

**Recap of East Downtown Council's Business Forum**  
**Thursday, January 17, 2013**  
**Elements of Good Urban Design Presentation**

This business forum convened at Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle, Ltd located at 710 South 2nd Street in the Mill District of the Downtown East neighborhood in Minneapolis.

- EDC President Jim Norkosky opened the forum by introducing himself, welcoming those in attendance, and asking the audience to introduce themselves. Jim then asked the EDC Membership Director to say a few words.

Dan Collison commented that Christie Rock, the part-time Executive Coordinator, has been outstanding in helping him connect with the membership and in marketing the EDC. Dan has enjoyed being the EDC Membership Director; it has been fun to see businesses find each other especially at the business forums. He has found that when ideas are presented and talked about, and relationships are forged between businesses, creativity is stimulated then they can go back to those businesses with more ideas about what is happening in the Downtown East/Elliott Park district, how their businesses can grow, and what the future of growth will be in the DEEP district. That is how value is added to membership at a very low cost (i.e., as cheap as a bottle of wine or as expensive as a cheap wedding dress). The EDC does not try to create barriers but rather find incentives for small one-man operations to billion dollar corporations to participate in the organization and learn from each other. Dan encouraged the audience to help the EDC connect with those businesses not in attendance and are unfamiliar with the organization by submitting their contact information directly to him at [dcollison@1stcov.org](mailto:dcollison@1stcov.org) or to Christie Rock at [christie@hantge.com](mailto:christie@hantge.com) or by visiting the EDC website at <http://edcmpls.org/>. This is especially important during this catalytic time where the entire DEEP district is being reinvented with development dollars unseen in over 100 years in scale.

Jim then introduced the following speakers:

- Paul Mellblom, Principal at Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle and EDC Director, began his presentation by describing the conditions of the Minneapolis Stadium District (MSD) and explained that what is most remarkable about the neighborhood, other than the big white saucer itself, is all of the surface parking lots. It is a left over neighborhood; a remnant of a time when the City wanted to concentrate in downtown and intentionally left the zoning to allow it to be what it is today. The streets were designed by traffic engineers to get people to flow in and out of downtown and in and out of the stadium. There are fast one-way streets and Washington Avenue is a viaduct for people going in and out of downtown. There is a lack of office and residential buildings around the stadium. To the northeast the Mill District neighborhood is thriving and to the southwest the Elliott Park neighborhood, despite its complexion and economic status, has been one of the most thriving and integrated neighborhoods by all measures in Minneapolis for many generations. But the MSD is a big dead zone in the middle of these two neighborhoods and is identified for just that purpose. It is unwalkable, alienating, and impersonal. Now we have the opportunity to think differently and make it a better neighborhood.

Paul then described four different urban design plans in North America to help the audience become good consumers of public space. Since the DEEP district will be undergoing tremendous transformation over the next 10 to 20 years, businesses within the district should have a vital role in saying what the neighborhood should become and one of the ways to be better at helping shape the dialogue and participating is to know some of the tenets of good urban design (reference attached PowerPoint document entitled [Mellblom4Plans](#)).

- ***Downtown Vancouver.*** In this first example, Paul explained that the area of focus was developed over the last 20 to 25 years mostly by an influx of Asian money; as they became more affluent they started buying second homes and investing in Vancouver. The whole idea of new neighborhoods,

new urbanism plays a part. The distinguishing feature is its Point Towers, narrow floor plate buildings that at the street level fill out towards the sidewalk with active and engaging uses, then as it rises the floor plate narrows allowing vistas around the narrower towers from adjacent larger towers. It is completely mixed use with a varied street texture. It is a city as park concept where every building is set into a small park-like setting. The designation of public versus private space is very loosely defined and knits together nicely. The Towers and the harbor to the north are the identity of the neighborhood and is a highly walkable neighborhood versus the classic urban canyon feel in downtown Minneapolis, a smart way to regulate urban development. What Minneapolis can learn from this example is that the whole area creates places for people to be outside and is pedestrian oriented with green spaces, sidewalks and shops.

- ***Boston Back Bay.*** In this second example, Paul explained that a lot of this area is reclaimed land and was developed primarily in the early part of the 20th century. In contrast to the above example, this is a mix of mostly old and, contextually looking like old, new buildings that are consistent in height, materials and scale. It is completely mixed use, very active pedestrian-oriented neighborhood with consistent street edges. The identity is the building to street relationship and how the buildings form a beautifully textured edge throughout the district. The area follows the sense of City Beautiful design and has a lot of parks scattered throughout that have become areas of refuge. They have created a sense of place via a rigid sensibility of streets and the areas of great public parks are knitted throughout the neighborhood.
- ***Chicago Lincoln Park.*** In this third example, Paul explained that this is a great upscale area just outside of Chicago's Loop that has an identity built upon its relationship with the park. It is a very walkable, lively urban area and has a loose street texture edge with a variability of office, residential and commercial buildings on different blocks.
- ***Kansas City Country Club Plaza.*** In this fourth and last example, Paul explained that this is an active shopping, entertainment and office district built in the 1920s by J.C. Nicols. It has a consistent low-rise building scale with hidden parking centered within the complex or placed on rooftops. It has a very distinct and consistent identity throughout driven by the public places and fountains, the Spanish Mediterranean revival style architecture with consistent tight street edges and beautiful boulevards, and visual markers. This is truly an urban nonresidential area but it does have upscale residential neighborhoods surrounding it. Its sense of consistent identity makes it work as a great place.

In his overall assessment of development potential within the MSD, Paul explained that over 30 years ago when looking to expand beyond the downtown core, the City recognized that the Mill District was detrimental to downtown businesses so it invested \$350 million over a 20-year period to induce early developers to move in and help the area grow resulting in about \$1.4 billion worth of private investment realized. It is now one of the most sought after neighborhoods in Minneapolis. With a thriving Elliot Park neighborhood on one side and the thriving Mill District neighborhood on the other side, the MSD is the last opportunity for the City to begin to fill out underutilized real estate adjacent to downtown and grow towards the University of Minnesota, a major economic engine in the region. If we're smart consumers of design as people who live and work in the area, we can make this a great neighborhood. He encouraged the audience to invest and insert themselves in the process.

- David Frank, Senior Manager of Transit Development for the City of Minneapolis and Chair of the Minneapolis Downtown Council's 2025 Plan Residential Task Force (RTF), gave an update on one of the goals of the 2025 Plan, i.e., double Downtown's residential population from 35,000 to 70,000 by 2025 and give them someplace to live when they arrive (reference attached PowerPoint document entitled [Frank EDC Presentation](#)). David explained that in order to achieve that population growth they would

need to speed up the growth of residential development — implying a certain amount of stackness in design (i.e., more than single family homes and duplexes) — and recruitment of people to the area. Efforts the RTF are engaged in to keep downtown more competitive and attract and retain residents include: pursuing a partnership with *The Journal* to ensure everyone has the right kinds of information and is speaking from a common book (reference *The Journal's* Development Tracker); striving for the creation of a new downtown educational facility to retain young families via the joint initiative of the North Loop Neighborhood Association and Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association (read “Parents push for downtown school” article in December 17-30, 2012 issue of *The Journal*); and working on adding additional green space from 5th Street to the riverfront. David is also engaged with the NLNA in a scoping study on where to put open space in that neighborhood.

Other amenities that will help attract and retain residents include grocery stores, e.g., the recently built Lunds at 1201 Hennepin Avenue and the new Whole Foods Market to be built in the Ryan Companies and The Excelsior Group apartment project at 222 Hennepin Avenue. And in the spirit of Vancouver for people who like to think about urban design and development, David recommended visiting Gordon Price’s website at <http://www.pricetags.ca/>. Gordon is a former Vancouver councilmember who once famously said “it’s not a neighborhood until there’s a grocery store there”. You may also find his report on “Shanghai the City of the 21st Century” interesting reading.

David also stressed the importance of having fun and whimsy in urban design, e.g., lit and musical swings on streets and bus stops in Montreal and in London.

Lastly, David announced the NLNA’s annual meeting on Wednesday, January 30, 2013, 7 p.m. at Target Field, 1 Twins Way (3rd Avenue North between North 5th and 7th Streets) in the Carew Atrium near Gate 6.

- Beth Shogren, Chief Operating Officer at Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District, described the function and services of the DID. They are excited about partnering with the MDC on the 2025 Plan. What they are looking ahead to in 2013 is right along the lines of what both David and Paul discussed. Everyone’s attention is on Downtown East and the Vikings have coalesced that and development is going to happen. The Greening and Public Realm Committee’s purview are the things Paul mentioned in his presentation, i.e., calming street traffic, increasing the tree canopy, more green space, more open space, more pedestrian friendly. There are two task forces of the GPRC: one focusing on the reconstruction of Washington Avenue (County Road 152) between Hennepin Avenue and 5th Avenue — they got Hennepin County to open its mind to make it more pedestrian friendly; and one focusing on increasing the tree canopy within the grey donut area. For more information about the reconstruction visit <http://www.hennepin.us/portal/site/HennepinUS/menuitem.b1ab75471750e40fa01dfb47ccf06498/?vgnnextoid=488e2e058f408310VgnVCM10000099fe4689RCRD>.

Beth then explained the main purpose of her visit: in 2013 they will have to renew the City ordinance that enables the DID, a process that occurs every 5 years (their first since inception in 2009), and as a consequence will be launching a petition campaign to commercial property owners soliciting their support for the DID. Beth had petitions available for distribution and encouraged tenants who support the DID to talk to their landlords. For more information about their services please visit <http://www.minneapolisdid.com/>.

- After a brief Q&A, Jim thanked Paul for hosting the event, acknowledged and thanked Kieron Frazier, Business and Legal Affairs, Minnesota Vikings, and all the guests for attending. Then he announced that the next forum would be at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 21st with Michael Rainville of Meet Minneapolis, Convention and Visitors Association, in the Marquette Plaza building at 250 Marquette Avenue, <http://www.minneapolis.org/>.

Lastly, Jim advised that the Stadium Implementation Committee's Planning Subcommittee on which he serves will be reconvening that evening after about a month off and he will have more news next month, meanwhile construction bids are due later this month to select by February 1st the company that will build the new stadium. Preliminary sketches of the new stadium are due in early March.