



District Thinking

How shared infrastructure, features, and services can open possibilities for more resilient, vibrant, and walkable communities

Hennepin Thrive / ALHC Fall meeting, November 21, 2025





Agenda

9:30 a.m. Welcome & Introductory Remarks:

- *Denise Engen, Active Living Hennepin County*

9:35 a.m. Presentations

- *Stephen Klimek, Executive Director, Towerside Innovation District*
- *Kersten Elverum, Community Development Director, City of Hopkins*
- *Spencer Miller-Johnson, Senior Planner, City of St. Paul*
- *Anthony Adams, Associate Director of Civil Engineering Ryan Companies*

10:20 a.m. Q & A

10:30 a.m. Adjourn (meeting will stay open for more discussion)

An aerial photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a mix of modern and older buildings. In the foreground, several multi-story apartment buildings with brick and dark facades are visible. A large construction site with a steel framework is in the lower right. The background shows a dense urban skyline under a cloudy sky. The word 'TOWERSIDE' is overlaid in large white letters, with a stylized graphic of a heartbeat line to its left.

TOWERSIDE

DISTRICT THINKING & VALUES



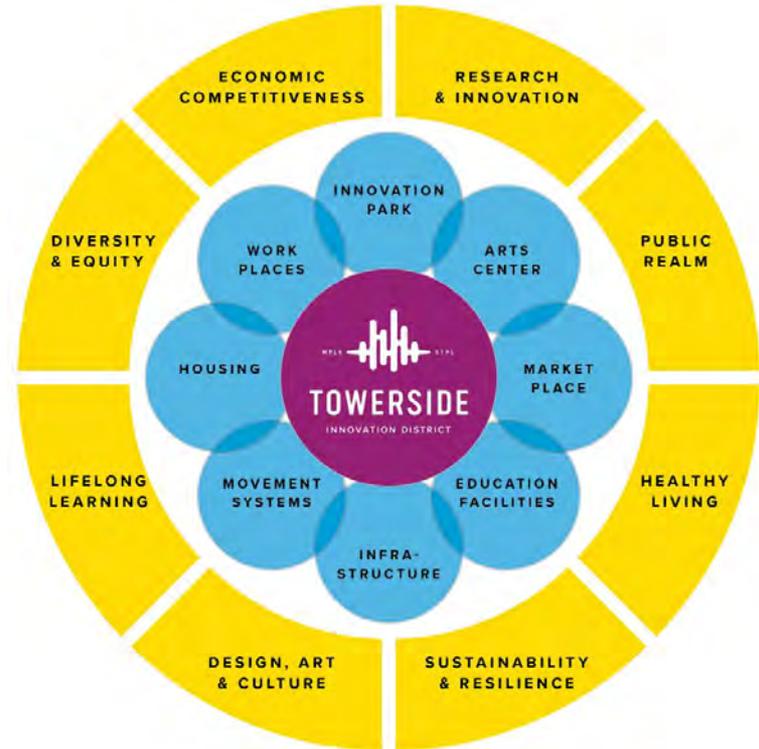
Big challenges. Bigger opportunities.

- Climate & Resilience
- Equity, Housing & Demographic Shifts
- Infrastructure & Economic Growth
- Community, Belonging & Civic Life

These aren't siloed issues—they're systems problems rooted in space & place.

The challenge isn't just what to build.

It's how to align what we build with who benefits and what the process & projects can unlock together.



PLACE BASED DEVELOPMENT



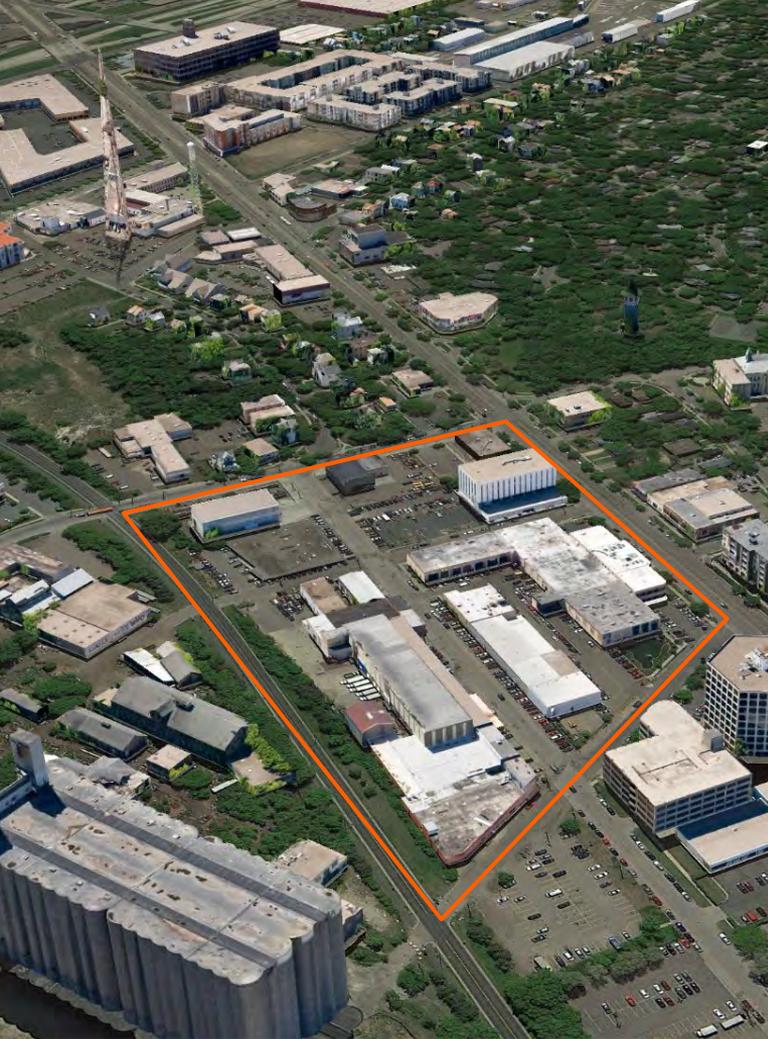


TOWERSIDE

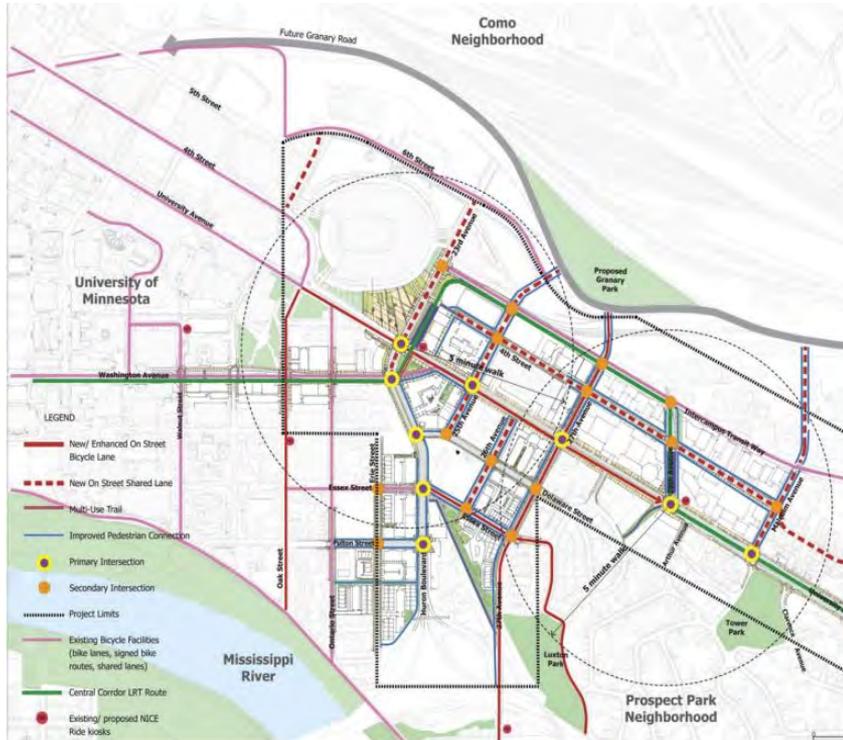
a place / an idea / an organization

- **Transit-oriented community in the center of the region catalyzed by Green Line LRT and future E-Line BRT**
- **370 Acre Innovation District adjacent to the University of Minnesota Life Sciences campus & spans two cities and two counties**
- **A place-based partnership dedicated to creating a high-intensity, high-density district where living, working, and innovation intersect in an equitable, diverse, and sustainable community**





A VISION FOR TRANSIT & PLACE

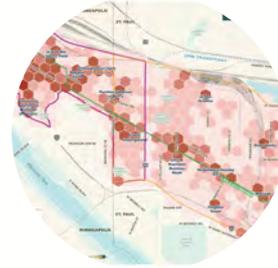


Towerside's Integration - Portfolio Of Work



A. Hardware

Support development of District Systems and connected real estate to deliver wider & stacked benefits through pre-development activities and district-scale coordination



B. Software

Cultivate investment, jobs, small business support, affordability, and access to opportunity through adaptive planning, policy, and place-management operations



C. UX - User Experience

Community co-creation of the district through engagement and visioning, creative placemaking, and communications



D. OS - Operating System

Collective impact governance structure that supports portfolio projects, partnerships, and co-learning for systems change



BRINGING TOD TO LIFE

Asset-Based Community Development

We don't just need new projects— we need new systems for working together.

- Shared & Stacked Systems to Deliver Greater Value
- Practice Partnership to Align Power & Purpose
- Human-Centric & Outcomes-Based Approaches
- Engaged Community as Co-Creators, Not Audiences



DISTRICT STORMWATER



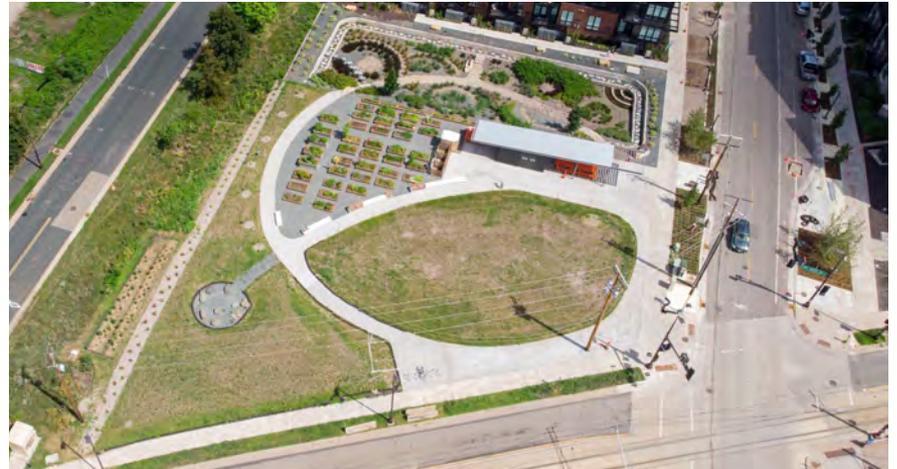
- MWMO's first-of-its-kind system delivers cost-effective stormwater management and reuse while providing public green space
- Captures runoff from 4 parcels totalling 8-acres
- Collects, treats, stores, and provides 200,000 gallons of reuse water to properties and garden
- Enabled greater development density on each site
- Part of an integrated public realm next to LRT platform with Green 4th & Bridal Veil Gardens park



BRIDAL VEIL GARDENS



- 1-acre signature green space includes a transit plaza, picnic pavilion, community garden plots, and open green space
- \$1.4M cost provided by the first use of MPRB's Park Dedication Fee policy
- Site was host to a popular community garden that was incorporated permanently
- Interim use and placemaking generated audiences for project engagement



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING



- Intentionally bringing in the arts and artists to facilitate engagement and participation in new ways
 - Public Art
 - Activations
 - Community Events
 - Participatory Planning
- 2016-2019 Pop-Up Events at future Signature Green Space site led to design elements
- 2024 Earth Week Water Party



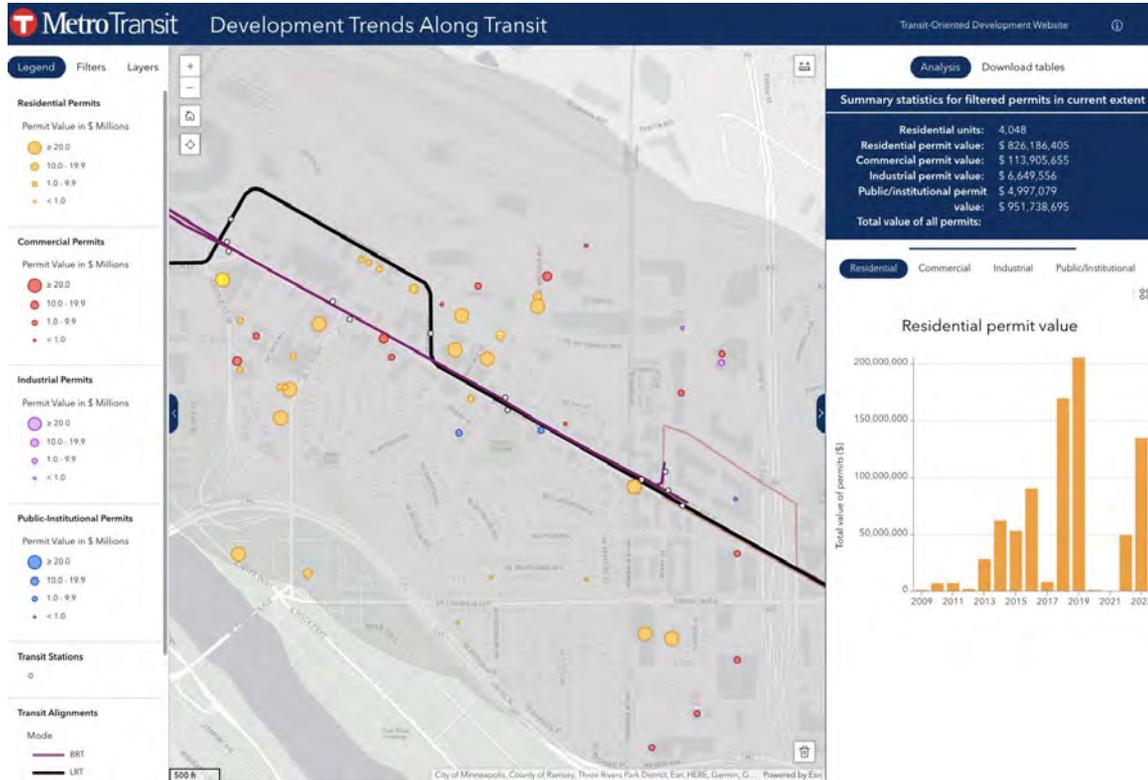
CITY BUILDING OUTCOMES



- 3 LRT stations & 4 New BRT stops
- 4000+ new housing units with full range of market, affordable, mixed income, student, and senior
- 20% affordable @ 60% AMI or under
- Full service grocery store and 3 anchor entertainment destinations drawing millions a year
- Mixed use district with commercial and industrial employment opportunities
- \$5.6M in public realm investment, creating 2+ acres of new park & green space



CITY BUILDING OUTCOMES - INVESTMENT



Residential units:

4,048

Residential permit value:

\$ 826,186,405

Commercial permit value:

\$ 113,905,655

Industrial permit value:

\$ 6,649,556

Public/institutional permit value:

\$ 4,997,079

Total value of all permits:

\$ 951,738,695



FUTURE EFFORTS



District Energy



- Shared Heating/Cooling
- STER - Sewer Thermal Energy Recovery
- ATES - Aquifer Thermal Energy Storage

Grand Rounds Regional Trail



- Coordinating alignment with landowners and developments
- New parks and green spaces
- Intersecting with stormwater and mobility opportunities

Multimodal Connections



- Shared Mobility Hub facility
- Integrated with public realm, bike+ped network & transit
- Provide shared use vehicles



THANK YOU

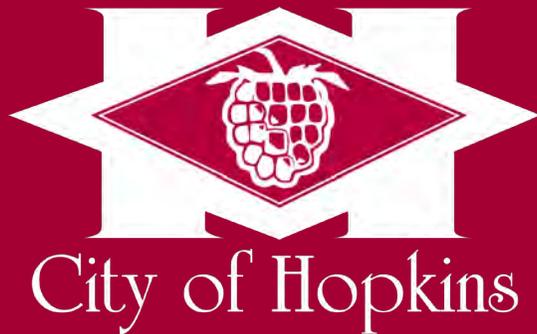
Stephen Klimek (he/him)
Executive Director

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District Thinking



Kersten Elverum, Director of Planning &
Development

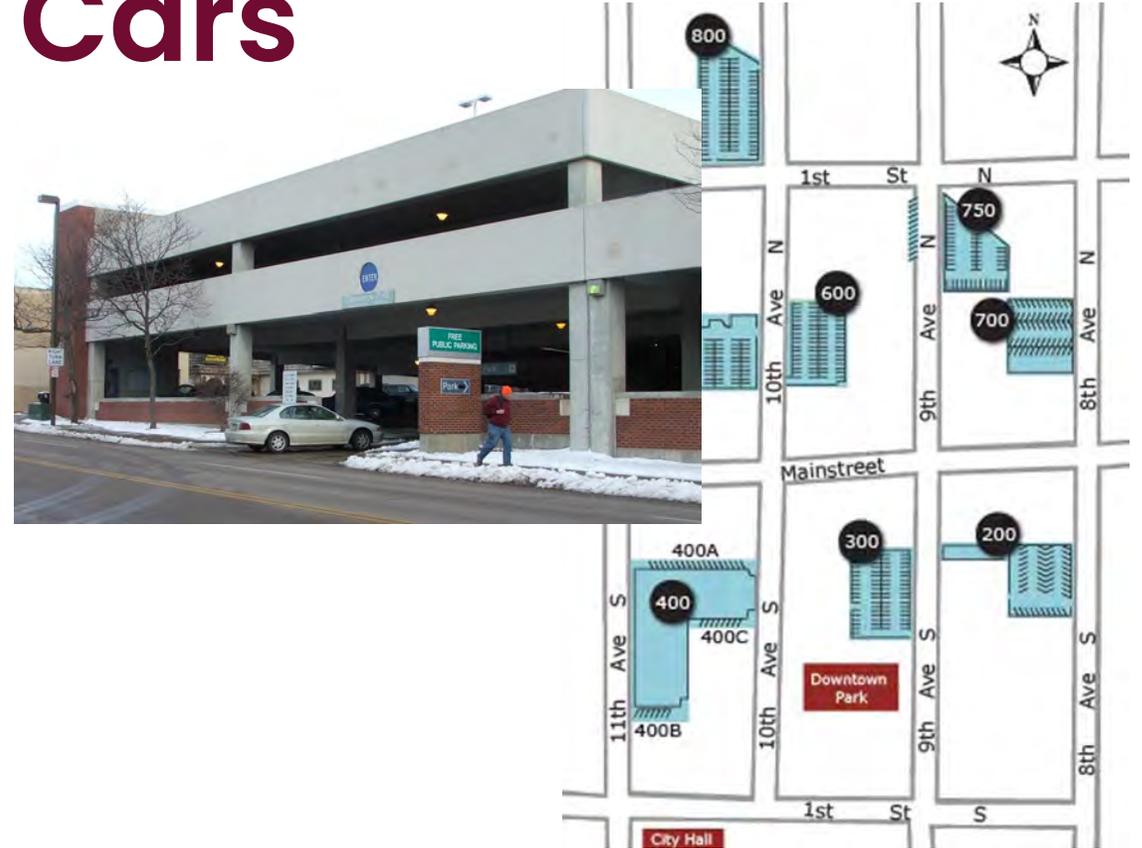
Benefits of District Thinking



- Predicable experience
- Investments are protected
- Allows for compact development
- Shared resources
- Allows for place-based branding and activations

District Parking for Cars

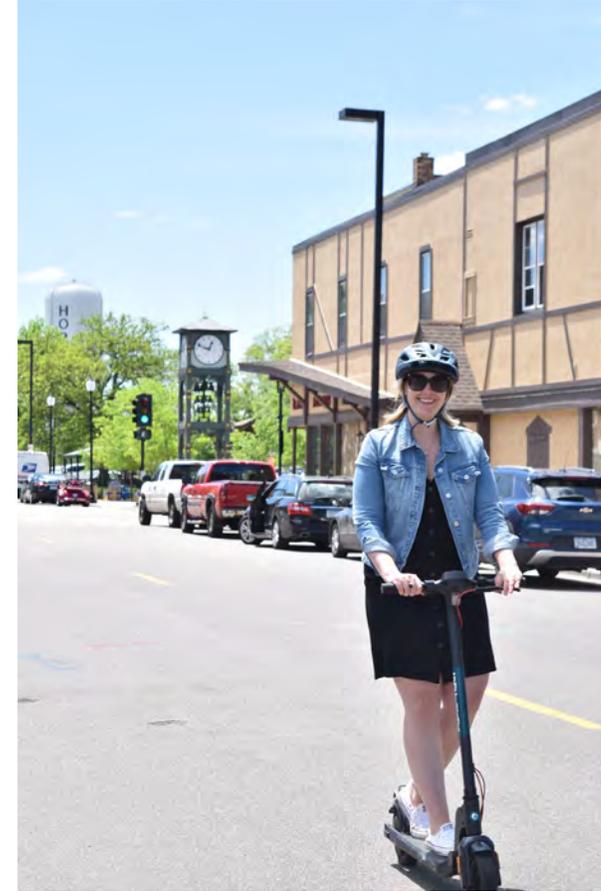
- Saves money for businesses
- Allows for most efficient use of parking
- Keeps Mainstreet walkable
- Allows for other community functions: farmer's market, events, concerts, etc.



District Parking for Bikes



District mobility: car share, scooter and bike rental



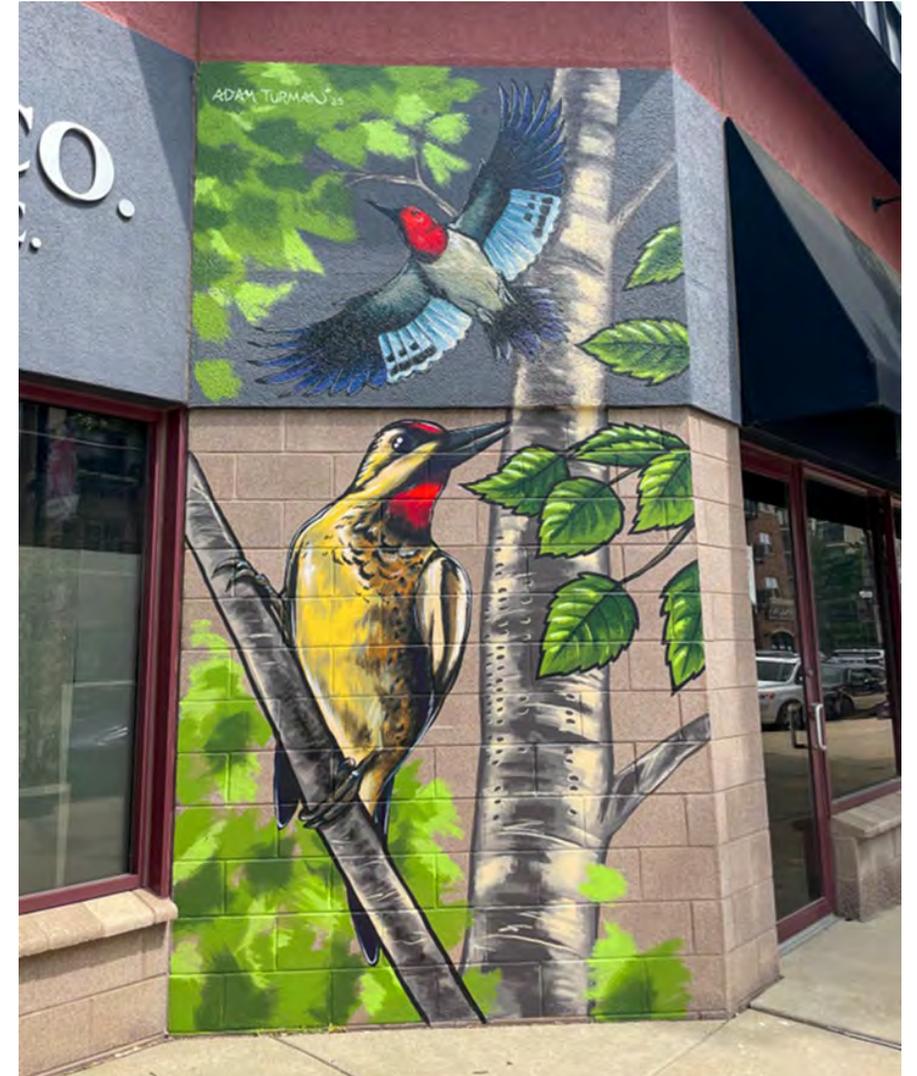
District Gathering Places



District Activations & Programming



District Art and Identity





Woman with Cloth
CJ Renner
member of the Hopkins
Center for the Arts

Think
Hopkins.com



Fiestaware
Angeleta Smith
member of the Hopkins
Center for the Arts

Think
Hopkins.com



Girl on Tricycle
Tom Hessel
member of the Hopkins
Center for the Arts

Think
Hopkins.com



The Magic Trick
Heather Renaux
member of the Hopkins
Center for the Arts

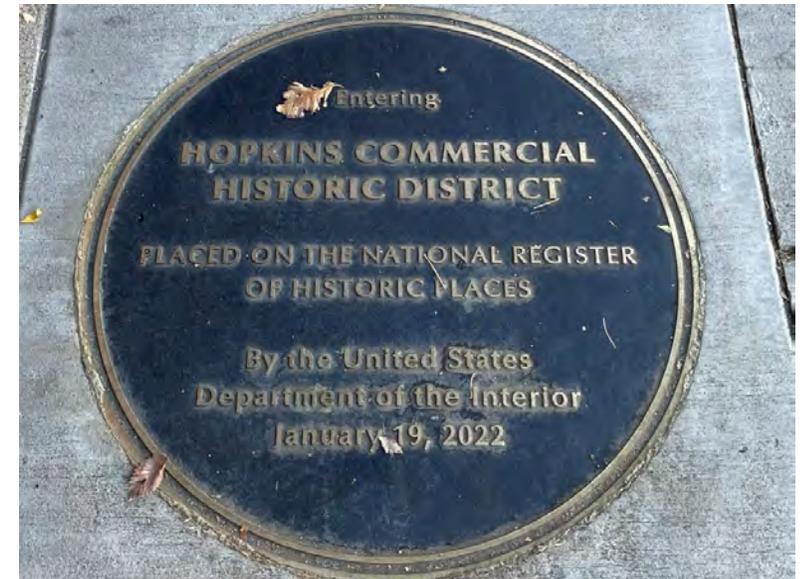
Think
Hopkins.com



Untitled 1
Elaine Beatty
member of the Hopkins
Center for the Arts

Think
Hopkins.com

Historic District





District Services





Alley Activations & Connections



District Marketing



How can you support a cluster of businesses to create more than the sum of the parts?



The Ford Site (Highland Bridge)

Exploring a New Urban Neighborhood



Site History & Planning Process



Pre-demolition

(Ford Motor Company Archives)

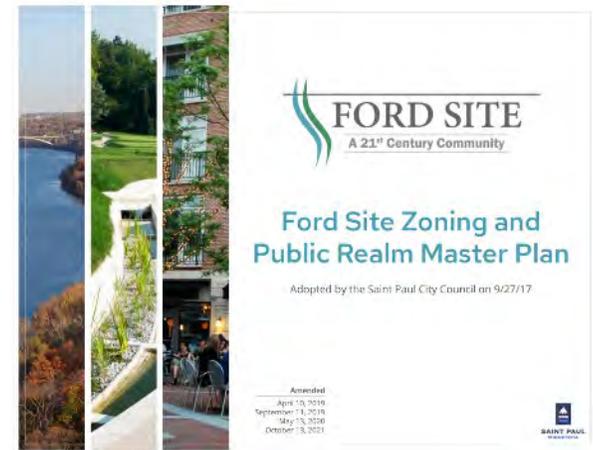
Post-demolition (Fall 2015)

(Pioneer Press: Scott Takushi)



Planning for a Shared Vision

- Ford Task Force initiated January 2007
- >100 public meetings
- 1300+ people
- 100+ articles in print, radio and television media
- 3,800+ subscribers to the Ford project news email list
- Culminated in the Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan, adopted September 2017



- Mix of uses and activity
- Affordable housing
- Environmental sustainability
- Parks and amenities
- Street network
- Zoning and design standards



Ryan Development Plan

- **122 Acre Project Site**
- **55+ Acres Public Open Space**
 - Public ROW (30 ac)
 - 4 Public Parks (13 ac)
 - 3 Privately Owned, Publicly Accessible Open Spaces (8 ac)
 - Preservation of Two Existing Highland Ball Fields (5 ac)
- **66 Acres Private Development Space**
 - 100,000 SF Retail
 - 65,000 SF Office
 - 3,200 Units Residential



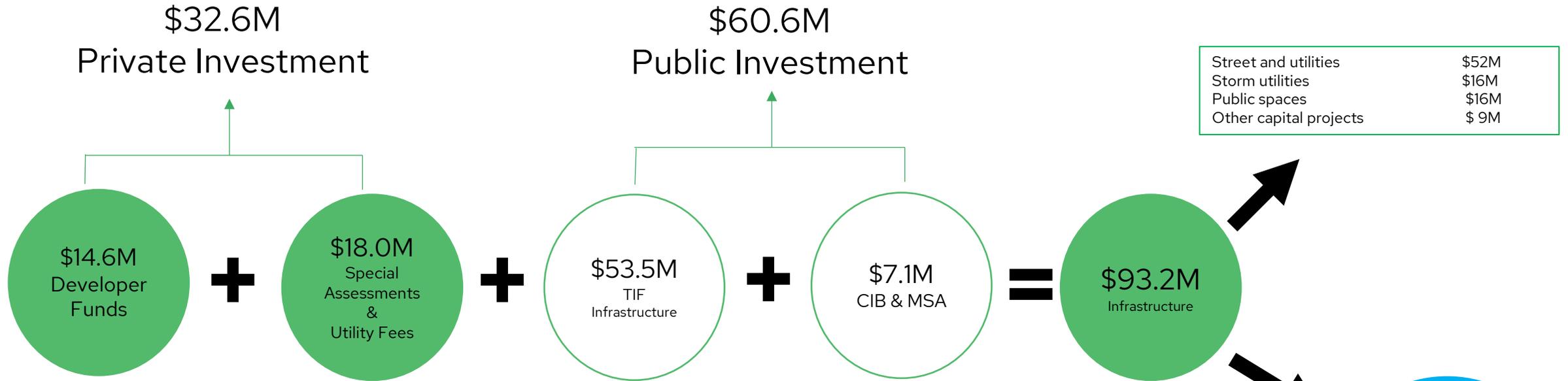


Ryan Development Plan

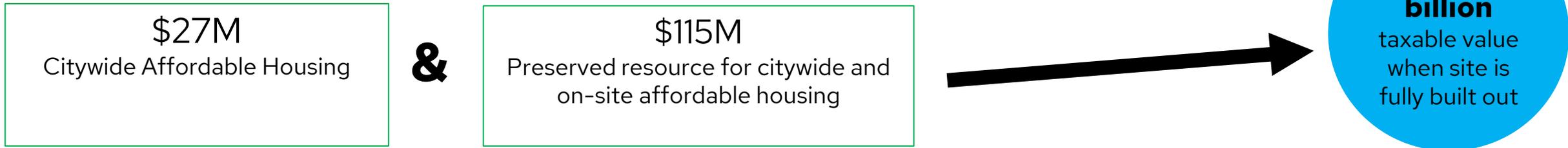


Redevelopment of the Site

INFRASTRUCTURE - IN PLACE



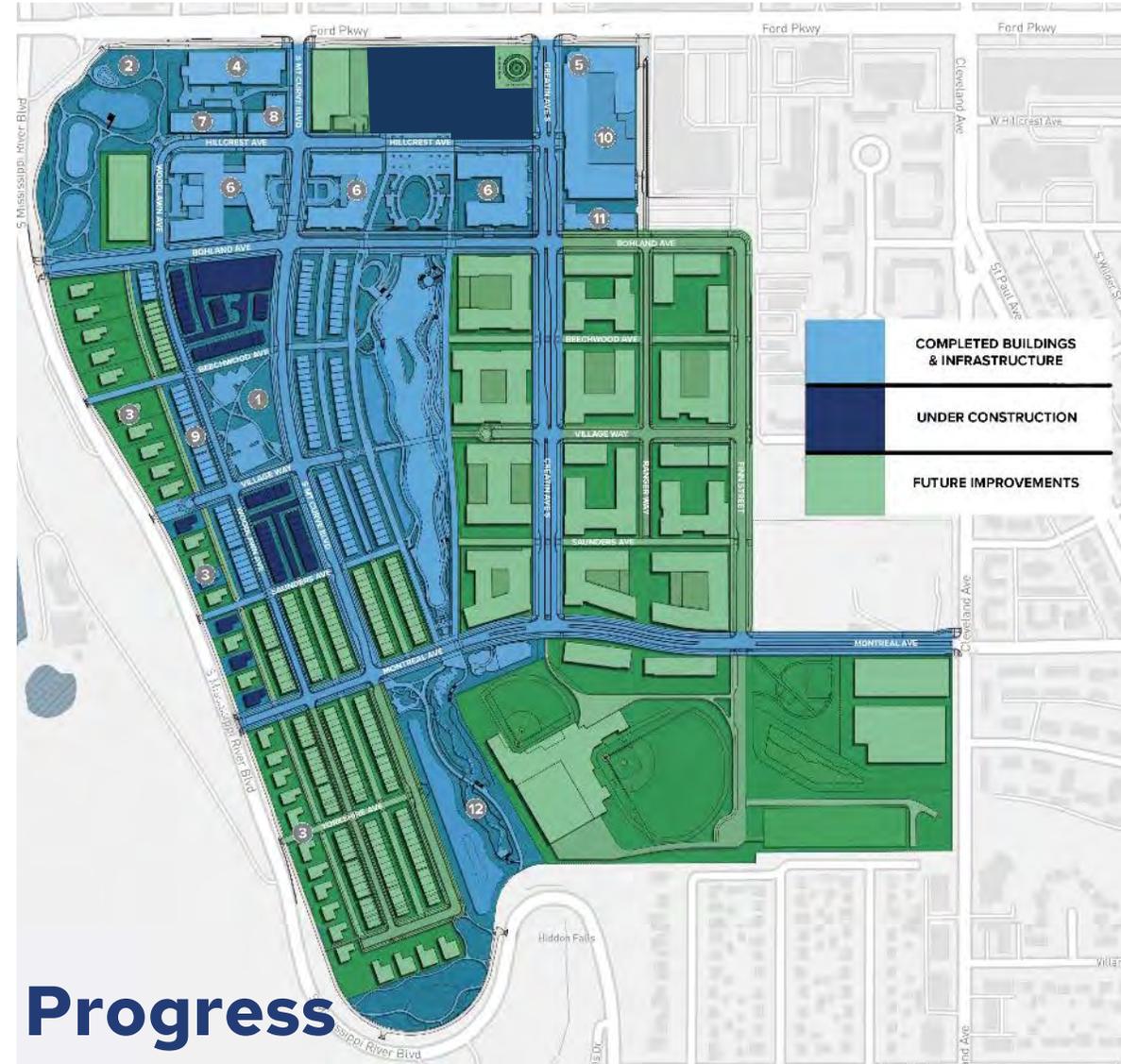
AFFORDABLE HOUSING - FUTURE ACTIONS



Development Progress



Land Ownership



Progress

Vertical Development Progress

1



2



3



4



5



6



Lessons Learned

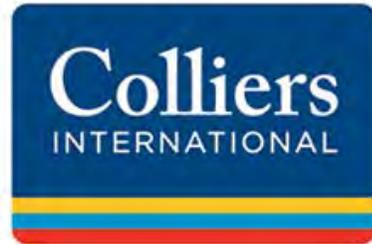
Community

- Partnerships
- Advocates





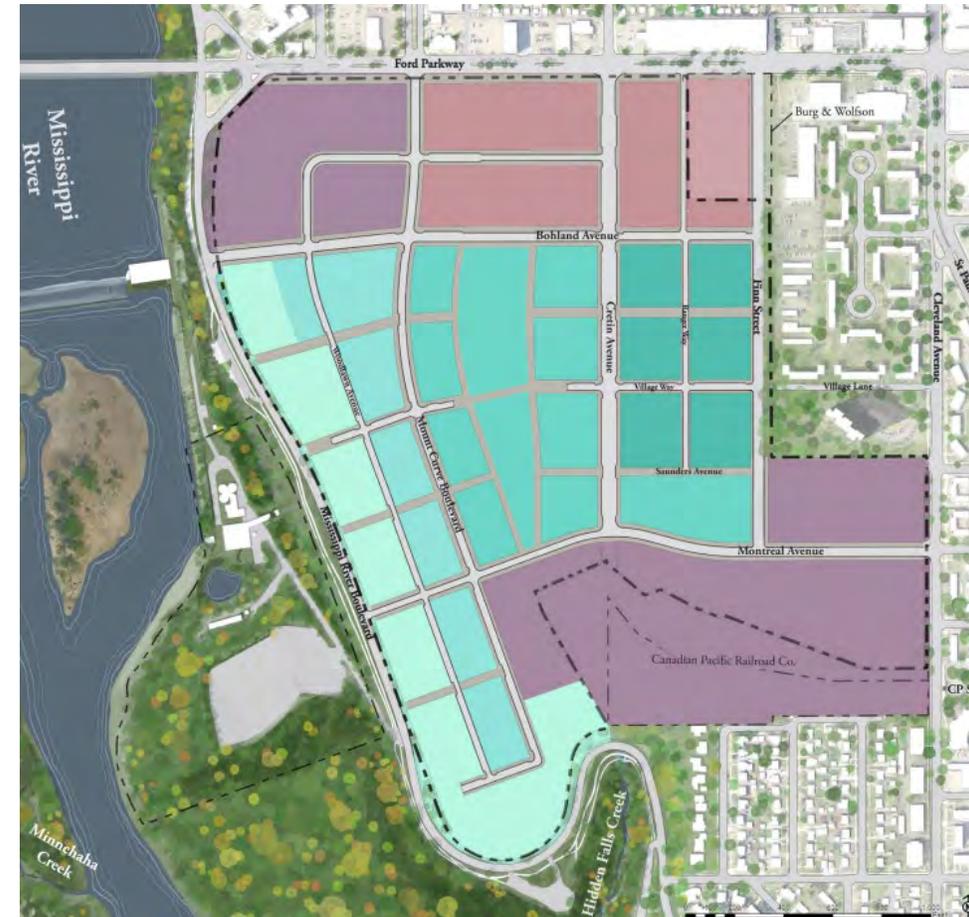
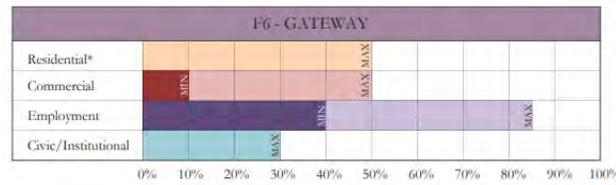
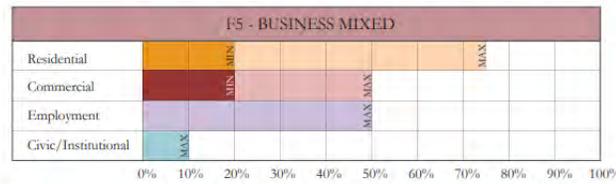
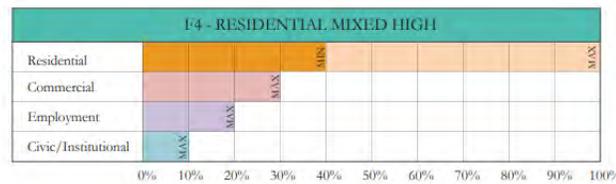
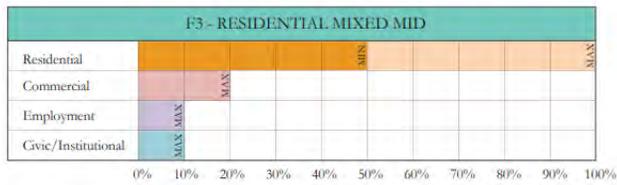
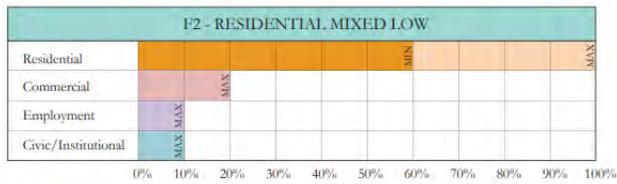
Project Partners



Planning & Implementation

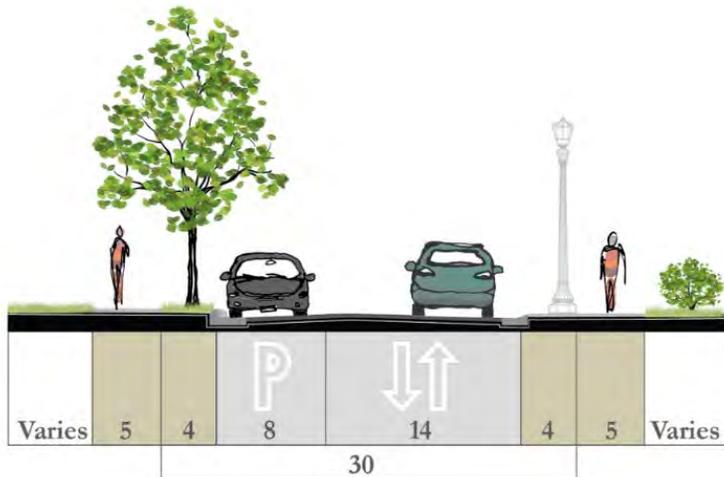
- Zoning Districts
- Master Plan – Planning/Engineering
- Construction Phasing

Table 4.2 Required Mix of Uses

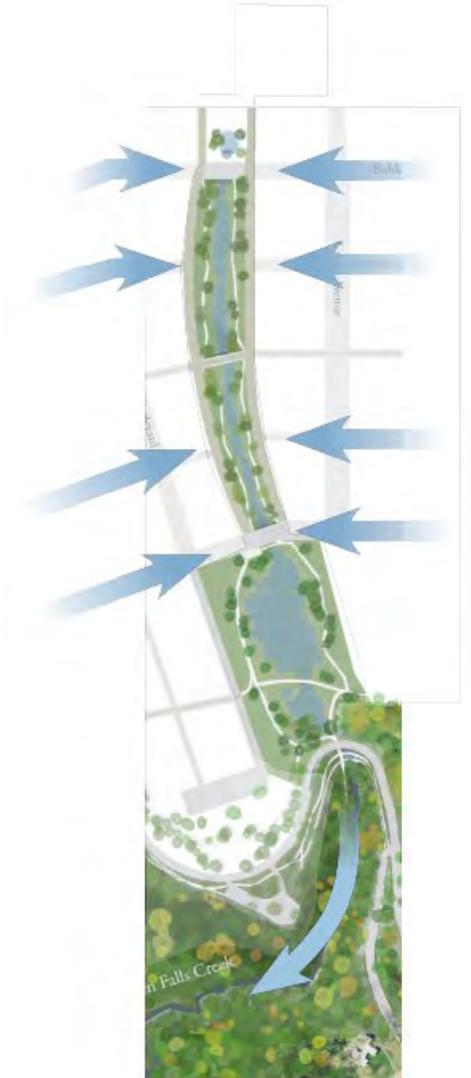


Planning & Implementation

- Zoning Districts
- Master Plan – Planning/Engineering
- Construction Phasing



TOTAL RIGHT-OF-WAY		30
CURB TO CURB DISTANCE		22
VEHICULAR	Shared	14
BIKE		
BOULEVARD TRANSITION (feet per side)		4
PEDESTRIAN EASEMENT (feet per side)		5
ON-STREET PARKING		8



Planning & Implementation

- Zoning Districts
- Master Plan – Planning/Engineering
- Construction Phasing





How it started



How it's going



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Q&A

What are your questions for the presenters?

Comments, observations or similar experiences to share?





Hennepin County Active Living

Denise Engen, Denise.Engen@hennepin.us

Robb Luckow, Robert.Luckow@hennepin.us

Hennepin County Community Investment

Ryan Kelley, Ryan.Kelley@hennepin.us

The image features a 2x4 grid of icons on a white background. The top row includes: a person walking and a person on a bicycle; an apple on top of a stack of books; a cigarette with a slash through it and the word 'TOBACCO' below; and a plate with a fork and spoon. The bottom row includes: a city skyline; a person standing next to trees; a heart with a pulse line; and a road winding through houses and trees. Below the grid, the text reads 'Hennepin County Active Living' followed by 'A collaboration of'. To the right are the logos for 'ship statewide health improvement partnership' and 'Hennepin'.

**Hennepin County
Active Living**
A collaboration of

ship
statewide health
improvement partnership

Hennepin