

Recap of East Downtown Council's Business Forum
Thursday, October 17, 2013
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
aloft Hotel, 900 Washington Avenue South
Downtown East Neighborhood of Minneapolis

- ***Welcome and introductions***

EDC President Dan Collison introduced himself and welcomed the audience to the October business forum then explained that the EDC is an organization committed to the economic vitality of the East Downtown District that encompasses an area catapulting toward complete redevelopment over the next three to five years.

Dan then extended gratitude to: Caroline Sherman, Adam Herbranson, and the entire staff of the aloft Hotel for providing space and hospitality; and the 13 new businesses who have joined and the 43 businesses who have renewed their membership. The EDC membership represents companies as small as individual realtors to as large as multi-national corporations, from manufacturing and health care, to philanthropy and the social sector. Collectively, we represent thousands of employees and residents, and hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity flowing through and into downtown and beyond.

Dan explained that historically the EDC has existed since 1979, but over the last year it has become obvious that the organization needs to become a more significant actor in the unfolding drama that is happening in front of us, i.e., the billions of dollars going toward reinventing certain blocks within the district.

Dan then explained that after a summer of engaging in strategic planning, listening one-on-one to Minneapolis elected officials, neighborhood organizations and, most importantly, the membership, the EDC has refocused its strategy in order to: build value through initiatives; be a critical source of information; and convene all of the parts of our district for the common good. These are not new aspirations, but because of the unfolding drama, it feels like the EDC has to become something completely different. As a consequence, he has reached out to the Minneapolis Downtown Council as well as the North Loop to forge new relationships so that we see ourselves as a whole working together, finding ways to complement how our structures work, what plans we work, and all the things that will fit together to bring the water up in the whole downtown.

Today's power packed forum on "Understanding How Development Takes Place" is to help with that effort and functions as part one of three in a series. The remainder of the series will be:

- In November an overview of the Minneapolis Downtown Council's 2025 Plan by Collin Barr, Chair of the Minneapolis Downtown Council and Downtown Improvement District. The EDC's focus is on everything that happens on the east side of downtown. Mikkel Beckman will present on his Public Realm Subcommittee activities.
- In December a presentation Downtown Community Committee's activities by Mike Ryan as well as an update on the Ryan Companies project.

Thereafter, the audience introduced themselves then Dan introduced the following City leaders:

- ***City of Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak***

Mayor Rybak reminisced about his early experiences in Downtown East (i.e., the area between the University and downtown, the area between the Mississippi River and where the Metrodome was going to be built) and discussions about Washington Avenue. Then it was not a place where you'd tell people you've got to see, but they are talking about it now more and more. As you think about the vision for this part of downtown, he spoke about 2004 and 2005 when they got a group of architects together and started talking about Washington Boulevard (the vision he's always had), and that the grand connection between the University of Minnesota and downtown along the riverfront should be one of the great

places of any American city; it should be a promenade, a grand gathering space. If we do a few things right over the next couple years, that can/should be the great place to come together, e.g.:

- From a micro-policy perspective, no left turn between 4-6 p.m. when the area becomes more of a car-oriented and exhaust fumes place and less of a pedestrian, sidewalk café, retail, and grand promenade place. This idea percolated during the Mayor's Great City Design Teams period when they considered having cars take 4th Street to ease congestion on Washington Boulevard and those commuting into downtown take 5th Street. Because of the post-bridge collapse infrastructure work, 4th Street will be the main way those commuting from downtown can get onto the bridge. Rybak then asked the audience to help finish the job when he's not around.
- From a macro-policy perspective, when there was an effort to move the Vikings to Arden Hills and use the sales tax to pay for it, Rybak advised that he and Council President Barb Johnson stood firm on the City's involvement based on it occurring on this side of town on its current site then used it as a catalyst for further development. What folks didn't realize, well before that they had been working very quietly with the Star Tribune and they brought in Ryan Companies who came up with something even grander than the City had envisioned. Landing Wells Fargo as a tenant for a million square feet of office could have gone anywhere including other states, but hopefully it will be coming into this district.

Rybak then had a map distributed and described the work CPED has done for the scores of development opportunities for other blocks within the district. Not to re-impose a whole new neighborhood on the community, but to heal what we already have. Now is the time to say to the property owners and the development community here and around the world to take action. We've got people chasing a hotel deal and a lot of people talking about housing in this part of town. The park will be a great catalyst and unifying place for these developments.

Rybak stated that we can't just build things; we also have to focus on connections because one of the reasons this district ended up underdeveloped was that it was not connected. What connections matter?

- Over I35W — we've got to win back that bridge.
- Getting from the West Bank/Cedar Riverside area over to the stadium. If done right you'll have two different LRTs going in different directions that you could walk to and from the stadium. Right now when you come from St. Paul on I94 you come down a ramp, but don't get too use to it because they have a state grant that will allow everyone to come off of 7th Street and they'll get that ramp back. One of the items tucked into Rybak's budget (and he would like for everyone to help advocate for) is half a million dollars to rewind that area, to take that exit ramp and turn it into a pedestrian way and connection. Amongst friends, he also wants to locate a skate park that will animate and excite the area.
- The University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis should share thoughts, e.g., the former Grain Exchange is now the Brain Exchange with all these new entrepreneurs and tech companies and if linked to the University what an opportunity.
- 11th Avenue with better street connections. Can only be done if the stadium is 360 degrees, i.e., animated on all sides with pedestrian and bike trails.
- The little rail link behind Wasabi could have a pedestrian way/back alley where restaurant patios face.
- The proposed park where long-term it would be very active that represents all the values of the community and would cost a lot more than the City has in the deal. It is probably evolving closer to the [Ryan Companies] images of a very open space about the finish level of Gold Medal Park but without the hump. This is what the Park Committee will begin talking about tonight and how to get that done. As it evolves with interest rates going up, it means a lot of them will be involved with fundraising. He will be deeply involved in the process as he was appointed as mayor and former mayor because he's not walking away from one of his favorite things he's ever done. It needs to be a great place!

- ***Director of Community Planning and Economic Development Jeremy Hanson Willis***

Willis thanked everyone for doing business in the city and explained it is a very exciting time to be in Minneapolis and for him to be at CPED, or as referred to by the Mayor, “the growth department” of the city tasked with bringing more residents, jobs and businesses to make sure the city is on a trajectory of growth. Willis advised that CPED was created by the Mayor Rybak when he was newly-elected to take disparate parts of the city government and make them work better together as a team and streamline processes to improve the economic business environment. Then approximately a year ago, they made the most significant change to the department by integrating a number of new functions and by creating a division for long-range planning and a division for innovation and process improvement to work even better for all those live and do business in Minneapolis (reference the 4-page Jeremy document).

- ***Director of Long Range Planning Kjersti Monson***

Monson introduced herself and explained she’s been on her job for about 5 months and her position was a result of the restructuring that Willis and Rybak undertook last year. Then she explained why it is important to have this new department that looks at trends, future alternatives, does research and thinks about planning differently. Cities are more important now than they’ve ever been and are the global drivers of GDP. People are coming back and populating the city, densifying and clustering so when comparing a city to a city region or to a state or even the federal government, on a global scale in terms of population, cities are very important and city planning is evolving as a consequence. Planning is moving toward a proactive, advocate and design role and technology is expanding their capacity and will be a fundamental component of how they operate (reference the 5-page Kjersti document).

- ***Principal City Planner for Downtown Beth Elliott***

Elliott explained that she will be speaking about the East Downtown Parking Lot Study again at an Urban Land Institute event on October 31st and all are welcome to attend. She is our downtown planner and her door is always open to have more interaction about Downtown East, Elliott Park, the parking lot study, etc.

Elliott then described how Downtown East and Elliot Park evolved from 1980 to the present. There has been a lot of proactive planning by the City, the Minneapolis Downtown Council and the neighborhoods. Why was there no new development? Speculation has been that in 1980 with the Metrodome, the business community did not want a competitive entertainment district with the Warehouse District so the zoning stayed industrial for decades and is why there are still a lot of parking lots. Then they went through a lot of zoning changes in the area to help make development more market based, more flexible, less onerous on the regulatory side. That and with all the planning over the last 15 years have brought us to where we are today. It is a very exciting time because things are beginning to happen.

Elliott explained that their goal, as in many parts of the city, is to have development with amenities like transit, employment opportunities, parks, schools, etc., and so they want to make sure they are building up capacity in those areas, like in Downtown East and Elliot Park, instead of in very stable areas. LRT was introduced here in 2004 and we haven’t seen a lot of transit-oriented development since then so she started to think about what are the development barriers. HR&A was hired to help (based on a grant from the federal government) and they created a tool-kit to incentivize market-based development on the surface parking lots that would work for everyone, i.e., property owners, the City, and the community.

Elliott described the area where the study focused on: a confined area three blocks west of the business district, south of the amenities of the Mill District, east of the 7 Corners and West Bank/Cedar Riverside area, north the established Elliot Park neighborhood — there are a ton of amenities around and she

knows no other part of the city that is as amenity-rich just around it. With the proposed Ryan Companies project and park, this is really a great time to start thinking about the area around these amenities.

Elliott also described the scope of the study and the plausible scenarios for success in the East Downtown District (reference the 55-page Beth document). It is very hard to get development in a neighborhood particularly if there's a stadium. There has to be an innate market, you have to plan for it and you have to amenitize the area.

Elliot emphasized that this study was just a way to figure out what the development barriers are, to move from assumptions to reality, and any of these implementation strategies will include the community.

- ***Conclusion***

Dan thanked the guest speakers for their presentations then reminded the audience of the Thursday, November 21st business forum at the Normandy Inn beginning at 11:30 a.m. and described the topic and guest speakers.