

Problems with the Minneapolis 2040 Plan

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan Perpetuates a History of Racial and Economic Injustice

The City of Minneapolis is currently engaged in redoing the zoning ordinance as part of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan. For many of us who spent years trying to undo the economic and racial injustices of the past zoning code, this is a slap in the face. The new proposed zoning code puts those economic and social burdens back on low-income and minority neighborhoods. I am not sure if the City is doing this intentionally or suffers from a lack of historical awareness.

In the past, we used different terminology. We called it: "dumping the city's problems into low income and minority neighborhoods so that the rich neighborhoods did not have to deal with them." Uses such as bars, saunas, liquor stores, pawn shops, porno theaters, garbage transfer stations, polluting industries, level 3 sex offenders, etc. were all dumped in our neighborhood. The result was high crime rates and unsafe living conditions.

Now, planning staff and city officials defend permitting these uses by claiming that any problems that arise will be controlled through other city departments such as licensing. Our experience was that using licensing and enforcement activities (often requiring police involvement) was an exercise in frustration. It typically took five to ten years to deal with any one problem property. Then another one would pop up. It was like playing "Whack-a-Mole". The only strategy that worked was changing the zoning - either eliminating the use or making it conditional.

Two examples: Saunas and Bars:

Saunas were concentrated along Lake Street. Saunas were fronts for prostitution (along with pornographic theaters). Johns (males primarily from the suburbs seeking sex) would patronize these establishments and would proposition any women who happened to be anywhere remotely nearby. It was impossible for a woman to walk down Lake Street or Franklin Avenue without being harassed. It was also hardly the ideal environment for children. The problem of saunas was finally solved by changing zoning to restrict saunas to a downtown adult entertainment district.

Bars and liquor stores were originally concentrated in low-income and minority neighborhoods through liquor limits and then zoning. The five dive bars on Franklin Avenue between Chicago and Bloomington Avenues largely preyed on and perpetuated problems of alcoholism in the American Indian community and affected the surrounding residential area especially when the bars closed early in the morning (1:00 a.m. and when the ordinance changed, 2:00 a.m.) when the party moved outside. Then there was the liquor store located on private land in the middle of Peavey Park.

Under the Minneapolis 2040 Plan, bars, liquor stores, saunas, etc. will be allowed to locate anywhere they want in our neighborhood because the city is zoning our neighborhood as a

higher intensity commercial district. We will have nothing to say about what happens because the city is also getting rid of the conditional use permitting process for these uses.

However, in the proposed lower intensity commercial district that is more often designated in rich, non-minority neighborhoods, these uses are not even allowed.

The City is doubling down on its efforts to use zoning to perpetuate racial and economic injustice in low-income, minority neighborhoods. The City recently lost a law suit that will now require them to conduct an environmental impact study. Such a study would likely reveal the economic and racial injustice impacts of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan. Instead of doing the study, the City is trying to get a law passed that will exempt them from the environmental rules.

Clearly the city does not care about its low-income and minority residents or their safety.

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan will Eliminate Family Housing

Despite lip service to the contrary, the Minneapolis 2040 Plan's Built Form Regulations create huge financial incentives to either convert 3- and 4- bedroom apartments into efficiency units or tear them down and build new efficiency units. Developers will be able to cram 10 efficiency units on the average sized lot in neighborhoods within a mile of downtown. At maximum build-out of both unit types, the higher number of efficiency units will generate twice the total income and displace families in the process.

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan Ignores the Impact of COVID

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan was prepared before COVID devastated downtown and changed our work habits perhaps for a very long time. Yet the City is charging blindly ahead and implementing a plan that does not address the impact of COVID. One of the main goals and the implementation strategies of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan is to expand downtown into the surrounding neighborhoods. However, COVID has dramatically changed downtown. Office vacancy is over 22% and downtown is a retail wasteland. What exactly are we expanding? Maybe the entire 2040 Plan should be revisited. For downtown, the emphasis should be on how to save the existing downtown and not on expanding it to include more neighborhoods.

Implementation of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan will create massive amounts of Environmental Pollution

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan calls for the construction of thousands and thousands of new housing units but eliminates the requirement for any off-street parking. People are not changing their behavior and using public transportation. Transit ridership declined 25% before the COVID pandemic and has declined another 50% post-pandemic. The light rail stations at Lake Street and Franklin Avenues are not safe (who wants to get robbed or shot?) and are disgustingly filthy. What will be the environmental impact of having thousands and thousands of cars roaming city streets and idling at stop lights while trying to find an on-street parking space, especially one that isn't metered? What will happen in winter when the availability of on-street parking can be reduced by half?

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan Does Not Provide for Any New Open Space

The Land Use Plan that is part of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan maps out the land on which new housing as well as other development is permitted. Existing Parks are expected to serve the thousands and thousands of new residents. No new public open space is shown and the plan's Built Form Regulations require almost no on-site open space. Rear yard requirements have been eliminated. What will be the demand on parks that are in the newly expanded downtown districts? In other areas of the city, what will be the impact on neighborhood parks when families with children are forced to move to the suburbs because they can't find housing in the city?

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan will Destroy our Schools

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan calls for most of the new housing in the expanded downtown area to be in 6-story to 20+ story buildings that will likely contain units that are too small and too expensive for families with children. While in the surrounding neighborhoods, the financial incentives are in place to eliminate family-sized units and force families to move to the suburbs. Can our schools survive if there aren't any children?

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan will Increase the Cost of Rental Housing and Promote Blight

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan not only increases the allowable density of housing along commercial corridors but does the same in the heart of our residential areas. Speculators will be encouraged to purchase and assemble properties in order to tear them down and build larger apartment buildings. Because there will be competition for these properties, they will likely have to pay inflated market rates. To cover holding costs, speculators will raise rents and, because they plan to tear the buildings down, there will be minimal incentive to maintain the housing. As a result, the houses will deteriorate and become a blight on the neighborhood. This is what happened in the 1970's when speculators assembled properties and built 2 ½ story walk-up apartments. It also happened in the blocks surrounding Abbott Northwestern Hospital, when speculators bought properties, betting that the hospital would pay them top dollar to buy them out as the hospital needed more land for expansion.

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