

Midway Industrial Area Initiative Project Description August 1, 2003

Summary:

In the Midway Industrial Area Initiative, University UNITED, along with several of its member organizations and other partners, will engage community stakeholders in creating a vision for the future of the 1,200-acre Midway industrial area. This Initiative is timely and necessary as a result of the following recent developments:

- UNITED has uncovered the loss of more than one-third (nearly 3,000) of the area's manufacturing jobs over the past decade
- Announcements about new biotech centers in the Midway area on both sides of the city line
- Development projects converting Midway industrial land to housing/mixed-used
- Changing transportation dynamics, including trucking facilities moving from Roseville to St. Paul, the impact of shifts in the intermodal freight industry, and the potential for major transit investments on University Avenue

Background:

Historically, the Midway area grew up around its railyards and the manufacturing companies that followed. A recent UNITED report documented that over the past ten years, the Midway industrial area has lost about one-third (nearly 3,000) of its manufacturing jobs. In addition, five of the seven largest companies that were located within the study area in 1993 are no longer here a decade later. The loss of these high-paying jobs has had a detrimental effect on area families, the overall economy of the Midway, and the City of St. Paul.

In addition to the loss of manufacturing jobs, the following recent activities and trends have also convinced UNITED and its partners of the need for and timeliness of this initiative:

I. Mayor Kelly's Push for Biotechnology:

Mayor Randy Kelly has recently been promoting a biotechnology corridor in the Midway area, adjacent to the two University of Minnesota campuses, as a key to the economic health of the City in the 21st Century. The first step in the creation of the corridor, recently approved for financing help by St. Paul's City Council, is the proposed purchase of a building in the Westgate development by University Enterprise Laboratories for conversion to a biotech incubator facility. UNITED has expressed the view that a comprehensive community based planning effort must be undertaken in order to better integrate the biotechnology corridor into the area.

II. Possible Loss of Industrial Land:

Some concerns were raised during the community process accompanying the UNITED housing study about the trend toward converting industrial land uses to residential, resulting in a possible loss of jobs. Emerald Gardens/808 Berry Place, the largest new housing development in the Midway area in decades, is being built on a former industrial site. Another proposed major housing development in the Midway, at University and Hampden, would also involve a conversion from industrial land. These new housing developments have a tremendous positive impact on the tax base of the City, and the new housing units (particularly the affordable ones) are in high demand. But this issue has the potential to become oversimplified and turned into a debate about housing vs. jobs. UNITED advocates for a balanced approach and the mixing of commercial (including light industrial) and residential land uses in compact, walkable areas, consistent with the principles of transit-oriented development.

III. Transportation

Transportation has shaped the development of the Midway historically, and there are a number of transportation issues that will impact the future of the industrial Midway, including rail, trucking, parking and road design.

Research needs to be done to determine present connections between the rail/trucking industries and companies located in the Midway industrial area. Over the past several years the neighboring suburb of Roseville has been pursuing a policy of pushing out the trucking industry to allow for higher quality and more intense land use. This policy has resulted in some trucking firms moving south to St. Paul. The long-term impacts of this trend could be significant for the city and the impacted neighborhoods, and all policy options must be explored.

The industrial area sorely lacks a major north-south street, presumably because of the added expense of bridging over the railroad tracks. Our preliminary planning efforts lead us to believe we should explore the feasibility of a corridor that could connect University Avenue directly to the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. This would have the benefit of creating a “gateway” to the campus, with opportunities for biotechnology and other institutional developments along the 1.1 mile road.

The study area contains three of the projected light-rail transit stations for the central corridor line. Over the past year, UNITED has worked with the City of St. Paul and others on transit-oriented development planning for the projected station areas of Snelling and Lexington, and is currently beginning a similar planning process for the intersection of University and Dale. At this time, the City does not intend to extend these planning studies to the station areas at Fairview, Raymond, or 280, all three of which are in the 1,200-acre area of the Midway Industrial Area Initiative. This being the case, UNITED hopes to include some recommendations

for the future of this three critical nodes that have great potential for creating better connectivity between jobs, housing, and services.

The national trend of loss of manufacturing is not a new phenomenon, nor something unique to the Midway. As population in the region has shifted outward to the suburbs and exurbs, companies and employment centers have followed, taking with them not only the jobs but also the tax base. The departure of our manufacturing sector affects not only the families of those laid off, but also the City's ability to provide services without overtaxing residential property. This new and accelerating trend is becoming a regional equity issue, affecting the quality of life of and economic opportunities of our area residents – many of whom are new immigrants and people of color.

As the area has recently been losing manufacturing employment at a brisk pace, at least three vital community needs are clear:

- 1) Find alternative employment for those who are laid off;
- 2) Attempt to identify, retain, and attract job-creating companies and industries;
- 3) Determine how best to use industrial land given the changes in our global economy and decline in the manufacturing sector.

University UNITED hopes to address all three components in the Midway Industrial Area Initiative. Lessons can be learned from other cities. In Baltimore, as part of a community vision for a biotechnology cluster adjoining the Johns Hopkins University, an agreement was reached whereby thirty three percent of new jobs would be made available to residents of the adjoining neighborhoods who only had a high school education. Intensive job training programs are being established with the support of area foundations, schools, corporations and government entities.

Partners:

In April, UNITED's board created a task force to oversee and guide the Midway Industrial Area Initiative. The members of the task force are representatives from our four most directly impacted member organizations: Hamline-Midway Coalition, St. Anthony Park Community Council, Prospect Park/East River Road Improvement Association, and Merriam Park Community Council. Sherman Eagles, a UNITED board member, a longstanding member of the board of the St. Anthony Park Community Council and a technical fellow at Medtronic, agreed to serve as Chair of the Task Force. In addition to the Task Force, UNITED will create a Technical Advisory Committee of stakeholders and experts from the private sector, government agencies, academia, arts organizations, trade groups, labor unions, and more. UNITED has invited the Midway Chamber of Commerce, St. Paul Port Authority, and St. Paul PED to participate, and has kept the Mayor's Office informed of our activities.

Further, UNITED will be collaborating extensively with 1000 Friends of Minnesota on this project. 1000 Friends will bring their expertise in GIS and community mapping technology, and their regional perspective on smart growth and issues of social equity to the project. In addition, 1000 Friends has already helped arrange for a graduate student

intern at the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to assist with the project.

Activities:

Phase I: The initiative will be undertaken in two phases. First, there will be a thorough examination of the status and needs of industrial companies currently located in the 1,200-acre study area, and a study of current and likely future manufacturing trends. As has been mentioned, some preliminary data gathering has already taken place, though much more remains to be done. This phase will likely include a survey of firms within the study area regarding their needs for space and transportation, and expectations for the future. A similar survey conducted in UNITED's 1995 study of Midway manufacturers will be used as baseline data, though additional kinds of questions will likely be added.

UNITED, with assistance from 1000 Friends of Minnesota and local universities, will use GIS mapping as a tool for communications and analysis, better enabling community stakeholders to make informed decisions and recommendations.

In addition to gathering information about local firms, UNITED has already begun doing research to benchmark and learn from University-linked technology parks in other cities. Executive Director Brian McMahon recently attended a national conference of the Association of University Research Parks to learn about the history and status of these developments nationwide.

University UNITED has a particular interest in exploring how such developments can be woven into the fabric of a community rather than imposed upon an unreceptive neighborhood. To this end, UNITED recently hosted a community meeting in the Midway with Don Carter, a Pittsburgh based urban design consultant whose work on a Baltimore biotechnology center project has won awards for integrating its design elements into the existing neighborhood.

Phase II. After the first phase of the Initiative has been completed, UNITED will lead the collaborative in examining the spatial and land use implications of these findings and in making long-term recommendations for the area. This effort will be done in conjunction with the impacted district councils (some of whom are in the process of updating their community plans) and with a number of other community partners and stakeholders. UNITED and its partners will then work to have the land use recommendations incorporated into community and small area plans, as well as the City's Comprehensive Land-Use Plan.

Concurrently, UNITED and partners will examine the prospects and resources available to those individuals in the community who have lost manufacturing jobs, and need to reposition themselves for other kinds of jobs or self-employment. In this effort, UNITED will partner with area workforce development agencies, the Foundation community, area corporations, Neighborhood Development Center, and a host of other groups with expertise in the area of wealth creation for working families.