FRIENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

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

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Dear Commissioners:

We are writing to urge you, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), to protect the longstanding vision for 600 Main St. SE to be a public gateway to the Stone Arch Bridge by voting in favor of the resolution to oppose rezoning of this site.

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**

For the past 140 years, 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 some industrial uses (power utilities, railroads) 600 Main is the only privately owned parcel between the parkway and the river for miles up- and downstream.

MPRB has engaged with Steve Minn, the owner of 600 Main, since at least 2003. At that time, Mr. Minn proposed a land swap for an MPRB-owned parcel he wanted to develop elsewhere. Mr. Minn wrote that "MPRB would derive much greater benefit for either parkland and/or parking supporting the present and future recreational needs of the riverfront" by owning 600 Main.

However, that land swap never came to fruition. In 2008, Mr. Minn proposed developing 600 Main and sought a rezoning. MPRB opposed that rezoning. The Planning Commission denied the project twice; Mr. Minn appealed to the council twice and got 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 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.

There is no reason for MPRB to change its position now. It's puzzling that MPRB is going to such great lengths to expand its waterfront parkways Above the Falls, yet would consider abandoning that goal in the central riverfront.

**Trail would not promote connectivity**

In exchange for giving up its decades-long vision, MPRB would not gain anything of value. It would gain a half-block long trail to nowhere.

The Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park Master Plan states, "Where it is not possible or feasible to acquire land, the MPRB will work to create partnerships with landowners with the goal of obtaining easements, as necessary, to promote trail connectivity throughout the park and along the riverfront."

But 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.

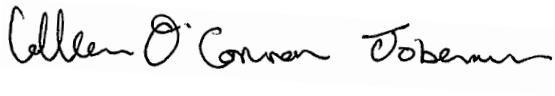
We share MPRB's vision for an eventual connection between St. Anthony Main and the Dinkytown Greenway. This will only be realistic if Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) leaves its railyard next to the Dinkytown Greenway. When that happens, BNSF would presumably also abandon its access road to 6$^{th}$ 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 for MPRB to have 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.

A trail easement at 600 Main would not promote the connectivity envisioned in the master plan. MPRB would be giving up a lot to gain almost nothing.

We urge you to oppose rezoning this property. Thank you.

For the river,



Colleen O'Connor Toberman
Land Use & Planning Director