



Request for City Council Committee Action from the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development

Date: November 19, 2009

To: The Honorable Gary Schiff, Chairperson,
Zoning and Planning Committee

Subject: Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan

Recommendation:

Adopt a Resolution by Council Members Ostrow and Hofstede regarding implementation of the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan in Northeast Minneapolis (attached). The purpose of the proposed Resolution is to signal to Hennepin County, neighborhoods, and others the importance of revisiting, refining, and updating the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan recommendations prior to implementation and to help relieve the uncertainty that is discouraging investment along the corridor.

Previous Directives:

- July 12, 2002 – City Council approved the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan on July 12, 2002, subject to the following conditions:
 - a. that Hennepin County continues to coordinate with the Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee as it moves into subsequent stages including but not necessarily limited to the acquisition plan, redevelopment plans, preliminary roadway alignments, preliminary and final design states; and
 - b. that separate approval of the preliminary roadway alignment is required; and
 - c. that separate approvals of subsequent design phases are required. The City of Minneapolis is supportive of Hennepin County's conceptual plan for the Lowry Avenue Corridor and encourages Hennepin County to address the following issues in conjunction with its partners:
 - continue to review proposed land uses, design guidelines and economic development opportunities to create livable neighborhoods, evaluating proposed roadway widths and other design features;

- comply with the Minneapolis Plan to increase the variety of housing types and economic opportunity, strengthen the Lowry Community Corridor, area commercial nodes and the Central/Lowry Activity Center by providing for appropriate density, urban design and uses; and ensure continued dialogue with abutting neighborhoods, neighborhood organizations, and other stakeholder groups as this conceptual plan evolves.

Department Information

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Presenters in Committee: Haila Maze

Financial Impact

- No financial impact

Community Impact

- Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth (2009)
- Access Minneapolis Design Guidelines for Streets and Sidewalks (2008)
- Central Avenue Small Area Plan (2008)
- Pedestrian Master Plan (2009)
- Zoning Code

Supporting Information:

Lowry Avenue is a Hennepin County roadway.

In May 2002, Hennepin County completed its Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan. The stated goals of the plan were to “enhance access to jobs through public transportation; effectively link civic spaces through transit, bicycle and pedestrian connections; and congregate services, retail and office space around transit centers/nodes.”

The analysis in the plan concluded that Lowry Avenue needs to be widened in certain segments to accommodate traffic, new bike lanes, parking, and streetscape improvements. This widening would require the County to acquire the first property abutting Lowry Avenue, either on the north side or south side, between Lyndale Avenue and Central Avenue to accommodate roadway requirements, parking, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and landscaping. The residual land not needed from the acquisitions could be available for redevelopment.

After the completion of the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan, Hennepin County requested that the City of Minneapolis formally adopt the planning study, to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations. On July 12, 2002, the City Council adopted the plan subject to a series of conditions, which reflected some concerns regarding the impacts of the recommendations, particularly on Northeast Minneapolis neighborhoods and commercial areas. The conditions are set forth in “Previous Directives” above.

Plan Implementation and Concerns: As of September 2009, the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan has been implemented through the reconstruction of Lowry Avenue west

of the river through North Minneapolis. The replacement of the bridge over the Mississippi River has been planned and funded, and construction is scheduled to start soon.

Except for the bridge approaches on the east bank, the plan has not yet been implemented in Northeast Minneapolis. There is currently no timeline or dedicated funding in the County capital improvement program, at least through 2012. However, concerns with the plan's recommendations have continued to grow since the City Council action. These concerns include:

- *Dampening effect on investment.* Due to the proposed acquisition and demolition that plan implementation would require, commercial and residential property owners along Lowry Avenue have been discouraged from investing in their properties. The uncertainty regarding the timeline for implementation has exacerbated this situation.
- *Changing views of how a street should function.* While traditional approaches to road building emphasize moving cars and trucks quickly along wide roadways, this has not been the priority of the City in recent years. Instead, there has been a focus on prioritizing other modes of travel (including pedestrian), while still accommodating all modes safely. Hennepin County staff have indicated a similar shift in their own policies and practices.
- *New policy direction.* Since adopting the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan, the City Council has adopted additional plans which refine their position on this project. The Access Minneapolis Design Guidelines for Streets and Sidewalks (2008) identify Lowry Avenue as a Community Connector with a maximum of 2-3 lanes for automobile traffic, rather than the Lowry Plan's suggested 4-5. And the Central Avenue Small Area Plan (2008) provides an alternative, narrower cross section at the intersection of Central and Lowry which meets the needs of the corridor without requiring extensive right-of-way acquisition.
- *Potential for workable alternatives.* There are a number of alternatives to accommodating traffic needs on the street – from focusing on intersection improvements to relocating some facilities to parallel routes. These alternatives should be explored prior to reaching a final decision.