

StarTribune

Editorial: By 2025, a bigger, livelier downtown Minneapolis

Article by: EDITORIAL

Star Tribune

December 14, 2011 - 12:42 AM

Imagine downtown Minneapolis as home not to the 34,000 people who live there today, but to 70,000 -- more than in today's Brooklyn Park or Burnsville.

Now chart a plan to make it happen in the next 14 years. Consider the changes in housing, transportation, education, retail, entertainment and amenities that would help spur that much population growth and set the stage for more.

Eighty Minneapolis business and civic leaders just completed that assignment. They're set to unveil their recommendations this morning in "[Intersections: Downtown 2025 Plan](#)."

It's the latest in a series of 15-year plans that have guided the Minneapolis Downtown Council and the evolution of the urban core since 1959. ([See related Opinion essay](#) by Steve Berg, a consultant to the council and a Star Tribune Editorial Board alumnus, for an explanation of the new plan's salient features.)

This is a plan that deserves attention and applause -- attention, because the council has a record of accomplishing what it sets out to do; and applause, because of the can-do, come-together confidence these recommendations represent.

This is not the work of people bowed by three years of economic trouble or cowed by intensifying global competition. It's an ambitious yet plausible projection of what should happen in the business district that sits at the geographic and economic heart of the region.

Many -- including this page -- will quibble over details. But it's difficult to fault the direction this plan charts.

"Intersections" is in keeping with the best of this city's business traditions. It builds on the successes of the past.

For example, it envisions a renewed and enlarged Nicollet Mall that can be again what it was 44 years ago, a destination in its own right. It aims to make the most of the amenities that the city's businesses helped build -- its parks, libraries, education and arts institutions.

It also proposes new ones -- or, in one case, the revival of an old one. The proposed Gateway Park on the west end of the Hennepin Avenue bridge would be a larger and greener version of long-lost Bridge Square, the city's original central plaza.

Added are a series of greenways -- linear parks -- connecting pedestrians and cyclists to residential clusters in and near downtown. A new downtown elementary school is included, too.

The plan asserts that Tom Lowry had it right 125 years ago, and that transit-averse legislators today have it wrong: Transit is essential to urban vitality.



DOWNTOWN GREW

Total Minneapolis population as measured by the decennial U.S. census was almost unchanged between 2000 and 2010, holding steady at slightly more than 382,500. But the total number masks sizable population loss on the city's financially distressed North Side that was balanced by growth in downtown and Southeast neighborhoods.

Source: Minneapolis Office of Community Planning and Economic Development.

RESOURCES

-Downtown Council: [2025 Plan](#)

Census Data: [Minneapolis](#)

"Intersections" proposes something old, a streetcar "circulator," and something new, a Transportation Interchange near Target Field. It would be a latter-day central station that would invite desirable spinoffs, including redevelopment and jobs in the distressed near North Side.

To its credit, assistance for the poor is also part of this plan. It calls for permanent shelter and support services for the 300 to 500 people who will sleep outside in downtown Minneapolis tonight and most nights this winter.

"Intersections" hews to the Minneapolis tradition of extraordinary civic contributions by its businesses, and of public-private partnerships for the sake of community betterment. It anticipates both significant corporate donations to pay for projects and funding help from all levels of government.

Both will be required to accomplish this plan's goals. While the report puts no total price on the projects it recommends, the tally clearly runs well into billions of dollars. A new downtown Minnesota Vikings stadium would cost roughly \$1 billion alone.

For the stadium and more, government's taxing muscle will be required. That clear implication runs counter to the "no new taxes" message that the business community has taken to the Capitol for the last 15 years.

Erosion in state support for its biggest city and its poorest residents has contributed to a number of the ills the report identifies as weaknesses that downtown must overcome -- a perceived lack of public safety, high property taxes, homelessness and poverty near the city's core.

(One of our quibbles: The plan says too little about how to overcome downtown's public safety deficit.)

Minneapolis businesses need to own up to the fact that they can't have the downtown they seek and "no new taxes" too. Then they need to convey that enlightened understanding to their political allies in St. Paul.

* * *

Readers, what do you think? To offer an opinion considered for publication as a letter to the editor, please fill out this form. Follow us on Twitter @StribOpinion and Facebook at facebook.com/StribOpinion.