



## Appendix – 1.4 KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

### Loring Park Neighborhood Master Plan

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## Ray Harris

November 11, 2010

*The following is a summary of an interview conducted by Peter Musty, CLPC Master Plan Consultant, attended by Neil Reardon, Master Plan Steering Committee Member. The notes were reviewed and approved for accuracy by Ray Harris on November 29, 2010.*

Mr Harris invited us to his 7<sup>th</sup> floor home at 210 West Grant. Amery, a beautiful black lab, greeted us at his side. He was asked to talk about the past, the present and the future of Loring – and his role as resident and visionary, starting by describing what he felt about Loring’s future:

### **Change in America**

Before asking Mr Harris to share stories about his career in Minneapolis and his activities in the neighborhood, I pressed Mr. Harris to first share some thoughts about the future. Reluctantly, modestly, but with the kind of conviction that only comes with having thought a lot about something, he began to relate some opinions.

“ There is a fundamental change in America. The love affair with the auto...the love affair with the white picket fence...(is gone).”

He feels the rejuvenation of urban areas has been happening - is happening – and that folks want to drive less. “I don’t drive a car. I am the epitome of the urban person.” Speaking rhetorically, he related that many would leave their house in the suburbs and move to the condo downtown, but are held up (unable to sell the home in the suburbs.)”

### **On the Size of Housing**

We have 2.8 million people in the twin cities, and 3.8 million bedrooms. We are in a condition of underutilization (of housing), and need to change our housing strategy. We need to prepare for a time where there is NO market (for large suburban homes). “Did you know the average size of a home (post-WWII) was 1100 square feet? Our expectations now - are out of control.”

### **On Cities vs Suburbs**

Cities, by definition, are designed to bring people together, whereas suburbs, by definition, spread people apart. People still want socialization, to be a part of a community - therefore...urban. He feels zoning is outdated, and needs to reflect today’s lifestyle.

“Major, major change is coming. We need greater density, mixed use.” He mentions rising demand among empty nesters, and independent housing for seniors and aging population.

Ray was asked by Neil R.: “What has changed (1960’s vs now)?” Ray related several things

- gasoline prices
- commute times
- ability to work from home (didn’t exist)



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#### **On the Real Estate System (buying & selling)**

Mixed in with optimism for our future came some caveats regarding the current system; “The real estate sales system needs to be thrown out.” He explains that people are encouraged to relocate (from their neighborhood) rather than moving within their neighborhood.

“The whole system has to be redone.”

#### **On Loring Park**

“The money that is coming in (to government) is inadequate to cover the costs of our infrastructure.” As an example – he points to the Park Board and Loring Park; he feels they have done a good job – but it remains the case that they are underfunded, “...they are doing the best job they can with what they have.”

He points to Berger Fountain, the decline in activity such as skating on the pond etc. “It’s a wonderful wonderful park, but it’s a tired park.

#### **On The Value of Public Space & Walking Minneapolis**

“If you look at world class cities, it doesn’t have a damn thing to do with bricks and mortar.” Ray relates that “the whole point of Walking Minneapolis (Foundation) was not to walk – but to get (us) out and appreciate all that’s around us.” We just hole up in September. He points to cities in similar climates such as Copenhagen – and wonders why Minneapolis is the “winter city” it claims to be. There is much less activity during the winter months than could be. Loring Park in the winter... “...is way underutilized.”

#### **On Building Heights in Loring**

Ray favors intensity, verticality, when it’s appropriate. He brings up Loring Park City Apartments as a missed opportunity. It could have been seven stories with a courtyard plaza, instead of three story building (with a larger footprint).

#### **On Harmon**

Ray favors a better program (for reuse) of buildings along Harmon (vs redevelopment).

Ray mentioned Eat Street – and how much changed overnight just with a new perspective; “...all of a sudden it was a place for people to go.” Lesson: people’s perceptions are important.

He wondered if the same can be applied to the Park – and to Loring overall – and conjectured that there may not be change in many buildings...

#### **Greenway Gables**

In 1974 Loring was not seen as a desirable area. The economy was depressed. No lenders were available for tower ideas. There was no money available from money lenders to put up a tower in Loring Park. The Development District put in place plans for the Greenway, but for two years they hadn’t found a developer. Ray Harris and his partner Bill Fine saw an opportunity, and proposed Greenway Gables; owner occupied townhomes on the future Loring Greenway. “The idea was - everyone could get their own mortgages. We put up one sign and sold out all 43 units. This was despite no trace of the Greenway promised by the City – which later opened in 1980. “We weren’t sure the Greenway was going to get built.” The Gables established a quality level that others followed.

“They told us... “No one will ever pay money to live in Loring Park.”...”



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‘Hot Dog’ Amery at National Night Out Dog Parade on the Greenway. (photo taken by P. Musty)

#### Berger Fountain

Ben Berger wanted the fountain in front of the Walker Art Center. Ray, Martin Friedman and Judy Dayton was involved in placing it in its current location. He stated that it needs fixing.

#### The Loring Dog Park

The park is 4-5 years old. “There were 2,000 dogs in downtown with no place to be let loose.” “We had to pay for it.” Ray got Kraus Anderson to donate their labor, and it was otherwise a community effort to pay for the rest, including a statue inside the park.

#### On Loring Greenway

Neil brought up to Ray the idea by some in the community to activate the Greenway by encouraging small amount of retail. Ray was doubtful that anything beyond seasonal carts could survive. Also – he anticipated resistance from the 1100 units that live on the Greenway (to the idea of any commercial uses).

#### On Nicollet

I (Pete) was gently but abruptly admonished for asking this question about Nicollet Avenue in this way: “What do you think we should be zoning for on Nicollet Avenue...” Ray recommended that I reframe the question – perhaps like this: “What do we want – what is the mix of land uses that we want on Nicollet?” He then answered the question; “We should have more density on every site that is available.” Like Uptown – there are certain places...there are certain places in our city that are the places for density.” Ray mentioned that the connection across the bridge to Stevens neighborhood is “...a cold place to walk over...”, and “...it’s a challenge to link the two neighborhoods.”



The Dog Parade on the Greenway during National Night Out, 2010. (Ray is in the yellow shirt.) (photo taken by P. Musty)

He is confident that intensity will return, “If I were sixty years younger, I’d be wanting to take advantage of the opportunities.”



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#### **On Hennepin Lyndale & Connection to Sculpture Garden**

Ray admitted that any large scale change for Hennepin Lyndale is so far in the future – that it’s smart to figure out ways to live with it. “Lets see something happen.”

Then as he looked out his window past Berger Fountain and across the Park he said, “Something major is going to happen in the next years.” Pressed to elaborate, he simply smiled and would not respond, as if he knew something that he enjoyed withholding. Pressed again – the grin simply grew larger.

Not sure if it was related, Ray ended the interview returning to a discussion of Loring Park itself; “...it can’t be done piecemeal – can’t be done only with public money. Ray repeated that Loring Park is a people place that is underutilized – and needs more safe crossings to the park. He also repeated an important point - that he isn’t critical of the Park Board – repeating that they are “...doing the best they can with what they have.”

#### **Ray’s Upcoming Book**

Ray related to us that he will be publishing a book in mid 2011. The book will relate to our collective resistance to change – and why we often continue to do the same things over and over...

#### **Opportunities in Loring**

In general, he feels there are huge opportunities in Loring.

He feels that private and public sector can and should collaborate in the future; citing the private sector’s ability to come in and help the public sector.

#### **Further Thoughts About Loring in 2030?**

*[This is a placeholder for any additional input that Ray would like to submit as follow up to the interview.]*