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Corridor Housing Initiative Proposal

Nicollet Avenue

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I. Opening Statement

Main Issues

Loring Park is a non-impacted neighborhood with a mixed-income community, supportive of increased density development and affordable housing options. However, despite strong support from our residential and business community to move forward with new development, Loring Park has had difficulty attracting and holding onto developers and development projects along Nicollet Avenue. Through a series of developer roundtable discussions, the neighborhood identified a number of obstacles to developing along Nicollet Avenue, including parking requirements and zoning that restricts high-density development. Issues such as land acquisition and financing have also caused a number of developers to discontinue previous planning efforts. Additionally, in collaboration with two other neighborhoods, in 2001 CLPC conducted a marketing study of the corridor, the product of which was a recommended Development Plan. While the plan identified important development opportunities along the corridor, the community was disappointed that the plan did not capitalize on residential density opportunities.

Working closely with city and county staff and the provided technical support, the Loring Park neighborhood will address development challenges on Nicollet Avenue and explore possibilities for coordinating city policy with our neighborhood's vision. This would enable the neighborhood to work with developers and residents to implement a project that both addresses the needs of the surrounding community and acts as a catalyst for even more housing development in coming years.

Objectives

Address obstacles to development	Address issues of land acquisition and financing to encourage and support developers in their efforts to create mixed-use developments on Nicollet Avenue, in particular focusing on affordable options for home ownership
Public policy framework	Create a public policy framework – agreed to by residents, business owners, and the City – that supports the neighborhood's vision for development
Commitment from developers	Commitment from developers to move forward with at least one mixed-use development that would be a catalyst for future housing
Design Plan	Produce an approved Design Plan for the Corridor Housing sites and environs that is based on our Vision Statement and Planning Concepts
Resources	Secure funding and resources to support development
Educational document	Create an educational document for neighborhoods, based on the meeting process, that defines strategies for building partnerships with developers and city officials to work through development obstacles and enact a community's vision

II. Vision

In the Loring Park neighborhood, we celebrate our highly diverse range of income, age, race, nationality, and sexual preference. The daytime population is infused with workers and visitors to institutions, offices, stores, conventions, parks, museums and restaurants, and nighttime brings others to various theatres, restaurants and other venues. Loring Park is a pedestrian neighborhood, so that its users see each other and interact on its streets, in the park, and in local businesses on a regular basis. Loring Park residents, downtown area workers, downtown businesses and corporations, and visitors from near and far would all benefit from additional housing along the Nicollet Corridor.

In Loring Park, we are committed to enhancing the urban environment through the development of high-density mixed-use development designed to provide for the needs of the entire neighborhood and enhancing the community's environment and quality of life. The addition of new mixed-use development on Nicollet Avenue would be a catalyst for more development and revitalization, transforming the corridor into a dynamic residential, commercial and cultural thoroughfare that will benefit both the neighborhood and the entire city. As the Twin Cities' population and traffic continues to increase at a rapid pace, providing more than 150,000 people who work downtown with viable and attractive options for downtown living is a valuable way to conserve resources and support a lively downtown culture and economy. Making Nicollet Avenue an even more vibrant corridor with a variety of housing options will ultimately benefit the entire metropolitan region.

III. Project Partners

CLPC has brought together a number of different partners to collaborate on Corridor Housing Initiative meetings, representing various corridor interests and aspects of housing development. The partners that we have identified represent the types of businesses and institutions that are vital to building strong partnerships and advancing viable development. These partners include:

- The **Loring Park Nicollet Avenue Task Force**, a group of residents, architects, a business owner and an art director that has taken a comprehensive approach to studying the future of this part of the neighborhood.
- The **CLPC Land Use Committee** has formally endorsed this proposal and supports Corridor Housing Initiative meetings in conjunction with development planning
- **Council Member Lisa Goodman** is very supportive of the project and her office is interested in participating in the planning process.
- **Jerry Bordman**, vice president for development at Central Community Housing Trust and former MCDA housing director.
- **Lee Blons** of the Plymouth Congregational Church Neighborhood Foundation, a group that has been a development partner in several renovations and new construction projects in the area.
- **Jay Nord** of Edina Realty, who has worked with the neighborhood in the past to attract developers for Nicollet. Mr. Nord has expressed an interest in the use of alternative construction technologies in order to reduce construction costs.
- **Business owners** along Nicollet, virtually all of whom have expressed interest in participating in a collaborative development effort.
- We also expect involvement from about 2 or 3 other **developers** whom we understand are interested in development in the area.

IV. Context

While "corridor housing" may imply a broad range of corridor and housing types, in the most urban sense a corridor draws together a dense mix of housing, jobs, services, recreation and culture along a common line of accessibility. In this sense, few places in the Twin Cities offer both the existing fabric and the future potential as does Loring Park's Nicollet Avenue. Located within a few blocks of the central business district, the Loring Park neighborhood is blessed with an outstanding collection of religious, cultural and educational institutions. Loring Park's 7,500 residents have a history of embracing the diversity, density and mix of use that characterizes their neighborhood. Indeed, there is recognition that these same qualities are key to making Loring Park an even more outstanding place to live in the future.

The area around Nicollet Avenue, between I-94 and 14th Street, contains the largest area of property that is either suitable for development or likely to be developed in the Loring Park neighborhood. In cooperation with the Stevens Square and Whittier neighborhoods, Loring Park did a marketing study of Nicollet Avenue in 2001. In that study, which included substantial community participation, three sites along the Loring stretch of the Avenue were identified as prime development locations. With these sites and a handful of other potential sites, there is a long term potential of adding 600 to 1,000 new housing units to this part of the neighborhood.

According to a Maxfield Research Inc. report dated August 15, 2003, there exists a market for 1843 for-sale housing units Downtown between now and 2010. With the recent pickup in Downtown employment due to new hiring and firms taking advantage of cheap leasing rates and available large floorplate office space, an increase in the rental housing market is expected.¹ Affordable housing is generally always marketable.

As part of the 2001 marketing, traffic and urban planning study, the Nicollet Avenue Task Force held several roundtable meetings where developers were invited to freely discuss issues of development in the city of Minneapolis in general and along Nicollet Avenue in particular. At these meetings, developers and community members identified a number of obstacles to development – such as parking and zoning requirements – in Minneapolis in general and on Nicollet Avenue in particular. This work culminated in a marketing booklet that identified development sites that were most likely to be developed in the near future (including three sites previously mentioned). The booklet also provided several urban planning options that the three neighborhoods could pursue, including the establishment of a new overlay district and a modification of driving lanes for improved traffic flow.

A number of notable assets enhance the potential for successful corridor planning. Nicollet Avenue's adjacency to downtown Minneapolis promises considerable growth in the years to come. Major additions to the Walker Art Center and Art Institute as well as the Convention Center Grant Street streetscape project will draw more visitors to the proposed project area. The Nicollet Avenue Task Force has also recently begun work to support the redevelopment of the Loring Park's Allina property, a large site one block from Nicollet Avenue.

¹ Source: Maxfield Research Inc. Report dated August 15, 2003

V. Inventory

Participants in the 2001 marketing study identified three sites that are prime for mixed-use development, in particular the creation of affordable housing (refer to the 2001 Development Plan):

1. The "Meter Farm" is a large parking lot east of Nicollet, north of 15th Street, across from the Convention Center. The lot is owned by the City of Minneapolis, and if developed in conjunction with the adjacent lot, could support a significant number of housing units. In 2002, the Cornerstone Group developed a detailed proposal for mixed-use development on the "Meter Farm" site, but ultimately abandoned the project, possibly due to funding and staffing issues.
2. Site #2 is a lot located east of Nicollet and south of 16th Street. Adjacent to the lot is District 202 – a nonprofit youth community center that provides social, cultural and educational opportunities by and for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) youth and their friends – and Archdale Housing Project for Homeless Youth – a project designed to help homeless youth transition into permanent housing. New housing development would support the missions of these organizations, providing new opportunities for their constituencies to transition into neighboring affordable housing units.
3. Site #3 is located west of Nicollet along I-94. The site is currently occupied with two small buildings: Jerusalem's Restaurant and the former Marker's Liquor site. Both of these property owners have expressed interest in collaborating on new development, providing new dining facilities for Jerusalem's Restaurant. The neighborhood is interested in potentially extending the site to 15th Street, and in doing so, preserving many of the businesses along Nicollet in any new development.

VI. Viability

Support and Follow-through

CLPC has significant experience working and organizing collaborative projects with surrounding neighborhoods, developers, and businesses, and has good relations with City representatives. We also have the resources and support to communicate with Loring Park residents and businesses. To do so, we will post meeting notices on our neighborhood website and virtual block club site, send out information through the neighborhood e-mail list, mail notices to residents, and post information in area buildings.

The Loring Park neighborhood has a ten-year history of continuous work improving Nicollet Avenue. Ten years ago, the kind of mixed-use residential development that we envision for the corridor would have been highly unrealistic. At this time, the Avenue was blighted and all manner of livability crimes were common to the neighborhood. The scene today is dramatically different thanks to the hard work of citizens, business owners, elected officials and city staff. Some of our past collaborative efforts include:

- A complete rebuilding of the streetscape from Grant Street to 29th Street, including trees, pavement and ornamental lighting as part of a joint project of the Nicollet Avenue Business Association and the Whittier, Stevens Square and Loring neighborhoods.
- A marketing, traffic and urban planning study by architects, urban designers, traffic engineers and market analysts, done in cooperation with the Nicollet Avenue Business Association and the Whittier, Stevens Square and Loring Park neighborhoods. Besides professional consultants, this effort was carried out by an inter-neighborhood task force of business owners and residents and included several

community wide meetings which sought new ideas and consensus regarding future development locations, types and patterns.

- Continuing the work of the inter-neighborhood task force, Citizens for a Loring Park Community established its own Nicollet Avenue Task Force consisting of residents, architects, a business owner and an art director. This Task Force has been meeting regularly for a year and a half. The Task Force has taken a comprehensive approach to studying the future of this part of the neighborhood. It has developed criteria for analyzing existing conditions and future development based on use/mix, movement and connectivity, the neighborhoods’ history and character, public space, and neighborhood parking infrastructure. The task force has recently begun work in supporting the establishment of a community participation process for the redevelopment of the Loring Park Allina property, which is a large site one block from Nicollet Avenue.
- Central City Neighborhood Partnership (CCNP) Safety Group – a coalition of CLPC, Elliot Park Neighborhood Inc., Stevens Square Community Organization, and Whittier Alliance – created to promote the effective use of public funds to enhance safety and reduce crime
- CCNP Restorative Justice Group – a coalition of CLPC, Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association, Elliot Park Neighborhood Inc., Stevens Square Community Organization, Whittier Alliance, and the West Bank Community Coalition – designed to promote system changes to improve offender accountability for livability crimes

Additional funding sources

The neighborhood has access to \$43,000 of Economic Development funds, dedicated to development along Nicollet Avenue, from Phase I NRP planning. CLPC will additionally coordinate Corridor Initiative planning with planning for NRP Phase II funds, half of which are required to be committed to housing. We will also give serious consideration to opportunities to utilize CLPC housing funds in this project or in related development.

VII. Proposed Meeting Tracks

Meeting Tracks	Participants	Technical support
<p>Track 1 Policy roundtable discussion (1-2 meetings): working teams to address city policy that impacts development as well as public commitment</p>	<p>Developers (CCHT, Cornerstone Group), city officials (Planning/Zoning, Public Works, City Council, Mayor’s office), select neighborhood and business representatives (who have been involved in past development discussions), Nicollet Avenue Task Force, facilitators</p>	<p>CPPP</p>
<p>Track 2 Planning workshop: explore design scenarios that fit in with neighborhood character and examine how development sites work together (1 meeting)</p>	<p>Design Center, wide range of residents, Nicollet Avenue Task Force, city officials</p>	<p>Design Center</p>

VIII. Appendix

- A. Map of development sites
- B. Nicollet Task Force Vision Statement and Planning Concepts
- C. Loring Park Community Development Concept
- D. Nicollet Avenue – Map of Loring Park Development Potential