

## From Past to Present

# The Evolution of the Midtown Greenway

Few people know the history of the Midtown Greenway Corridor. Known to most as the abandoned railroad track in the trench on the north side of Lake Street, the Corridor is actually the symbolic result of one of the biggest legal and political battles in the history of Minneapolis.

Minneapolis was a young and emergent city in the 1880's. The flour milling industry was booming and the population was growing in leaps and bounds. Rail was the most efficient way to ship products at the time and area rail companies like the Milwaukee Road saw the quickly developing business center as potential for a more efficient route to the Mississippi River. Their Hastings and Dakota division's tracks ran through Mendota then and the company knew that tracks through Minneapolis would provide a shorter, more cost-effective shipping route. Before long, the Hastings and Dakota tracks of the Milwaukee Road Line were laid along Minneapolis' southern border of 29th Street that ran parallel to Lake Street. The development of these tracks would ultimately ignite a debate in the City of Minneapolis that would last for nearly a decade, and change the city indefinitely.

The availability of shipping trackage spawned new business development along the rail route and the city began



View from Clinton Avenue looking east toward Portland Avenue along 29th Street, c.1915

Photo Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

to grow at an exponential rate. The railroad sidetracks provided these businesses with direct connections to major transportation routes. But the communities surrounding the tracks were mostly residential, outside of the commercial node of Lake Street, and the rail line was beginning to disturb this balance. Residents quickly saw their neighborhoods becoming increasingly industrial and were not happy. The grade crossings across the tracks were also extremely dangerous and responsible for numerous deaths.

## Brewing Controversy

By 1905, the neighborhood residents began to vocalize their discontent. Petitions calling for the removal of the crossings circulated among residents, and were eventually brought before the City Council. The growing dilemma posed a question that would plague the city for years: Should the tracks be elevated or depressed? The answer was in the hands of the City Council and the representatives of Milwaukee Road. Communication between involved parties was

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# Urban Village—Leading the Way for Corridor Redevelopment

A stone's throw from Lyndale Avenue and Lake Street lies the site of a three block 220-unit housing project that represents the future of urban housing development. Adjacent to the Greenway and reinforcing its north-south crossroads, the Urban Village project is focused on building transit-oriented development that supports higher density housing and attracts a variety of incomes.

## Laying the Foundation

The concept of Urban Village was conceived as part of an extensive community-based planning project headed by Council Member Lisa McDonald that identified the three block area along 29th Street, between Aldrich and Dupont Avenues, as a significant opportunity for residential development. "These three blocks were currently being underutilized and represented poor land use with immense potential," recalls McDonald. "The possibility of redeveloping this land presented the opportunity to increase the value of the property, but more importantly, to develop an urban housing design that would revolutionize the Midtown Greenway."

Caren Dewar of *Dewar and Associates* was brought in as a development consultant who, upon the creation of the Midtown Community Works Partnership, was asked to guide management of the project. "Early on, the design team wanted a variety of building types and architectural styles, so three different developers were hired to work on the project," Dewar said. "This was a path breaking opportunity and our vision was of a neighborhood, not a project."

The stage was set and the vision was clear. The Urban Village project was quickly becoming a top development priority of the MCW Partnership, though the project was facing considerable hurdles. "The project presents unusual challenges," Dewar recognized. "Special care and strong support will

be necessary in relocating the businesses that currently occupy land on the site."

## The Capital Investment Fund

Even though developers were to pay market value, the cost of facilitating all of the necessary preliminary steps exceeded the value of the property and presented a substantial obstacle. The redeveloped land would eventually be mixed income property of high architectural quality and property values were all but assured to increase, but the cost of clearing and acquisition of the land was due upon the commencement of development. The City of Minneapolis approved a redevelopment district for the project thus providing tax increment financing for the land assembly activities, including acquisition, relocation of existing property owners, demolition and site improvement. However, the City will not issue bonds to be repaid with the tax increment proceeds until construction of the project is fully underway. This presented a financing gap that would require "bridge" funding to get the project from development plans to actual construction.

To address this need, the MCW Partnership Finance and Land Assembly Committee, chaired by Wells Fargo Chairman and C.E.O. Jim Campbell, developed the Capital Investment Fund. Under Campbell's leadership, the Committee undertook the incredible effort of raising \$8 million in investments from both public and private sources. Investors will be repaid in 3-4 years once the City's bonds are sold, or allow their investment to be utilized for subsequent projects. Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton believes that this Capital Investment Fund represents an investment-funding prototype that can be replicated throughout the Corridor. "I am grateful to Jim Campbell for his leadership," she noted. "This is a great example of true public-private partnership."

## MCW Partnership

**Hennepin County Commissioners**  
Commissioner Mike Opat, Chair  
Commissioner Peter McLaughlin  
Commissioner Gail Dorfman

**Mayor of Minneapolis**  
Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton

## Minneapolis City Council Members

Council Member Brian Herron  
Council Member Lisa McDonald  
Council Member Jim Niland  
Council Member Kathy Thurber

**Mpls. Park & Recreation Board**  
Commissioner Vivian Mason

**Metropolitan Council**  
Ted Mondale, Chair

**Allina Health System**  
Gordon Sprenger, CEO

**Target Corporation**  
Nate Garvis, Vice President  
Government Affairs

**Fannie Mae**  
Missy Thompson, Director  
Minnesota Partnership Office

**LISC**  
Paul Williams, Senior Program Director

**Mpls. St. Paul Magazine**  
Burt Cohen, President and Publisher

**Wells Fargo Bank**  
Jim Campbell, Chair and CEO

**Xcel Energy**  
Kent Larson, Minnesota Vice President

**Reliant Energy Minnegasco**  
Gary Cerny, President and COO

**US Bank**  
John Murphy,  
Minnesota State Chairman

**MCW Co-chairs**  
Gordon Sprenger  
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Above: New mixed-income housing fronting on the Greenway between Aldrich and Dupont Avenues.

Right: The landscape gallery pedestrian promenade along Greenway rim.



### Looking Forward to the Future

Upon its completion, Urban Village will be a role model for urban housing development in the new millennium. Facing the Greenway, Urban Village provides a view to the park amenities and walking paths outside one's front door while inviting neighborhood residents to partake in all the Greenway has to offer. The multi-modal transit connections, including the future link of LRT to the airport and the Mall of America, present the opportunity for people to live a quality lifestyle independent of auto transportation.

"Urban Village exemplifies Smart Growth," said Met Council Chair Ted Mondale. "It provides more choices in where people live, and how they move around, with access to transit options. Urban Village is a great project, due largely to the work of an amazing public-private partnership."

The Urban Village project is a truly dynamic model of visionary development coupled with innovative and unconventional investment funding. It serves as the blueprint project leading the way for development throughout the Corridor and represents all that is possible to come.

## Transit and the Midtown Corridor

The Midtown Community Works Partnership is focusing on several transit studies to identify viable options through the Midtown Greenway Corridor. Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council have explored a busway and both single and double track vintage rail trolley options. Any of these transit options would connect with the LRT Hiawatha Line, which will begin service between downtown Minneapolis and Fort Snelling in 2003, and extend to the airport and the Mall of America by 2004.

The transportation studies are available on the MCW Partnership website: [www.midtowncommunityworks.org](http://www.midtowncommunityworks.org).



Hiawatha LRT Groundbreaking Ceremony, January 17, 2001

From left: Art Leahy, former General Manager of Metro Transit, Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, Minneapolis Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton, Metropolitan Council Chair Ted Mondale, Governor Jesse Ventura, U.S. Representative Martin Sabo, MnDOT Commissioner Elwyn Tinklenberg, Joel Ettinger, Federal Transit Administration and Lt. Governor Mae Schunk.

slow and broken and progress moved at sluggish pace, as Milwaukee Road officials were reluctant to assume any responsibility for redevelopment of the tracks. Without any reachable agreement between the parties, the City Council tabled the issue in 1908.

The Minneapolis Journal prompted debate to continue with controversial dialogue that forced the Council to resume discussion.

Neighborhood residents were infuriated by the Council's lack of action to this point. By 1909, the issue was back on the Council's agenda presenting the same quandary of how best to eradicate the crossings. Under pressure, Milwaukee Road officials eventually proposed a plan to elevate the tracks. The proposal was poorly received by the City because it called for the closing of nearly two dozen main intersecting streets. The City rejected the proposal and asked Milwaukee Road to present the Council with a more feasible plan. The City even offered to assume half the costs.

### **The Resolution**

Finally in early 1910, the Railroad presented a \$1.3 million plan to depress the tracks with project completion in two years. The Railroad would incur all costs and would require no street closures. Unfortunately, the proposal now negatively affected the businesses along the tracks that relied on the sidetracks (which were to be removed) to transport their goods. As tensions began to mount, the Council pondered whether there was a solution that collectively served the needs of the railroad, private business and the residents.

The three-way battle that ensued was excruciating for all involved. The debate of how to handle this problem was already more than five years old. The City took matters in to their own hands and passed an ordinance requiring the immediate depression of the tracks. Milwaukee Road complied and preparation for the depression began in April 1911.

The businesses affected by the ordinance quickly mobilized opposition. Stating that their interests were not being served and that they had not received fair notice of the ordinance,

they refused to comply. Thirty companies joined together to obtain an injunction against the City to halt the project. Their case was heard in October when a judge ultimately denied their claim and ordered Milwaukee Road back to work. In January 1912, disgruntled and impatient, the businesses changed their strategy and filed a new lawsuit against Milwaukee Road.

The companies argued that the City had gone outside its authority and that no railroad could alter its track in a way that would affect the businesses on that line without the permission of the State Rail and Warehouse Commission. But the City's ordinance had already passed and the Railroad had the right to terminate any side trackage contracts within sixty days of written notice, which had been given.

In July 1912, the Minnesota Supreme Court intervened. The Court found that the City had exercised its rights within the law and therefore the ordinance would be upheld. It was also determined that the Railroad and Warehouse Commission had no legislative or judicial authority to interfere with the City's rights of police powers to protect public safety. Work to depress the tracks and build the more than three dozen bridges that would serve as crossings, began immediately and was completed by 1916.

### **A New Beginning**

The depression of the Hastings and Dakota tracks created what is today, the Midtown Greenway Corridor. The site is still considered one of great opportunity and its redevelopment is again a high priority for private business and local government. This time the key stakeholders are working in partnership.

The Greenway has now evolved from an industrial railway to a developing urban corridor that envisions mixed-income housing, multi-modal transportation and open space designed to reflect the many faces, cultures and classes that lie within its borders.

*Facts for this article provided by The Twenty-Ninth Street Tracks: From Neighborhood Activism to City Power, by Eden Spencer and the Minneapolis Journal, 1905-1914.*

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# Resonant Journey

## The Public Art Master Plan for the Midtown Greenway Corridor

**"The bridge design plan is the perfect example of combining pure function with aesthetic beauty. This is an incredible opportunity with uniquely definable and identifiable purpose."**

—Nate Garvis

The incorporation of public art in the redevelopment of the Midtown Greenway Corridor has been a top priority of the Midtown Community Works Partnership since its inception. Consistent with the overall design and development of the Corridor, public art will bring forth the history of the Greenway and emphasize the individual characteristics of the neighborhoods while allowing them to be uniquely tied together.

### A Plan with Purpose

As a critical component of the Greenway's development design, the integration of public art required a formalized plan and implementation strategy. The MCW Partnership received a \$100,000 grant from the Bush Foundation and hired the Freeman Whitehurst Group, a Phoenix-based consulting team specializing in the planning, policy and management of public art and local arts agencies, to develop a public art master plan. "This project has a national audience," stated Gretchen Freeman. "The opportunity that exists in the linear and bridged nature of the Midtown Greenway exists in no other American city that we're aware of."

The Public Art Master Plan is an encompassing framework model that provides detailed thought and recommendations for every area of focus along the Greenway. It captures the essence, and embraces the history, of the Corridor while integrating the distinct needs of the various investors, local officials and community members involved in its planning. "The partnership between the public and private stakeholders in this project was vital," Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin acknowledged. "Each person at the table on this was instrumental in its success."

One of the most unique opportunities and intensive recommendations of the Public Art Master Plan is the redesign of the 40 bridges that cross the Greenway and connect its neighborhoods. The proposal, spanning 30 years, states that the bridges represent the literal and figurative "bridging" of the communities and



This photograph from the Public Art Master Plan of a family at the Powderhorn Farmer's Market is one of many used to illustrate the Greenway's history and reflect the many cultures of people that live there.

Photo by Tim Francisco

neighborhoods of the Corridor and is the single-most significant public art and design opportunity within the Greenway. "The bridge design plan is the perfect example of combining pure function with aesthetic beauty," said Nate Garvis. "This is an incredible opportunity with uniquely definable and identifiable purpose."

### Building on History, Planning for the Future

The plan stresses the importance of preserving rare urban amenities, and highlights the significance of public art in urban design and development. "The Public Art Master Plan sets an important precedent for public art policy," said Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton. "It will serve as an educational tool as well as a guide of implementation for public art well into the future."

Bestowing a voice upon both the Greenway and its residents, the Public Art Master Plan provides the communities and neighborhoods of the Greenway with the opportunity to create visual representation of their rich diversity and history. "The Office of Cultural Affairs intends to use this plan as a 'primer' for all other projects within the city," stated Noel James, Director. "That's how good we think it is."

Go to [www.midtowncommunityworks.org](http://www.midtowncommunityworks.org) for more on the Public Art Master Plan.

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## Arbor Day 2001

# Greening the Greenway

On Saturday, April 28, the Midtown Community Works Partnership and the Midtown Greenway Coalition sponsored an Arbor Day event that marked an important stage of development in the Midtown Greenway Corridor-greening of the Greenway. Bringing together the MCW Partners, local government, neighborhood organizations and Greenway residents, the occasion was a unique opportunity to truly experience the Greenway and assist in its redevelopment.

Volunteers from neighborhoods and communities bordering the Greenway, along with volunteers from MCW organizations planted 250 trees, shrubs and perennials, in clusters along the Greenway. Five areas bordering ten neighborhoods were identified for planting (from west to east): Kenilworth Trail and Dean Parkway, the Mall at

Hennepin Avenue, Fremont Avenue, Nicollet Avenue and Kix Field.

The MCW Partnership selected Close Landscape Architecture to develop a landscaping plan and hired Twin Cities Tree Trust to lend organizational support to the project. The local chapter of Tree Trust (a private, nonprofit organization that acts as a catalyst for local volunteer and community service groups in the growing, planting, and maintenance of trees in rural and urban areas) worked together with the MCW Partnership and the Midtown Greenway Coalition to rally volunteers in the neighborhoods prior to the event.

MCW Co-Chair, Jim Campbell greeted guests and volunteers at a welcoming ceremony held near Kix field on the Greenway's east end. Local officials and MCW Partners including Mayor Sharon Sayles Belton, County

Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, Council Members Lisa McDonald and Brian Herron and Met Council Chair Ted Mondale, thanked volunteers and spoke briefly of the significance of the redevelopment of the Greenway. Following the ceremony, representatives of Tree Trust and Master Gardeners provided training to volunteers to ensure proper planting of the trees. After planting, volunteers enjoyed lunch supplied by the Partnership.

The tree-planting event was a fun and productive way to unite the neighborhoods along the Greenway in a common effort. Community residents learned more about the Midtown development project and gained a sense of ownership in the Greenway itself. The end result is a more beautiful, appealing urban park for each neighborhood to enjoy.



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