

INFILL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

A performance-based approach to building quality housing



PREPARED BY

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in partnership with

PAYNE - PHALEN RESIDENTS AND DISTRICT 5 PLANNING COUNCIL

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Introduction

At some point in the future, the City of Saint Paul will return a majority of the residentially-zoned Housing Redevelopment Authority (HRA) owned land in the Payne - Phalen neighborhood to the tax roles. There is an opportunity now for the community to help guide the HRA decisions about treatment of these properties into the future. A thoughtful planning process can serve to isolate those properties which are truly unbuildable and offer them for private purchase as side yards or public use, while buildable lots can be phased into development over a period of years.

If we adopt the premise that each house contributes to the “feel” of a residential block, then the crafting of infill housing development principles becomes a method for improving and reinforcing the quality, not only of the house, but of the block itself. The level of housing development anticipated under the federally funded Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), and other programs, provides the community with an opportunity to ensure that new housing developed on HRA owned land is not only high quality, but also designed to contribute to the overall quality of life on the block where it is built.

A growing inventory of vacant land has caused the community to consider how to seek best outcomes for new housing. How can an infill development program make strategic investments in residential blocks as a means to enhance each block? This was the question asked of residents at a series of roundtable discussions. This guide proposes to set a new image by example. A balance of function and aesthetics, the principles address what the various elements should do, not what they look like.

Block Considerations

Conversations with residents outlined a number of issues, at the block scale, that could be taken into account when considering new infill development.



Front yards and curb appeal - Front yards should be inviting and well cared for.

Side yards at corner properties - These lots have two front yards and attention should be paid to this element of the blocks.

Rear yards and privacy fencing - The “walling off” of backyards impacts the social and safety considerations of being part of a neighborhood.

Alleys - Alleys have a tremendous impact on the quality of life on the block and attention needs to be paid to improving the functional aspects of this area of the site.

Neighborhood open space - Typically, city lots have minimal room for community green space. Look for ways that a block might be reconfigured to provide for additional community gardens and play lots.

Stormwater runoff - Because much of the neighborhood sits on the sides of bluffs, stormwater runoff creates numerous problems for residential and commercial sites.

Transition between commercial and residential uses - Creative strategies could be used to make this a seamless pairing.

Site Recommendations

One of the key values expressed through the community process is that these projects be inviting and welcoming. The feel of the whole experience is that you want to live in this place, in this house. As such, a critical component is how the site is designed.

Front Yards and Curb Appeal

Tastefully landscape the front yard for a positive first impression.

Porch

Porches are a valued design element, and a usable, livable front porch is to be included in each project.

Lighting

Exterior lighting should be welcoming, highlighting particular elements of the site or house, and improving safety.

Fences

Fences are discouraged in the front yard, with the side yard and backyard fences that are unobtrusive.

Backyards

Backyards need to balance the social-ability and privacy aspects.

Garage

The garage should be thought of as an additional opportunity for socialization. The plan for the garage could include opportunities for a small workshop or garden shed.

Alley

Alleys can be beautiful. Develop an alley presence that is attractive, usable, social and safe using plantings / lighting / designated trash area / rain gardens.

Water

Mitigate stormwater runoff in ways that enhance the site and block. Rain gardens are one example.

Multiple adjoining sites

Developing adjoining site offers an opportunity to create a block open space for play areas, gardens, or social space.



Building Recommendations

These new buildings should be built to a standard that would expect a service life of one-hundred years or more. Much of the existing housing stock has lasted that long or more, and we should expect the same of new construction.



Siting

Maximize opportunities for interior daylighting and solar power applications.

Neighbor Friendly

Care should be taken in window placement facing the adjoining neighbors.

Solar Ready

Buildings to be planned and designed to enable installation of solar photovoltaic and heating systems now or in the future.

Materials

Use durable materials and materials with recycled content when possible.

Daylighting

Minimize the need for artificial lighting by careful placement and sizing of windows.

Flexibility

Floor plans should allow for ease of transformation to prolong the viability of the building for future owners.

Indoor Air Quality

Materials and finishes to contain low VOC content. Place windows to enhance cross ventilation.

Energy

Specify Energy efficient appliances. Exceed the State energy code.

Water

Specify low flow fixtures and dual flush toilets.



Additional References:

Minnesota Green Star Guidelines
www.mngreenstar.org

Sustainability Guidelines

www.stpaul.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=11656

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency Green Communities
www.mnhousing.gov

Minneapolis / Saint Paul Solar Ready Guidelines
www.lunningwende.com

Planning Consultants: Lunning Wende Associates, Inc