

Citizens call on city officials to 'restart' Minneapolis 2040 comp plan process, decry hiring of PR firm, at September 18 press conference

At a press conference Tuesday morning, September 18, in the Loring Park neighborhood, former Minneapolis City Council member Lisa McDonald called for Minneapolis City officials to restart the "Minneapolis 2040" comprehensive planning process, this time with inclusive, good-faith citizen participation. Accompanying her was Jana Metge of Citizens for a Loring Park Community, one of many neighborhood organizations whose Small Area Plans have not been incorporated into "Minneapolis 2040."

Below is the text of McDonald's comments.



On Saturday morning the community read in the Star Tribune just how incompetent Minneapolis City Planning is in the face of overwhelming public opposition to their Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

They have hired a public relations firm, Goff Public of Saint Paul, for a cool **eighty thousand** taxpayer dollars to convince us that we **actually do like it!**

Furthermore, in an empty gesture designed to give the impression they are actually honoring citizen concerns, they have proposed meaningless tweaks to the plan — while remaining tone-deaf to what is really causing the discord they have sown in the community.

It's more than the fourplexes. It's more than taking away their cars. It's more than jeopardizing their beloved lakes and redesigning whole neighborhoods. It's more than the financial bonanza for developers who have contributed generously to political campaigns.

It's their arrogance.

From the get-go City Hall has ignored us. Behind closed doors they designed a social experiment that has been tried nowhere else in the nation, and they are hell-bent to try it out on us, regardless of opposition.

They told neighborhood associations to forget the Small Area Plans they worked years to create, and that their plans will be overridden by the city's social experiment.

They have consistently withheld information from us — for example, denying they had hired a PR firm when we asked them several times, including with a formal data practices request.

Adding insult to injury, they have positioned the plan to imply that anyone who dares disagree with them — for any reason — is racist and a bad person.

This is a gratuitous insult to thousands of good people, especially those who have spent years working for civil and human rights and to protect the environment!

One reason Minneapolis is a great city is that it has a tradition of listening to and partnering with its citizens. That's why this new disdain for citizens is so stunning. It's a complete reversal of this tradition and an assault on citizen engagement.

Consider some of the exclusionary measures the PR firm is recommending:

- To — quote — *reframe* the narrative about the plan and about future growth — as if they can hoodwink naïve citizens with some creative writing;
- To create marketing materials that council members who **support** the plan can use to **lobby other council members** who oppose it!
- To keep council members who oppose the plan **in the dark** about the new draft plan as long as possible, so as to spring it on them just before the vote; and
- To keep **the public** in the dark as long as possible, by embargoing communications with reporters until just before the plan is released.

Should taxpayers have to pay a PR firm for lessons on how to ignore the public? We don't think so. We hire city officials to **represent**, not **bamboozle**, us.

When officials we hire to **represent** us wrap their work in secrecy, they feed the already rampant belief that we cannot trust our government to tell us the truth.

Because the City has failed to engage the community in any meaningful way, Minneapolis for Everyone calls on the Mayor and the City Council to stop the process — and **restart** it, this time with inclusive, good-faith citizen participation.

The City should:

First — Provide the public with an **honest** accounting and summary of what citizens really said in online comments, emails, and meetings.

Second — Fire the PR firm.

Third — Use the \$80,000 saved from the PR firm to relaunch the planning process, this time communicating in good faith with all of us, not a cherry-picked few. That includes working with our neighborhood organizations. They have the knowledge and decades of real-life experience to help Minneapolis wrestle through our challenges to solutions that are good for everyone.

Fourth, assess the environmental effects of the proposed plan.

Minneapolis 2040 would substantially affect our beloved natural resources — our lakes, parks, trees and green spaces. But the City has made no effort to identify or assess those impacts. For this reason, environmental assessments must be done.

So this is our message to the **City**:

We are citizens. It is our role and our **right** to participate in creating a shared vision for our own community. Stop trying to force your vision on us. *Restart this plan* — and work with us — all of us, in good faith.

This is our message to the **public**:

By denying us the opportunity to join together in planning our future, the City is driving us apart. No matter who we are, or where we live, or what we drive, all of us in Minneapolis will benefit from coming together to create a shared vision.

We urge everyone to call Mayor Jacob Frey to demand a halt to the process and to allow true community involvement in planning our city's future. Here is his number: **612-673-2100**.

We urge you to also contact your city council member. Demand that you, your neighborhood, and every neighborhood be heard.

As marginalized groups have always insisted: "Nothing about us — without us."

Thank you.