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Downtown 2025 plan must include job equity

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Recently, the Minneapolis Downtown Council laid out [a vision for 2025](#). It includes new buildings and infrastructure, new residents and new jobs.

The plan even advocates for a new Vikings stadium. Unfortunately, it misses the most significant opportunity for economic growth in our city, and indeed our region.

Conspicuously absent from that plan is any mention of diversity, equity or disparities. Zippo. Nada. Silent.

This despite the fact that it is now well-documented that equity is the superior growth model for all.

As stated in the well-respected national research organization Policylink's recently published paper, "public and private-sector leaders need to recognize that preparing the change in population for the needs of the modern economy is the key to our future and must make investments that allow all people to maximize their potential ... [B]y building the capabilities of those who are furthest behind, America not only begins to solve its most serious challenges but also creates the conditions that allow us all to flourish ... equity and growth need each other more than ever."

The Twin Cities region as a whole is home to some of the largest employment disparities in the country. The regional black unemployment rate increased from 13.8 percent in 2007 to a staggering 20.7 percent in 2010.

That 6.9 percentage point jump is larger than the total white unemployment rate, which currently sits at 5.75 percent.

This puts the current unemployment rate for black Twin Citians at 3.6 times the rate for white Twin Citians. Minneapolis in particular has lots of room for growth.

The gap in employment rates between whites and American Indians in Minneapolis is 27 percentage points, and the gap between whites and blacks is 25 percentage points.

Further, while whites make up 60 percent of Minneapolis residents, white workers make up an astounding 83 percent of the workforce.

The Star Tribune's editorial on Dec. 14 ("[By 2025, a bigger, livelier downtown](#)") lauded the Downtown Council plan as something that deserves attention and applause, saying that it brings both old and new ideas together.

But it really only brings the old way of doing things. By not acknowledging and addressing our immense racial disparities, this plan will only serve to further the crisis we are in.

It's time for something that is actually new. With the public discourse revolving around this \$2 billion plan and the hundreds of millions to be spent on a Vikings stadium, we must be clear and intentional about providing job training and placement for people of color in the Twin Cities.

When revenue streams are created to pay for large-scale development, a percentage of that money should be going to programs that train and place people into jobs.



View of Nicollet Mall's north end. The Minneapolis Downtown Council released an ambitious plan for the city's central core that involves doubling the current residential population, a mall corridor that stretches from the Walker Arts Center to the Mississippi riverfront, rehabbing Nicollet Mall's north end, and a Vikings stadium on the city's western side.

If we want a healthy economy, we must move from worst to first in employment equity.

To do that, our approach to solving the problem of our disparities cannot be separated from any of our long-term strategies and grand visions, much less from our plans for large public and private investments.

We must have a systemic and integrated approach so that equity becomes a necessary component of each and every plan for how our city and region develop.

That would be something new and innovative that would command and deserve attention and applause.

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