

**Recap of the Joint Minneapolis Downtown Council-
East Town Business Partnership Business Forum
Downtown Construction Update Panel**
(<https://easttownmpls.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/09.17-ppt.pdf>)
Thursday, September 17, 2020, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Via Zoom Conference

I. Welcome and Announcements

Steve Cramer, President and CEO of the Minneapolis Downtown Council (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/about-membership/our-team/>), welcomed everyone and stated he's happy we've joined them for this great panel and hopes we're doing well as we work through some challenging issues as a community and as a downtown. The projects discussed today will contribute to the long-term economic vibrancy and competitiveness of downtown and the region.

Marybeth Weiseberg, Director of Membership and Partnership at the MDC, thanked everyone for joining and went through housekeeping items for the webinar, which will be recorded and posted on their YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7aoc6mIbbk&feature=youtu.be>). We're to use the chat feature to introduce ourselves and Q&A feature for questions they'll try to answer at the end of the program.

Cramer then announced an upcoming program, the continuation of a series of webinars called *Listening to Our Leaders of Color*, developed because of the aftermath of the George Floyd killing to work towards a better community for all. The next installment will be *The Journey of Cultural Competency* on Tuesday, September 22nd (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/event/the-journey-of-cultural-competency/>). For the remaining programs of 2020, visit <https://www.mplsdowntown.com/events/>.

Dan Collison, Director of Downtown Partnerships for the MDC and Executive Director of East Town Business Partnership, also welcomed everybody stating the leaders they're about to hear are at the top of their field and will bring tremendous content to us. Then he announced the following ETBP events:

- The 2020-2021 Business Forum series (<https://easttownmpls.org/2020-2021-business-forum-series/>). The ETBP has worked hard to retool it to bring us timely and relevant topics, four of which, including today, in partnership with the MDC. Next month's forum on October 22nd will be a panel on *Learning from Perennial Disruption Navigators: A Start Up and Entrepreneurial Community Round Table* (<https://easttownmpls.org/etbp-business-forum-scheduled-for-october-22-at-11-a-m-via-zoom/>) led by Jacquie Berglund, CEO of FINNEGANS.
- The Mill City Farmers Market continues to roll on through October 31st under COVID-19 safety measures and preordering availability (<https://millcityfarmersmarket.org/covid-19-and-mcfm/>).
- The draft Parks for All: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board 2021 Comprehensive Plan is open for public comment through October (<https://minneapolisparcs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=d015be295d3f48329278bb23acf65552>).
- The American Red Cross Blood Drive at the Aloft Minneapolis is on Monday, September 21st, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (<https://www.facebook.com/MillCityTimes/posts/american-red-cross-blood-drive-scheduled-at-aloft-minneapolis-on-sept-21/3933175740029296/>).
- The Litter Be Gone cleanup events in Minneapolis, October 1-10, 2020 (<https://www.facebook.com/LitterBeGoneMN/>).
- The draft Minneapolis Built Form Regulations public online open houses with the one on Wednesday, October 7th, 3:00-4:00 p.m. focusing on downtown (<http://www2.minneapolismn.gov/cped/planning/WCMSP-222487>).
- The Elliot Park Neighborhood Community Safety Meeting is this evening, Thursday, September 17th, 6:00 p.m. via Zoom (https://www.elliottpark.org/91720_safety).

Visit their Pop-up Food Market on Thursday, September 24th, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., in the parking lot of North Central University at Chicago Avenue and 15th Street (<https://www.elliottpark.org/market>).

- Stay engaged with neighborhood associations meetings via Zoom:
 - For Downtown Minneapolis Neighborhood Association Board and Land Use Committee meeting dates, visit <http://www.thedmna.org/>.
 - For Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc., Board and Building, Land Use and Housing (BLUH) meeting dates, visit <https://www.elliottpark.org/>.
- Coffee with Ward 3 Council Member Steve Fletcher is now on Thursdays at 5:00 p.m., on Microsoft Teams or by phone (<https://www.facebook.com/pg/MinneapolisWard3/events/>).
- For help in navigating City Hall with your business questions, visit the Minneapolis Business Portal at <https://business.minneapolismn.gov/> which is designed to connect entrepreneurs and small business owners to the information and resources needed to plan, launch and grow a business.

II. Downtown Construction Update

Collison introduced the following panelists and asked the audience to send their questions using the chat feature so that they may answer them towards the end of the program.

- A. Water Works.** Jean Gabarini, Principal at Damon Farber (<https://www.damonfarber.com/people>), while showing axonometric renderings and construction photos, described the 2.5 acre park and pavilion development under construction in the Mill District of Minneapolis near the Stone Arch Bridge and St. Anthony Falls. The project is made possible by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, donors to the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, and a grant through the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.

The site was historically filled with mill ruins, the birthplace of Minneapolis milling, and HGA Architects has done a wonderful job of converting the Bassett Sawmill and Columbia Flour Mill into a structure which will serve the park and area throughout the year. It will have a public meeting space, public restrooms, office space for MPRB staff, and a second floor restaurant run by Sean Sherman, a James Beard award winner, aka the Sioux Chef. The restaurant will have views of The Falls and the sculptural Third Avenue Bridge, the same view you would have had if you dined at the original Fuji-Ya, the first restaurant to take advantage of being sited on and take back the industrial riverfront.

One of the key issues of this development that they had to overcome is it's a long linear site with significant grade change between South 1st Street and West River Parkway, and they wanted to make it as accessible and visually appealing to improve the safety of the area as well as serve as a key visitor amenity and destination that would knit the Stone Arch Bridge circulation into downtown Minneapolis. Through the design work they wanted to honor the full history, significance, power and deep roots of the site ranging from the indigenous history to contemporary use and, as a result, have incorporated a lot of interpretative elements into the site, e.g., plant materials that could be used in the Sioux Chef's recipes, rainwater that could be harvested from adjacent buildings and reused for irrigation and toilet flushing.

The site work will be complete this fall, the building will be finished by February 2021, followed by the opening of the restaurant in 2021. For more information, visit <https://mplsparksfoundation.org/Initiative/water-works/>.

- B. Hennepin Avenue Reconstruction Downtown.** Don Elwood, Director of Transportation Planning and Engineering at Minneapolis Public Works, thanked all their partners who came together to deliver this project. It runs from Washington Avenue to 12th Street and will have wider sidewalks,

protected bike lanes, enhanced bus stops, and four vehicle lanes with two in each direction.

They've learned from the past, working with Metro Transit, on how to provide quality transit for Hennepin Avenue, i.e., open shelters, real-time signage, nearly level boarding, and off-board fare payment.

They've learned from the past, working with the Downtown Improvement District, on how to provide streetscape improvements, e.g., custom lighting, banners, larger trees, bicycle parking, parking lot fencing.

They've learned communication continues to be a critical part of this project, so to help the public understand what they're talking about, Kimley-Horn put together a great video (<https://www.hennepindowntown.com/streetscape/>).

In order to support the downtown environment, there is water, gas, sewer, electricity, heating and cooling, and telecommunications, and our system is very old and 20 feet down. It's been challenging to get to this aging infrastructure so they put together a diagram of all of the utilities underneath our city streets to help explain what's going on.

Elwood then described how all the design concepts translate into concrete on the ground and greater public safety. They regularly update their website, have weekly online meetings which anybody can come on and ask questions, and SEH Construction put together a video (<https://www.hennepindowntown.com/construction-updates/>) to show where they are now which the key message is the City and the private sector is investing in downtown.

Phase 1, 7th to 12th Streets, are expected to be complete by the end of 2020, and Phase 2, Washington Avenue to 7th Street, should be complete by the end of 2022. For more information, visit <https://www.hennepindowntown.com/>.

- C. Third Avenue Bridge and I-35W@94.** Dave Aeikens, Public Affairs Coordinator at Minnesota Department of Transportation (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dave-aeikens-66a6094/>), described the Third Avenue Bridge project (<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/hwy65andthirdavebridge/>). Opened in 1918, the bridge spans the Mississippi River connecting northeast Minneapolis to downtown. It is an example of the patented Melan arch design with the reverse S-curve alignment and spacing intended to avoid dangerous limestone breaks at the riverbed. They haven't done any work on the bridge since 1980, so they've been out in full force since May 2020 to completely renovate and enhance it while maintaining its historical significance so that it should last another 50 years. Now and until January 4, 2021, there is one lane of traffic in each direction with a transit-only center lane going into downtown in the mornings and out of downtown in the afternoons. Thereafter, the bridge will be fully closed for 2 years with vehicle traffic detoured to Hennepin Avenue and bicyclists detoured to the Stone Arch Bridge. MnDOT historian Katie Haun Schuring will lead an online tour about the bridge on Tuesday, September 29th, 5:30-6:30 p.m. (https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_C3kV8dSuQiOs_sVEEeu5KQ).

Aeikens then described the I-35W@94 project (<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/35w94/>) which has been underway since August 2017, and now they're less than 1 year near completion. New bridges (e.g., I-35W and Lake Street Station, <https://www.metrotransit.org/i-35w-lake-street-station>), retaining and noise walls, and drainage have been built. This is a complete rebuild of 2.5 miles of work in about 4.5 years and things are going well.

Aeikens thanked the MDC for inviting him to present. If anyone has questions about these or other projects in Hennepin County, he can be reached at DaveAeikens@state.mn.us or 651-775-1261.

D. Metro Orange Line. Charles Carlson, Director of Bus Rapid Transit Projects at Metro Transit (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/charles-carlson-4264311a1/>), advised this is a BRT line running from downtown Minneapolis to Burnsville that they've been planning for a while (<https://www.metrotransit.org/orangeline>) to provide new connections between stations on I-35W and other places in the corridor. It's a fully funded project, under construction through next winter when it opens, and aligned with major highway projects.

BRT is different from local bus service in that it has improved stations, faster service, and congestion-free roadway. The existing C Line (<https://www.metrotransit.org/c-line>) that runs through downtown won a *2025 Plan* (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/2025plan/>) leadership award from the Minneapolis Downtown Council last October (<https://www.mplsdowntown.com/2019awards-c-line/>), and it has run well for them in its first year of service.

In connection to the I-35W@94 project, currently under construction is the 12th Street Ramp project (<https://www.metrotransit.org/12th-street-ramp>), a bus-only ramp in and out of downtown.

And the crown jewel of the Metro Orange Line project is the I-35W and Lake Street Station (<https://www.metrotransit.org/i-35w-lake-street-station>), bringing vast improvements to an existing less than welcoming transit environment.

Also under construction is the Knox Avenue Transitway beneath I-494 (<https://www.metrotransit.org/knox-avenue-transitway>) bringing this area much closer bus rides to downtown.

Connecting these stations all together will be others, i.e., 66th Street, 76th Street, American Boulevard, 98th Street, and Burnsville that are/will be under construction and will conclude next year. They're very excited to bring these services to us and share this update.

E. Southwest LRT Green Line Extension. Charlie Zelle, Chair of the Metropolitan Council (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/charlie-zelle-6750967/>), first noted he's a fan of every one of the projects we've heard about today. Regarding the history of the Third Avenue Bridge project, in 1980 he worked on the St. Anthony Main project next door and convinced MnDOT the first vehicle to cross that 1980 renovation was a 1921 Jefferson Lines bus (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson_Lines) that's still in the garage. He knows people at MnDOT if we can talk about it next time.

Then he explained the picture of seven members of the Met Council smiling under their masks was the signing of the \$928.8 million Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) with the Federal Transit Administration (<https://metro council.org/News-Events/Transportation/Newsletters/FFGA-received-2020.aspx>). Usually you get federal funds and try to get the local math, but this was upside down. They had the local funds for a number of years, thanks to Hennepin County, but were missing that extra billion and now it's fully committed. A \$2 billion project is large and complicated.

Zelle then described the project itself (<https://metro council.org/transportation/projects/Light-Rail-Projects/Southwest-LRT.aspx>); it has an alignment from the Royalston Avenue/Farmers Market Station to Eden Prairie with three communities (St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka) in between. It's an incredible interrelated connector that extends across to St. Paul which has significant impact for downtown Minneapolis. Decades in the making, this is the largest infrastructure project that has ever been done in Minnesota; its U.S. Bank Stadium, Target Field, and TCF Bank Stadium all wrapped up into one in terms of jobs and ultimately economic impact, and because it is its pretty disruptive to every community unlike other LRT projects.

For downtown, this is not just about building tunnels and putting in light rail track; it's realigning all of the freight rail, moving track to the north to accommodate stations, installing protective crash walls, and elevating the Glenwood Avenue intersection in the Root District which will be transformational for

this part of downtown and open up development.

Zelle lastly described the Kenilworth LRT tunnel construction

(<https://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/Southwest-LRT/Construction/Kenilworth-Tunnel-Construction.aspx>). This is a century old freight rail corridor and because the residential adjacencies are so narrow makes it a particular construction challenge. Using a press-in piler which emits micro vibrations for cut and cover tunnels is a lot less disruptive.

III. Closing Remarks

After Collison recited the questions received via the chat feature, noting all these pieces just described above (i.e., bringing public access, using and leveraging public and private partnerships to pull these things off) represents more money than we can get our brains wrapped around and amount of time it's taking, he invited everyone to post their questions for the speakers.

Then on behalf of the MDC and ETBP, he thanked everyone for joining today's webinar, advised there are forums almost every other week between the two organizations, and trust they'll stay engage to help shape and lead where downtown Minneapolis is going for the next and many years ahead.