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Pursue the Corridor Vision

Minnehaha-Hiawatha Community Works Project

Minnehaha-Hiawatha Community Works is a project within the Hennepin Community Works (HCW) program. The mission of the HCW program is “to enhance how the communities of Hennepin County work together to create good jobs, provide access to employment, and build the long term value of communities by investing in infrastructure, public works, parks, and the natural environment and by improving the existing implementation systems.” The purpose of the Minnehaha-Hiawatha Community Works (MHCW) project is to maximize the benefits from the Hiawatha LRT line by leveraging County investments in infrastructure to stimulate economic development, improve the natural systems of the area, enhance transportation (including bike and pedestrian access), improve quality of life, and increase the area’s tax base. For example, the upcoming reconstruction of Minnehaha Ave/CSAH 48 presents a major opportunity to integrate a street reconstruction project with improved access to jobs, stores/services, transit and parks/trails for all transportation modes - driving, bicycling, walking and public transit.

In 2008, the Minnehaha-Hiawatha Community Works project began a two-year process to develop a corridor vision and project implementation framework for the Minnehaha-Hiawatha corridor. This corridor framework consists of four components:

- » *Data Inventory Report*
- » *Summary of Issues*
- » *Strategic Investment Framework*
- » *Implementation Action Plan*

The Implementation Action Plan is intended to serve as a guide for implementing the corridor vision, strategies, concepts and projects of the Strategic Investment Framework. It is a tool for both public agencies and private organizations to strategically collaborate on and coordinate transportation, housing, business development, cultural/recreational amenities, and environmental investments that will improve the livability, sustainability and vitality of the Minnehaha-Hiawatha corridor.

Minnehaha-Hiawatha Corridor Vision

The vision for the Minnehaha-Hiawatha Corridor is established within the Strategic Investment Framework and sets forth a long-term vision of creating a more livable corridor. The vision for Minnehaha-Hiawatha is focused on improvements and reinvestments in five key aspects of livability:

- » *Mobility - A balanced multi-modal transportation system designed and operated to ensure safety and accessibility for all users of the community's streets, trails, transit, and freight rail facilities.*
- » *Land Use & Physical Resources - A sustainable, transit-supportive land use pattern that integrates a diverse range of complementary land uses and development densities.*



Martin Olav Sabo Bridge connects the Midtown Greenway's walking/bicycling facilities across Hiawatha Avenue/Trunk Highway 55. (Source: City of Minneapolis)

Mission of Hennepin County Community Works Program

“to enhance how the communities of Hennepin County work together to create good jobs, provide access to employment, and build the long term value of communities by investing in infrastructure, public works, parks, and the natural environment and by improving the existing implementation systems.”

- » *Environment & Natural Resources - Sustainable development practices and lifestyle options support a healthy ecological environment and conservation of natural resources.*
- » *Economic Development - Diverse and vibrant districts provide jobs and retail options for area residents.*
- » *Social, Cultural & Heritage - A corridor of vibrant places and opportunities providing attractive gathering places for people and celebrating the community's diverse cultural and physical heritage.*



Implementing the vision of the Minnehaha-Hiawatha corridor hinges upon guiding its transition from a 19th century industrial railroad and highway corridor to a corridor of three unique “diagonal” neighborhood districts. Historically, the corridor’s evolution has been focused on its function as a regional link between downtown Minneapolis and destinations to the southeast. The corridor’s role as a regional link began with the early Indian trail, which was improved to a territorial road (Fort Snelling Road) connecting Fort Snelling and St. Anthony Falls. The territorial road became Minnehaha Ave connecting to the Minnehaha Falls area and the state’s first park, Minnehaha Park. Beginning in the mid-19th century, the corridor’s western portion evolved as an industrial district oriented to the rail line, which was constructed just to the west of Minnehaha Avenue. In conjunction with industries developing along the rail line and the city’s expansion, Hiawatha Ave was developed and extended along the rail line’s west side.

In the 20th century, Hiawatha Avenue was eventually designated as a segment of MN Highway 55 in the 1930s, followed by studies and planning for a potential upgrade to an 8-lane freeway beginning in the 1960s. Mn DOT acquired a significant amount of land, particularly along the west side of the highway corridor, and removed many of the houses in preparation for the potential freeway. Strong neighborhood opposition ultimately prevented the freeway upgrade and the highway was then upgraded to a 4-lane divided highway with the Hiawatha LRT line along the west side. In contrast, Minnehaha Avenue evolved from a territorial road to a city boulevard with a streetcar line and primarily residential development with frequent commercial nodes related to the streetcar service.

With the opening of the Hiawatha LRT line in 2004, the continued underutilization of some industrial and commercial areas, and aging public infrastructure, the corridor is ripe for transformation and reinvestment. In contrast to the historic focus on the corridor’s function as a regional link, the Minnehaha-Hiawatha Strategic Investment Framework establishes a vision that focuses on creating three unique “diagonal” districts within the corridor and the importance of east-west connections within these districts. The corridor’s diagonal orientation within the Minneapolis street grid makes it unique and memorable as a place. As land uses and transportation facilities change in the corridor, its historic and unique diagonal pattern should be capitalized upon to capture a true sense of place in the Minnehaha-Hiawatha corridor.

Implementation Approach

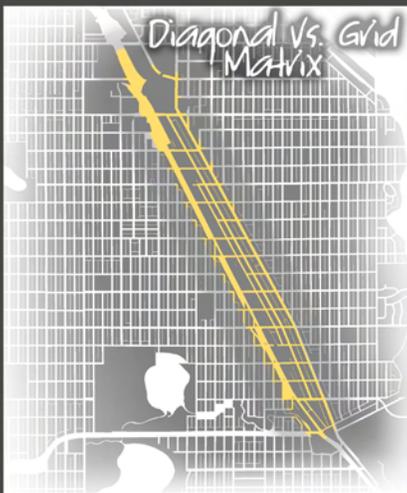
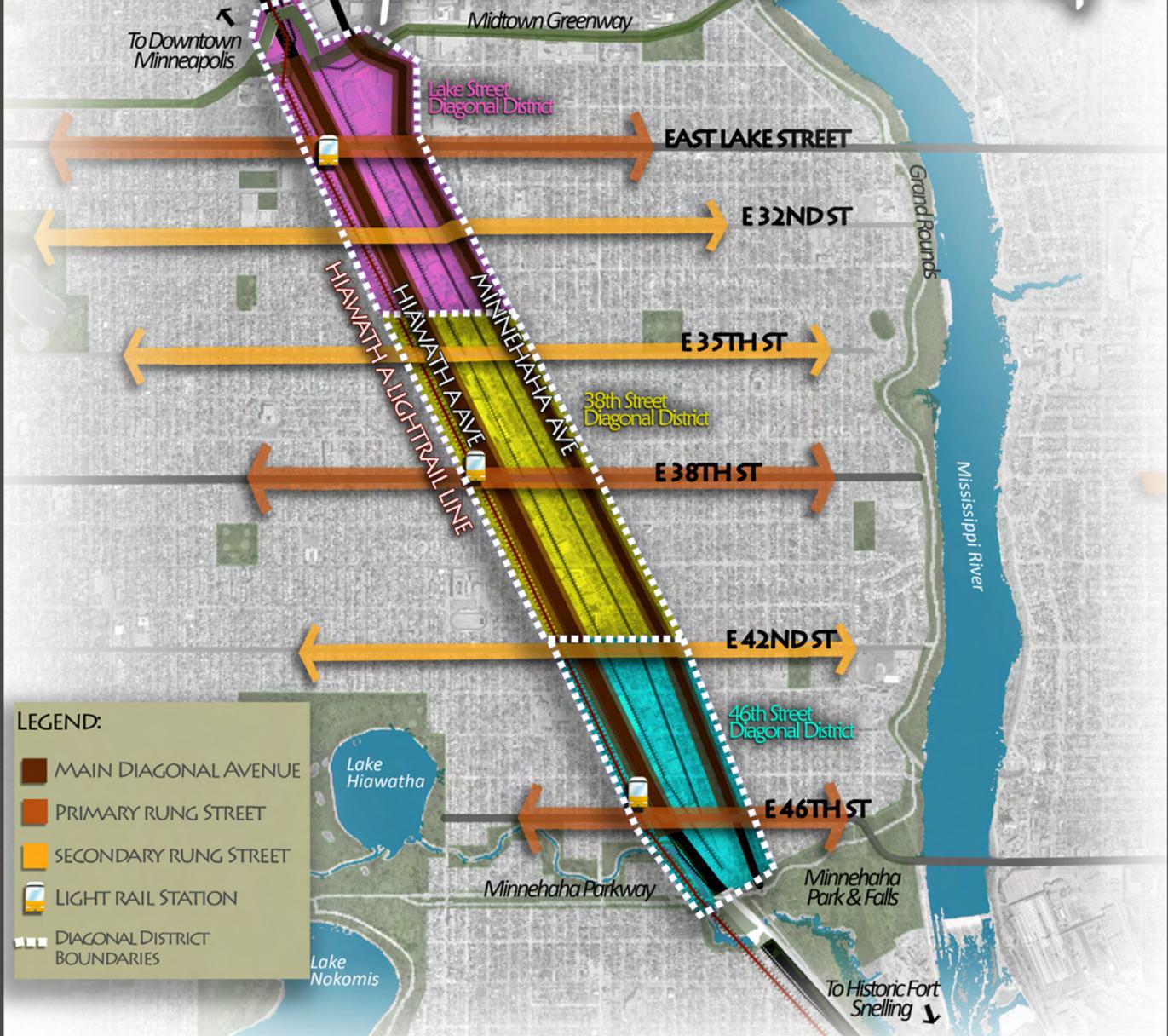
Set up the Implementation Team

Implementing the MHCW Framework should include creating a collaborative implementation partnership team that focuses on corridor improvement efforts at five different levels:

- » *Incorporating the Corridor Framework’s livability elements, values, strategies and implementation approach into future plans and programs that relate to the corridor at the various jurisdictional levels;*
- » *Setting up the implementation partnership teams and process;*
- » *Identifying, prioritizing, and coordinating corridor projects for each diagonal district;*
- » *Setting up a corridor livability indicators program, including establishing future goals/targets and monitoring on an annual basis;*
- » *Identifying strategies for partnerships, funding and communication for corridor projects.*

To be truly effective in getting things done in the corridor, implementation of the Minnehaha-Hiawatha Community Works (MHCW) project requires the collaboration of the private sector as well as public agencies at multiple jurisdictional levels, including Hennepin County, City of Minneapolis, Metropolitan Council, State agencies (particularly Mn DOT), Minneapolis Public School District, the two local watershed organizations, and area neighborhood and business organizations. Endorsement of the Corridor Framework by the Hennepin County Board, Minneapolis City Council, and neighborhood and business organizations, particularly Longfellow Community Council and Longfellow Business Association, will strengthen the opportunities for Corridor Framework recommendations to be implemented. A unified

Diagonal Ladder Concept



The Diagonal Ladder Concept:

A map of the Minnehaha-Hiawatha study area lends itself easily to the metaphor of a ladder: two major parallel routes are crossed at similar intervals by cross streets which enable access to, from, and through the corridor. The main diagonals—Minnehaha Avenue and Hiawatha Avenue/LRT line—run all the way through the study area forming the side rails of the ladder. East Lake Street, 38th Street, and 46th Street are the primary rungs on the ladder because Hiawatha light rail line stations are located at these streets and they are primary thoroughfares through South Minneapolis. Two of the primary rungs—Lake Street and 46th Street—connect south Minneapolis with St. Paul by crossing the Mississippi River. The secondary rungs—32nd Street, 35th Street, and 42nd Street—are important connector streets for destinations east and west of the corridor.

implementation approach for all organizations related to the corridor will enable the County to leverage strategic investments to address issues and optimize revitalization opportunities in the corridor.

Since the Corridor Framework is intended to provide a unified vision for the corridor, it is critical for the livability elements, values, strategies and implementation approach to be endorsed by the County, City, neighborhoods, and Metropolitan Council and, to the greatest extent possible, incorporated into each agency's/organization's existing and future plans relating to the corridor. A key component of formally supporting the Strategic Investment Framework and Implementation Action Plan is to establish each organization's commitment to creating an implementation partnership team to coordinate the project's implementation activities.

It is recommended that the Hennepin County Board endorse the Corridor Framework as a corridor action plan similar to previous Community Works corridor projects, such as the Midtown Greenway, Bottineau Boulevard, Humboldt Greenway, and Lowry Ave corridors. In coordinating the Implementation Action Plan, Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis are critical partners and potential lead agencies for many of the recommended implementation projects in the corridor. Another important partner is the Metropolitan Council, particularly relating to transit services. The Hiawatha LRT line is a key component of the corridor's future character and development pattern as is the arterial bus network that has a major presence in the corridor. The continued involvement of the neighborhood and business organizations is critical for future changes in the corridor. In addition, it is recommended that the Corridor Framework's implementation actions are linked to the neighborhoods' Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP) strategic action plans and funding programs as much as possible.

Recommended Projects

The Implementation Action Plan recommends a set of priority projects for implementing the Strategic Investment Framework. These recommended projects are organized around three diagonal districts and categorized as either catalyst (larger) or springboard projects (smaller). The lead projects are centered around public infrastructure improvements - Minnehaha Avenue/CSAH 48, 46th Street/CSAH 46 and 38th Street. These projects complement each other and support the corridor concept of a ladder with key "diagonal" avenues and "rung" streets serving three diagonal districts.

Focus on Diagonal Districts

Implementation of the Minnehaha-Hiawatha corridor vision and strategic investment framework should focus on the creation of three "diagonal" neighborhood districts:

- » *Lake Street Diagonal District*
- » *38th Street Diagonal District*
- » *46th Street Diagonal District*

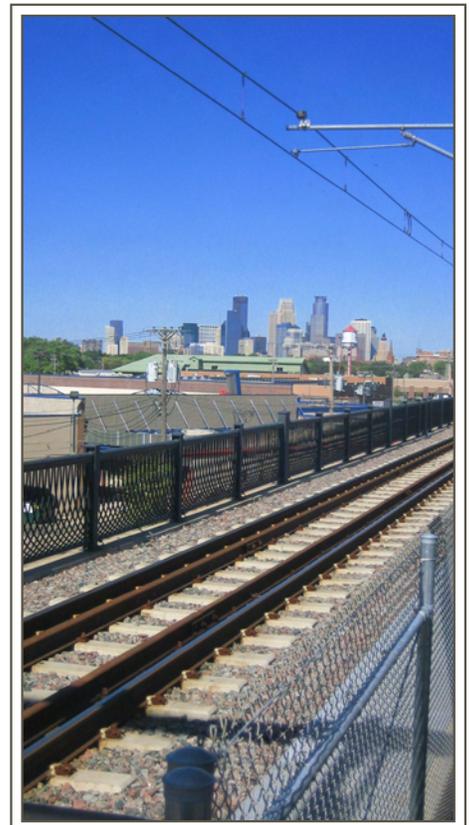
These three districts are focused on the three primary "rungs" or cross-streets of the diagonal corridor between Minnehaha Ave and Hiawatha Ave. The boundaries of the three districts are based upon the walkable distance (1/4 – 1/2 mile) from the three Hiawatha LRT stations located on the corridor's west side. The diagonal districts are envisioned to connect the seven Minneapolis neighborhoods to the east and west of the corridor with the three cross-streets serving as the primary hubs for activity and movement within the districts. These three cross-streets also provide the most valuable opportunities for functioning as major gateways into the neighborhoods. Consequently, the Implementation Action Plan is organized around reinvestment projects in these three districts that focused on improving the livability of the corridor.

Coordinate Project Funding and Measures

To achieve the desired corridor improvements outlined in the Strategic Investment Framework, it is important to continually identify, seek out, and maintain funding sources and partnership opportunities on an ongoing basis. Likewise, as the recommended projects and initiatives are implemented, it will be important to have the ability to measure and evaluate the impact of these efforts and to what degree they actually contribute to improving the corridor's quality of life or livability.



New housing construction at 44th St and Snelling Ave in the 46th Street diagonal district.



A view of downtown Minneapolis from the Lake Street LRT station.



