and industrial use…
>
> "At a location this significant, maintaining public access to the River and preserving opportunities for ecological and cultural restoration should carry substantial weight… There are many places where housing can and should be built. There are very few opportunities to protect land directly adjacent to the River for permanent public benefit, particularly in areas of high pedestrian and bicycle traffic like the east end of the Stone Arch Bridge."

MPRB just reaffirmed its commitment to these plans. On October 7, MPRB commissioners voted 8-0-1 to oppose this application to amend the comprehensive plan future land use designation, built form designation, and zoning for 600 Main.

Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area impacts

The applicant requests a rezoning from the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) Urban Mixed-1 (UM-1) designation to Urban Mixed-3 (UM-3).

The city is required to implement its MRCCA ordinance in compliance with state rules managed by the DNR. The tiering and viewshed provisions discussed below are required by the state rules; the city cannot choose to disregard them.

Public River Corridor Views

Per the city's comprehensive plan, the city's MRCCA code, and state rules,

> "The [Urban Mixed] UM District shall be managed in a manner that allows for future growth and potential transition of intensely developed areas that does not negatively affect Public River Corridor Views and that protects bluffs and floodplains. Restoring and enhancing bluff and shoreline habitat, minimizing erosion and flow of untreated storm water into the river, and providing public access to and public views of the river are priorities in the district" (Minneapolis zoning code 535.1630, also 2040 Plan Appendix A, p. A-10).

Public River Corridor Views (PRCVs) are specific public places at which the view from that point is considered scenic, iconic, or historic.

The MRCCA chapter of Minneapolis' 2040 Plan designates the view from the Stone Arch Bridge as a PRCV, stating,

> "It is the best place in the city to encounter the power of St. Anthony Falls and to see the natural beauty of Father Hennepin Bluff Park in one location. The river views of both the east and west banks consist of the Hennepin Avenue Bridge, the downtown skyline, Mill City District, Mills Ruins Park, the University of Minnesota campus, Water Power Park, Hennepin Island, Interstate 35 Bridge, Gold Medal Park, the steam plant and as noted St. Anthony Falls" (2040 Plan Appendix A, p. 63).

A large building at 600 Main would negatively affect the public view from the bridge into the St. Anthony Main area. The parcel should function as an open gateway to Main St. with sweeping views similar to the parkland views on the other side of 6th Ave. While the University of Minnesota steam plant is between this parcel and the river, the public view from the Stone Arch Bridge looks more directly at 600 Main and past the steam plant.

Building height and tiering

Changing the land use designation and MRCCA district designation at 600 Main would allow a much taller development than is currently permitted (from 35 feet to 65 feet or more).

The MRCCA Urban Mixed (UM) districts require that "tiering of structures away from the Mississippi River and from bluff lines is given priority, with lower structure heights closer to the river and blufflines, and that structure design and placement minimize interference with public river corridor views" (Minneapolis zoning code 535.1650).

Minneapolis uses three UM districts to enforce this tiering requirement, with UM-1, UM-2, and UM-3 districts, and accompanying building height limits, tiered back from the river. The city drew these district maps in 2020.

The proposed rezoning would undermine this careful planning and would not comply with the state tiering requirement. Currently, the building immediately north of 600 Main is about the same height as the proposed project. Proposed building heights would not tier away from the river.

In the unlikely event that the building to the north were demolished and replaced, proper tiering would still be impossible under the proposed rezoning. The parcel immediately north of 600 Main is designated as Corridor 4, yet the proposed designation for 600 Main is Corridor 6. That would allow a taller building in front of a shorter building.

Required comprehensive plan amendment findings not met

The proposed comprehensive amendment does not meet the required findings:

a. *The extent to which the proposed change would be consistent with the comprehensive plan goals and associated policies.*

The proposed change is not consistent with goals and policies that support park access and enhancing the Mississippi riverfront.

Goal 8 of the 2040 Plan, "Creative, Cultural, and Natural Amenities," discusses the importance of riverfront parkland:

> "Minneapolis' creative, cultural and natural amenities shape the city and its economy and attract residents, businesses and visitors. In 2017, Minneapolis had the repeat honor of being recognized as the Nation's Best Park System by the Trust for Public Land; Minneapolis' parks encompass the city's defining lakes and river banks and include features of astonishing beauty, historical significance and ecological wonder, all within a thriving urban setting.
>
> "Not only that, but Minneapolis has a national park running right through it – the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, which follows the Mississippi River through the city. Its pinnacle, St. Anthony Falls, the only major waterfall on the Mississippi River, generated the power that created Minneapolis. St. Anthony Falls has been the anchor in the rebirth of Minneapolis' central riverfront, an area that provides an incredible opportunity to increase access to natural and cultural amenities for Minneapolis residents and expand the city as a regional and national destination."

Policy 97 supports this goal. The policy states, “As the city grows and changes, development near lakes and waterways should be designed to preserve and improve the natural and built environment, ensuring that future generations continue to benefit from the resource that we are charged with conserving.”

Action steps for Policy 97 include regulating new development to preserve the quality of waterways and properly implementing the city’s MRCCA Plan in partnership with MPRB and other agencies.

The 2040 Plan’s MRCCA chapter is also relevant. The MRCCA chapter designates this area as a PRCV that must be protected as discussed above. The MRCCA chapter also guides city planning to comply with state rules such as building tiering within MRCCA. This finding is not met.

a. *Evidence demonstrating the reason(s) that the plan should be changed, including but not limited to whether new information has become available since the comprehensive plan was adopted that supports reexamination of the plan, or that existing or proposed development offer new opportunities or constraints that were not previously considered.*

Nothing has changed since the adoption of the 2040 Plan. Before and after adoption of the 2040 Plan:

- The site was private property within an urban riverfront area;
- The site was on the land acquisition list for the Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park (adopted in 2016); and
- MPRB opposed rezoning this site in both 2009 and 2026.

This finding is not met.

b. *The relationship of the proposed amendment to the supply and demand for particular land uses within the city and the immediate vicinity of the site.*

Minneapolis does have a demand for more housing. However, neighbors have also noted that this area is underserved for parkland. Decades of planning affirm that this site is desired for parkland.

c. *A demonstration that the proposed amendment has merit beyond the interests of the applicant.*

As affirmed by MPRB’s recent resolution and several longstanding plans, the public interest is for this site to remain designated for future parkland. This finding is not met.

d. *The possible impacts of the amendment on all specific elements and topics of the comprehensive plan as may be applicable.*

As discussed above, a comprehensive plan amendment would negatively impact the 2040 Plan including Goal 8 and the MRCCA chapter. This finding is not met.

Required zoning amendment findings not met

The proposed zoning amendment does not meet the required findings:

a. *Whether the amendment is consistent with the applicable policies of the comprehensive plan.*

The amendment is not consistent with the MRCCA policies, including those in the 2040 Plan that require preserving PRCVs and tiering building heights. This finding is not met.

b. *Whether the amendment is in the public interest and is not solely for the interest of a single property owner.*

This amendment is not in the public's interest. Decades' worth of plans for this site, resulting from extensive public engagement and affirmed by both the city's and MPRB's democratically elected leaders, affirm that the best use of this parcel is parkland. This finding is not met.

c. *Whether the existing uses of property and the zoning classification of property within the general area of the property in question are compatible with the proposed zoning classification, where the amendment is to change the zoning classification of a particular property.*

The existing zoning classifications in the surrounding area are not compatible with the proposed zoning classification for this property. Rezoning this property to UM-3 and Built Form Corridor 6 would allow a taller height than is permitted north of this parcel. This would make it impossible to comply with city and state requirements to tier building heights away from the river. This finding is not met.

d. *Whether there are reasonable uses of the property in question permitted under the existing zoning classification, where the amendment is to change the zoning classification of particular property.*

The existing zoning allows reasonable use of the property as parkland or several private uses, including multifamily housing, in conformance with state MRCCA rules. This finding is not met.

e. *Whether there has been a change in the character or trend of development in the general area of the property in question, which has taken place since such property was placed in its present zoning classification, where the amendment is to change the zoning classification of particular property.*

Nothing has changed about character or trend of development in the surrounding area since the zoning classifications were last updated. This finding is not met.

Trail would not promote connectivity

Furthermore, in exchange for giving up a decades-long vision for this property, the city and MPRB would not gain anything of value. They would gain a half-block long trail to nowhere.

A trail segment at 600 Main does not promote connectivity in any meaningful way. It would largely serve the residents of 600 Main, because few other people would have a reason to use a trail that dead-ends at the property line. There is no way for the proposed segment to connect to the Dinkytown Greenway without crossing the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railyard.

We share the vision for an eventual regional trail connection between St. Anthony Main and the Dinkytown Greenway. This will only be realistic if BNSF leaves its railyard next to the Dinkytown Greenway. When that happens, BNSF would presumably also abandon its access road to 6th Ave. SE, providing an obvious place for the trail connection from the Stone Arch Bridge to the Dinkytown Greenway (see attached map). This access road is already heavily used as an informal trail.

There's no reason to place much value on a trail easement at 600 Main that doesn't go anywhere when there's a natural spot to make the full trail connection all at once if BNSF leaves its railyard.

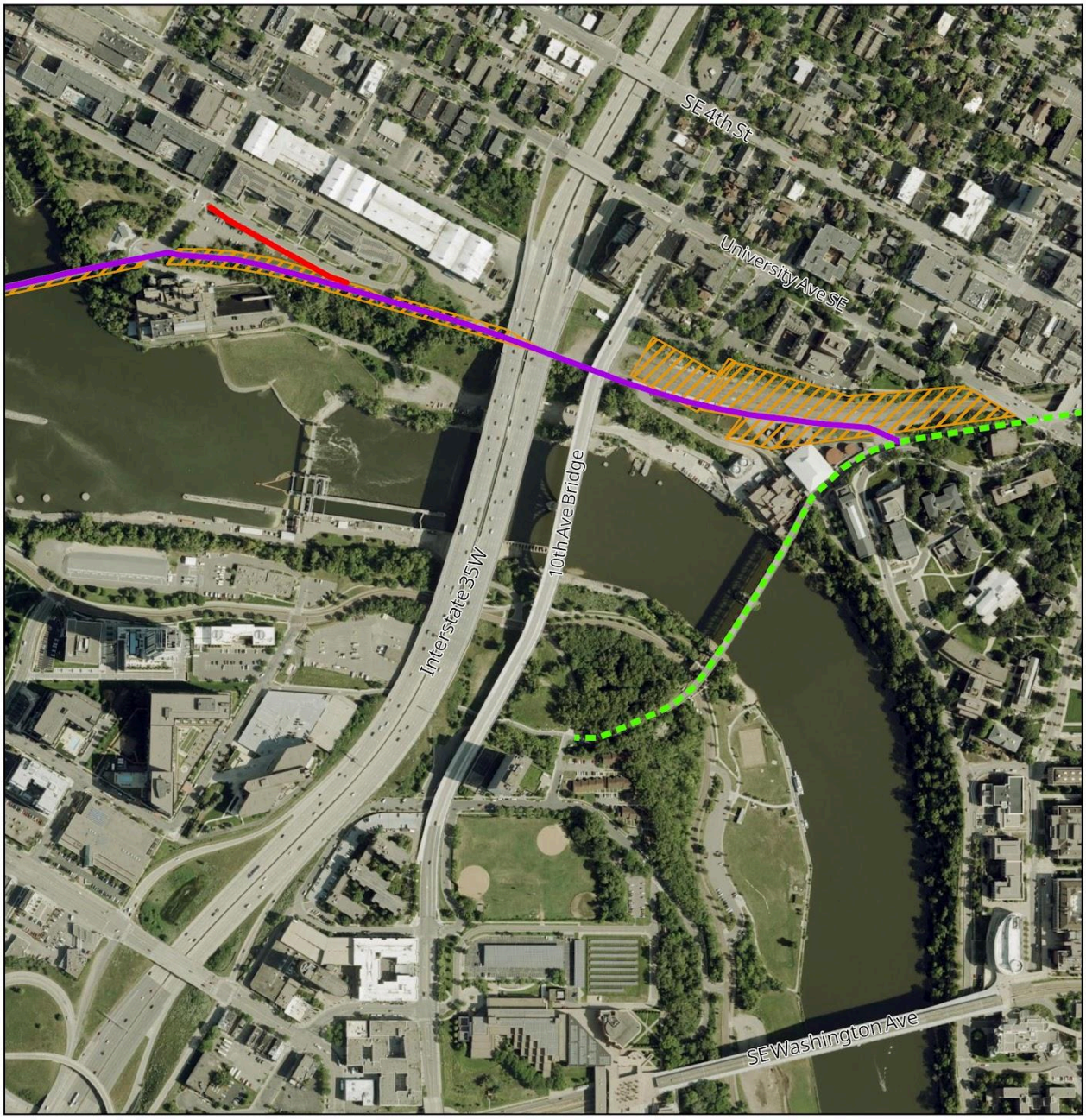
We urge you to recommend against the proposed comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning. Thank you.

For the river,



Colleen O'Connor Toberman
Land Use & Planning Director

East River Potential Trail Connection



Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway parcels

Dinkytown Greenway

Potential trail easement

Potential trail connection

0 150 300 600 Feet

Credits:

Esri, USDA FSA, Esri, Vantor, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, Vantor, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community, MetroGIS