



EAST SIDE UNIFIED JOURNAL

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We welcome you to a special edition of the East Side Unified Journal. Past issues of ESU are available on the [East Side Freedom Library's website](#).

In this newsletter, you can discover untold stories of the East Side, learn about opportunities for activism, and find community resources.

East Side Housing Justice



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Then and Now: Social Change and Economic Development in East Side Saint Paul



Looking north at the corner of Payne and York Avenues, 1910s.

Amidst ongoing debates over what can be done to bring the East Side back to economic health, the past provides both inspiration and cautionary tales.

By Geordie Flantz

East Side Saint Paul has long been a community in transition. Since the 1860s, when Swedish immigrants first settled in what we now call Swede's Hollow, waves of newcomers have made and remade our neighborhoods. During much of the last century, Dayton's Bluff and Payne Phalen were thriving working class communities, with large employers such as 3M, Hamm's Brewing, and Seeger Refrigeration (later Whirlpool) providing thousands of jobs and a hand up to the middle class. These jobs were the backbone of a thriving local economy, including a whole ecosystem of mom-and-pop shops up and down Payne Avenue and Arcade Street.

Unfortunately, early success on the East Side was followed by steep economic decline. By the 1990s, most manufacturing jobs had vanished, as all the major employers closed or moved out of the city. The arrival of new generations from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and East Africa brought new energy.

However, despite good faith efforts and the hard work of many, the economic dynamism of the post-war period has never fully returned.

By the Numbers

Over the latter part of the 20th century, the East Side lost some 15,000 unionized blue collar jobs due to capital flight and deindustrialization.¹ Today, the East Side is home to approximately 30,000 full time jobs, primarily in healthcare, social services, and public administration.² At first glance, this might suggest the East Side has largely recovered from the losses of the last century. A deeper dive suggests otherwise. For one thing, not all jobs are created equal. Manufacturing has greater knock-on economic effects than almost any other sector. For every 100 durable manufacturing jobs, economists estimate 289 supply jobs are created, plus 459 *induced* jobs.³ In this case, induced jobs refer to jobs supported by a manufacturing worker's wages. When a worker was paid at American Hoist and Derrick and then went out to a bar on Payne Avenue or bought something at the local hardware store, his job was supporting the jobs of his bartender, the clerk at the store, and many others.

In the case of the 15,000 manufacturing jobs lost on the East Side, if we estimate that 10,000 of them were in durable goods manufacturing (Whirlpool, 3M, American Hoist and Derrick, etc.) and 5,000 were in nondurable goods (Hamm's Brewing), then we end up with an additional 38,150 supplier jobs, plus 61,965 induced jobs. What this means is that the 15,000 manufacturing jobs lost on the East Side likely led to a devastating loss of more than 100,000 total jobs. Many of the supplier jobs lost would not have been directly on the East Side. However, many of the induced jobs would have been, especially at a time when economies were, in general, much more localized. The evidence of this isn't hard to see. Even today, driving up and down Payne Avenue or Arcade Street, the number of shuttered or boarded up storefronts is obvious.

East Side Stories

Of course, numbers can't tell us everything. Mary Anne Quiroz, co-founder and co-director of Indigenous Roots Cultural Arts Center, first came to the East Side in 1989, when she was 9 years old. An immigrant from the Philippines, Quiroz recalls an East Side that was much whiter but also, in many respects, rougher than it is today: "When we say like, times are rough right now, man, times were *rough* back then. Nobody had any business walking down Arcade Street ... everything was boarded up." Quiroz's family

was part of a seismic shift in East Side demographics, which saw white flight as a result of the economic crash, paired with an influx of immigration and relocation of poorer Black, Brown, and Indigenous Minnesotans, drawn to the area by plummeting rent prices.

When Quiroz's family first moved into a house on White Bear Avenue, she remembers a distinct lack of diversity. "It was all white," she says. "Everybody on that block was white. I went to Sheridan Elementary. It was mostly white. All my first crushes were probably white boys," she laughs. By the time she got to high school, however, things had shifted dramatically. "Our demographics are constantly changing," Quiroz says. "If you think about the city of Saint Paul at 51% of its residents identifying as Black, Brown, Native/Indigenous. You have [an] East Side that's identifying 67%, 68% BIPOC. So something had to shift."

Schroeder Brothers hardware store once stood at the corner of Payne and York Avenues, across the street from what is now Caydence Coffee. Started in 1889 by Matthew Shroeder and his brother Henry, the shop closed in the early 1940s. Matthew's grandson, Mattias Shroeder, now 86 years old, still lives in the house his grandfather built on York Avenue. Shroeder remembers riding the street cars with his mother and watching steam trains in the railyard below Payne Avenue. "When I was in grade school," Shroeder explains, "everything was individual little stores. In the late 40s, even the early 50s. Big box stores didn't exist." There were so many local stores that his family didn't bother frequenting any shops on Arcade Street, two and a half blocks from his house. "We never knew anything about Arcade Street," Shroeder says. "That was too far away! We're much closer to Payne Avenue. Only a block and a half." Amongst the stores he frequented with his mother was Jacobson's Bakery. "That was so famous," he says. "They had wonderful rye bread called Limpa. It was dark rye bread and they put orange peel in it. I've never found anybody that made bread like that, any place, because that bakery disappeared, maybe in the 1970s." Payne Avenue was so Swedish in those days that they called it "Snus boulevard," after the Swedish term for chewing tobacco. Schroeder remembers the East Side as a quiet place to grow up, where kids roamed the streets without worry and families didn't lock their doors.

For 20 years Shroeder moved to Chicago, where he worked as a technician for Gould Battery. In 1984 he quit his job and returned home to take care of his ailing mother. Though Shroeder is not one to dwell on the negative, the neighborhood had changed. Three times his house was broken into. He recalls watching the police carry out a drug raid on the home next door, the sound of

gunshots as three people fled the scene. When someone later broke into his house, rummaging through his possessions, Shroeder was shaken up, but didn't want to leave his family home. He says he's a proud East Sider. "I'll die here with my boots on," he says.

A Union Past

The East Side's former economic success, peaking sometime in the 1960s, had many driving factors. The unfettered capitalism of westward expansion and the country's larger colonial project had created massive wealth, as well as a tidal pull for European immigrants. While antitrust legislation had been passed nationwide by the end of the 1800s, and Teddy Roosevelt began Trust Busting in earnest in the early 1900s, the United States remained fertile ground for large corporations and manufacturing. Within this context, successful capitalists like Theodore Hamm and John A. Seeger created successful businesses providing beer and consumer goods to a growing population. However, it was thriving labor unions that ensured a good portion of that wealth got transferred to the East Side and its workers. By the 1950s, over a third of U.S. workers belonged to a union. Workers at all the major East Side employers, including Hamm's, Seeger's, and 3M, were unionized.

East Side Freedom Library co-founder Peter Rachleff says that the successful unionization of blue collar workers on the East Side enabled generations of people to become middle class. Union organization and political organization went hand in hand. "The earlier European descended workers of Swedish, Italian, Polish, Serbian, German, Irish backgrounds became very politically active," says Rachleff. He cites East Side politician and former U.S. Congressman Bruce Vento's career as a good example of the power of that level of organizing. "To talk to people that were very involved with Vento, we talk about corn feeds and lawn signs. It wasn't just about showing up on election day and checking the right box. People really were involved."

Rachleff sees the potential for unions to make gains again, riding new energy in recent wins by organized labor against Amazon and other large companies. One thing East Side immigrants have always had in common, Rachleff says, is a strong sense of mutuality. "Our new immigrant neighbors have a very strong sense of collective support, people who have each other's back, people who support each other... that was true of the Swedes and the Italians, they all brought that, and ultimately it got 'educated out of them,' one of the bad things that the American educational system has done."

At the same time, Rachleff admits there are hurdles to a stronger union future on the East Side. "The transition from the unionized, white, blue collar East

Side to the more diverse, immigrant, and more scattered occupationally-- people working in healthcare, people working in retail, people working at Amazon--how does that torch get passed intergenerationally?” Rachleff muses. He cites examples of unions successfully integrating, but admits the problem on the East Side is more foundational than merely opening the ranks of union membership to more kinds of people. In other places, Rachleff says, “the torch got passed, even if there was a downturn in the number of jobs or the number of members of the union or even the vitality of the union itself, but there still was a torch and it got passed. What happened on the East Side was much more disruptive, because the places where the earlier generations worked went away.”

When the big employers failed or fled, the social and political fabric of the East Side was torn. Over time a more fragile, complex, and arguably more beautiful tapestry has been woven. However, in a world of high diversity, high need, and low social-cohesion—not to mention the universal alienation supplied by Netflix and social media—bonds between neighbors can be low. This is exacerbated by poverty, lack of affordable housing, and dispersed family networks, which mean that many renters move frequently. It’s also true that while early European immigrants clung proudly to their individual identities, they had more in common than today’s predominant immigrant groups, whose countries of origin span the globe. All of these issues create roadblocks for collective social action.

Then, of course, there is this: you can’t unionize jobs that don’t exist.

The One Starfish Theory of Employment

Established in 1929 to manage the Saint Paul Harbor, the Saint Paul Port Authority was authorized to engage in economic development activities inland in 1955. Occupying somewhat hazy territory between a government agency and a non-profit, the port has gone on to become one of the city’s largest players in commercial real estate and business development, especially in “light industrial” business creation. It was the Port Authority that took over the old 3M headquarters site in 2008, redeveloping it as a new home for The Vomela Companies, a commercial printer that started elsewhere in Saint Paul in 1947. Like all of the Port Authority’s projects, Vomela was required to sign a Community Benefits Agreement. Under these agreements, the Port Authority offers companies heavily discounted land in exchange for promises related to property taxes and employment. On the employment side, participating businesses must create one job per 1000 square feet of building space, jobs must pay at least \$15 an hour with full benefits, or \$22 an hour

without benefits, and a “best faith effort” must be made to hire 70% of new employees from Saint Paul, with a 2 for 1 credit for those in the immediate zip code. The total benefit of the land discount given to Vomela was estimated at \$1,013,206 at the time of the agreement in 2018. In the intervening years Vomela has made 49 new hires. Thirteen of these were from the East Side.

If thirteen jobs created over five years sounds underwhelming to you, you’re not alone. The Port Authority has come under criticism from all sides over the years, for everything from lack of public oversight to erecting ugly buildings. Steve Trimbel, a long time East Sider and board member of the Dayton’s Bluff District Forum, has a particular bone to pick with Vomela and the larger Beacon’s Bluff development (of which Vomela is a part). “The Port Authority bought the old area where 3M had been,” Trimble says, “and that area probably had 2,000 workers. Well, if you take a look at what the Port Authority did, and they were saying, ‘Oh, we’re going to have new jobs’: every one of the things they put in there was somewhere already inside of Saint Paul. They were so happy that they were gonna for sure get 12 new workers after this. Well hell. So the city was just foolishly doing that, and they’re still doing that.”

If the Port’s East Side developments have disappointed in terms of job creation, it’s not for lack of trying. East Side Employment xChange is an initiative designed to connect East Side workforce providers with local companies looking to hire. The xChange works closely with the Port Authority and many of its Community Benefit Agreement signatories. Luke Weisman, staff coordinator for the xChange, acknowledges the difficulty of matching employers with the East Side labor force. He says in the past there has often been a mismatch between the kinds of jobs created and the kinds of work East Siders were trained for. He also acknowledges that race and cultural difference have at times created barriers to employment. “Back to the salad days of 3M and Hamm’s and Whirlpool,” Mr. Weisman says, “they were employing immigrants... but it all felt a little more homogenous back then.” In addition to external barriers like discriminatory hiring or lack of relevant training, workers who have experienced dislocation and/or generational poverty, have a lot more hurdles to overcome than just getting in the door of the right employer. Weisman says the xChange frequently works with residents who have been out of work for six months or more. Because people face so many and such complex life challenges, the xChange often gets deeply involved with residents. “We’re busy cleaning up the rest of their lives before they can get to work,” Weisman says. “We’re trying to create ways to provide support for people who are challenged to show up in the world and be productive. And they’re doing their damndest but they need a lot of support to

do it.” Because the number of jobs to be filled is small, and because many people truly don’t know what they want to do, Mr. Weisman describes the xChange’s placement work as a “one starfish at a time, personalized approach.” He also refers to it as ‘onesies and twosies’: “It’s two people in this organization and one in that one. And we have no, like, motherload where we’ve had 25 people that have all gone to work for, you know, Hamm’s.”

Despite the slow growth, Tonya Bauer, executive director of the Saint Paul Port Authority, thinks industrial manufacturing can still play an important role on the East Side and lead the way to economic recovery. “I’ve got a soft spot for the East Side,” Bauer says. “I’ve got family that worked at 3M. And I always think positive investment begets more positive investment.” Bauer is unerringly positive when it comes to the Port’s work on the East Side. “The East Side has never really gotten its fair share,” she says, “but I think there’s a lot of opportunity right now.”

Think Small

At times in the past, jobs strategy on the East Side seemed focused primarily on attracting large “anchor institutions” to provide the area with an economic tailwind. This strategy saw some success with developments such as the HealthPartners specialty center off of Phalen Boulevard.

However, recent years have seen a shift away from large business recruitment and toward small business creation. “I think that the critique was that we were plopping down these large companies and they weren’t hiring East Siders,” said one source familiar with local funding and development work who chose to speak off the record.

Of course, small business development has always been part of the mix. Over the years, an array of organizations such as East Side Neighborhood Development Company, Neighborhood Development Center, and East Side Enterprise Center, among many others, have worked to create and support small businesses on the East Side. At times, entrepreneurs from immigrant communities have banded together to form destination shopping and eating establishments such as Plaza Latina and Hmong Village. Other initiatives have included Payne Area ReBOOT, an attempt to link up the various arts organizations and restaurants along Payne Avenue to create a new shopping and dining district. If you can’t attract large businesses to employ large numbers of people in the community, there is a tendency to look to restaurants, the arts, and shopping as a way to attract people from other parts of the city or suburbs to come and spend their dollars at local establishments. This too can be a double edged sword. Luke Weisberg recalls efforts to create

shopping and dining destinations while he was an organizer in North Minneapolis. “There was often a sense by some folks that the neighborhood didn’t have enough income on its own to be really thriving,” Weisberg says, “and therefore the solution was, make it a destination so that the people living downtown would come to the Northside for something really spectacular... and I always thought, yeah okay, we can do a little bit of that, but it's not going to be like 50th and France or District del Sol, and maybe we don’t want that anyway. Maybe we just want to put more money in the pockets of the people who live here, make sure they have enough amenities to keep them here and make it work.”

What Weisberg was worried about, of course, was gentrification, the process by which a neighborhood with relatively low housing costs but perceived high artistic and/or cultural amenities begins to attract whiter, more affluent home buyers, creating a cycle of rising housing costs that eventually leads to the displacement of the people who made it attractive in the first place. “They love the culture,” laughs Mary Anne Quiroz, speaking of affluent white people from outer ring suburbs who sometimes attend events at Indigenous Roots, “at least that’s what they tell me.” Peter Rachleff says the East Side has often felt on the brink of gentrification. “As gentrification was really happening in Lowertown, and artists were being priced out of living there, it seemed like Payne Avenue and the East Side was going to be the place that artists relocated to, and there was some of that. But it hasn’t really gotten traction.” The financial crisis of 2008 and the pandemic both played roles in slowing or altering the march of gentrification across the city.

In early 2024, Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) made waves on the East Side by announcing they had raised ten million dollars to rehabilitate the Plaza Del Sol, a Latino food mall on the corner of Payne and Jenks Avenues. The renovation will create more space for incubating Latino small businesses and restaurants, an event center tailored toward events in the Latino community, and new offices for LEDC. Enrique Blanco, LEDC’s director of operations, says the non-profit is being very intentional about developing the project to benefit people who already live in our community: “It’s focused on smaller businesses, on the community that’s already there, for them to have an opportunity to be part of this transformation of their own neighborhoods. We believe in that model because the businesses, the people that have been putting up with all these issues, with disinvestment, they’re the ones that should get the reward.”

Blanco sees the project as more than a small business incubator, stating, “We have this vision that it’s not just the development of a building, but thinking

holistically about, how do you house the people who work in these little stores? What if they can afford to live in their own community, and they have their business there but they also have their house there, they have their family, their kids can go to a local school, they have the medical services they need...”

It’s a beautiful vision, one that rhymes in many ways with the old East Side, with its Swedish bakeries and butchers with barrels of salted herring at Christmastime. Blanco admits, however, that there are still many challenges facing small businesses in the area. “We have a lower income population,” Blanco says, “that doesn’t have the disposable income to be a patron of the businesses that are there.” Blanco believes that creation of something like the new Plaza del Sol can help transform the local economy. The hope is that this initiative and others like it can pump more money into the community so that the people who live here now can afford to support the businesses they are creating. The exact mechanism for how this might happen, however, isn’t entirely clear.

Homeland

While much of the 1900s were a boomtime for the East Side, we should be careful not to romanticize the past. Payne-Phalen was named after an accused murderer, its streets platted by former slave-owners on stolen Dakota land. Business boomed, but only due to the large-scale pillaging of the continent, its people, and natural resources. Maggie Lorenz remembers her mother’s stories of coming to the East Side from the Spirit Lake Reservation in North Dakota in the 1950s. “They got off the bus,” Lorenz says, “and immediately people started throwing rocks at them, calling them dirty Indians, telling them to go back to where they came from. That was my mom’s and my grandma’s first introduction to Saint Paul.”

Lorenz herself is now Executive Director of Wakáŋ Típi Awáŋyaŋkapi, an East Side environmental stewardship nonprofit centered in Dakota values. Their central projects over the years have been daylighting Phalen Creek and building a Dakota cultural and environmental center in Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. Mounds Park, which sits on the bluff overlooking the sanctuary, and Wakáŋ Típi, a limestone cavern at the base of the bluff, are both deeply significant spiritual and cultural sites in Dakota life. “This area on the East Side is Dakota homeland,” Lorenz says, “and as a Dakota person I have ancestral connections to the landscape.” According to Lorenz, the East Side was a nexus for Dakota communities, with great ceremonial, cultural, and political importance. It was also a central place for trade and commerce.

In the 1950s, Lorenz' grandmother came to the East Side as part of a wave of Native people moving back to Saint Paul in search of jobs and a better life. Her grandmother worked as a telephone operator and later at an East Side department store. The Native population on the East Side peaked, according to Lorenz, in the 70s or 80s. "There was such a strong population here in Saint Paul of Dakota/Lakota people," Lorenz says. "There was a real sense of visibility and community."

Ironically, while the East Side has diversified over the years, the Native population shrank following the same plant closures and relocations that devastated the local economy. Today, most Native people who live in Saint Paul live on the East Side, according to Lorenz, but the community is smaller, less organized, and less visible than it once was.

Lorenz, for her part, decided to raise her family here. "The East Side is a community of so much cultural richness and diversity," she says. In 2023, Wakáŋ Típi Awáŋyaŋkapi received \$2.5 million in state bonding money for the building of the Wakáŋ Típi Center, closing in on their \$13.5 million goal. In May of 2024 they broke ground on the project, and they expect to have their grand opening in the summer of 2025. It was also announced in 2024 that a new co-management agreement had been reached between the City of Saint Paul and Wakáŋ Típi Awáŋyaŋkapi to steward Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, putting the land under partial Native control for the first time since colonization.

Lorenz believes that uncovering the longer history and deeper significance of the land now known as East Side Saint Paul can have a positive impact for all East Siders. "I think the East Side would benefit a lot from acknowledging and celebrating the cultural richness that is the story of Dakota people," Lorenz says. "I think when people move to the East Side a lot of the stories are around 3M and industry and a lot of people know about Swede Hollow and the story of the immigrants, but it's not well known, the story of Dakota people here."

Lorenz also sees promise in new forms of industry bringing economic vitality back for all East Siders. "I think there's a lot of opportunity in green infrastructure, green buildings, and green projects," Lorenz says. "The work we're doing at Wakáŋ Típi Awáŋyaŋkapi is creating jobs. We're creating jobs for people to do this environmental stewardship here on the East Side, but I think there's a lot more that could be done around green infrastructure and green building. It's just a really big opportunity for the East Side. If we're going to grow and we're going to revitalize... why not do it in an environmentally sustainable and just way?"

With the results of the recent national elections, the promises of green industry might seem further away than ever. Native leaders such as Lorenz, however, provide compelling examples of the power of hope and resilience.

Past as Prologue

While the East Side's economic past was hardly perfect for all East Siders, we shouldn't let that obscure the multiethnic (if not multiracial) solidarity and economic opportunity that once caused the East Side to thrive. There's no doubt that the East Side of 100 years ago had a healthier, more robust economy than the East Side of today. According to the way the East Side Employment xChange calculates unemployment, there are some East Side economic tracts where up to 50% of adults are unemployed, pointing to an acute economic crisis that demands action.

Over the years, many people have dedicated their lives to improving economic conditions for East Siders. Undoubtedly, things would be much worse without their efforts. By and large, the problem is not with the particular methods or strategies employed, but one of scale. We all need to dream bigger when it comes to our local economy, both in terms of what's possible and the level of coordination and resources it will take to build a better future. Prescriptions for success will require change and support at the national and state levels, driven by cooperative, sustained effort from the grassroots.

The story of what that effort should look like and what those changes might be remains to be written. Harnessing the East Side's people power will mean building multiracial, multiethnic community in ways constantly troubled by our country's past, as well as its ongoing traumas and divisions. If we want the future to include health and prosperity for all of us, we should begin by understanding where we've been, and who we are together.

¹ According to labor historian Peter Rachleff.

² This number was arrived at utilizing the On The Map tool at the U.S. Census Bureau website in conjunction with Luke Weisman at East Side Employment xChange.

³ <https://www.epi.org/publication/updated-employment-multipliers-for-the-u-s-economy/>

Redevelopment of the Historic Hamm's Brewery Site Continues



JB Vang President Kou Vang at a community meeting in Feb. 2024. Photo Credit: Geordie Flantz

JB Vang is pressing forward with plans to redevelop the site despite setbacks and a negative media campaign from Rob Clapp, owner of Saint Paul Brewing.

ESU has covered this redevelopment and the history of the site extensively. Read more [here](#) and [here](#).

by ESU Staff

Early in 2024, as part of its development agreement with the City of Saint Paul, JB Vang held a series of community meetings regarding their plans to redevelop the historic Hamm's Brewery complex. Four meetings took place between January 24th and March 13th, culminating in a list of recommendations compiled by the Twin Cities branch of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

Chosen by the City of Saint Paul as tentative developer of the site in January 2023, JB Vang's plan includes adding 206 affordable housing units to the site, as well as a 56,000 square foot, two-story marketplace in the former brewhouse. The market is envisioned as an incubator for local businesses, managed by legacy non-profits East Side Neighborhood Development Company (ESNDC) and Hmong American Partnership. The plan also includes an outdoor public plaza, indoor community space, and greenspace adjacent to Swede Hollow Park and Bruce Vento Trail.

Having once employed thousands of middle class employees the brewery closed in 1997 after a wave of industrial plant closures and relocations that devastated the East Side economy. Many attempts have been made to redevelop the site over the decades, but the vast and labyrinthine brick structures present an enormous challenge to the city and developers. JB Vang's plan was selected for its adherence to a list of priorities put forth by the city with input from ESNDC, East Side Area Business Association, and the district 4 and 5 community councils. [These priorities](#) included maximizing housing and/or jobs, engaging the surrounding community, and prioritizing equitable outcomes.

The community meetings, held at HOPE Academy, were at times tense, with several attendees voicing concern over the lack of parking included in the current plan. Rob Clapp, owner of Saint Paul Brewing, was amongst the plan's loudest critics. Situated in the former keg and wash houses at the back of the site, Saint Paul Brewing has been a successful brewpub and eatery since Clapp purchased the building and the business from John Warner in 2020. Clapp argued that the large surface lot on the eastern end of the site often fills up with patrons visiting the brewery. In JB Vang's plan, this lot would be replaced with an apartment complex providing affordable housing to the community. Clapp claimed that removing this parking, while adding hundreds of residents and more businesses to the site, would greatly impair his business. Several other resident attendees recommended solutions to the parking issue, including satellite parking sites around the area with shuttle service.

Developers in Saint Paul are not required to include parking in housing or commercial building plans. Those requirements were scrapped by the mayor and city council in 2021. According to a [press release](#) at the time of the rules change, roughly 36% of Saint Paul's land area is currently dedicated to moving or storing automobiles. According to the release, "fully eliminating required off-street parking minimums allows more opportunity for housing developments, incentivizes housing affordability, reduces carbon emissions,

and reduces overall urban sprawl.”

Sustain Saint Paul Board member Luke Hanson supports the new rules, and says that getting away from car-first development is vital for creating a greener, more pedestrian-friendly city. “Parking minimums are one form of a subsidy that shores up the ease, comfort, and convenience of getting around in a car and advantages car travel over these other forms of travel that don’t have the same kinds of privilege. It’s really about leveling the playing field to figure out, if we’re not favoring parking in this particular way and it has to compete in a fair fight with biking and walking and transit, how much will people’s habits just automatically shift?”

Though the city does not impose parking requirements, parking has always been part of JB Vang’s design for the site. Two levels of parking are included under the new apartment building on the east end of the site, with a total of 144 spaces. These spaces will serve residents of both the newly constructed apartment building and the additional housing in the existing buildings on the west end of the site. Saint Paul Brewing already owns the inner courtyard parking lot on the west end and its 41 spots. Clapp owns four buildings and over 130,000 square feet of real estate on the site. He has access to 20 spots on the eastern side of 700 Minnehaha Avenue (previously home to an aquaponics business) and an additional 25 spots next to the old powerhouse across Minnehaha Avenue (though he has publicly stated that he does not intend to use those spaces as parking for any of his businesses). In addition to these resources, JB Vang has voluntarily redesigned the new apartment building in response to the community workshops. The new building has been pushed further to the east and tighter against the bluff at the back of the site, raising costs for the project but creating another 70 spots for surface parking to be utilized by all commercial businesses on site.

Despite these efforts, Clapp has continued to oppose the redevelopment. In January, Clapp’s lawyer submitted a letter to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) formally objecting to the listing of the Hamm’s site in the National Register of Historic Places. JB Vang spent months working with SHPO and putting together a detailed account of the site and its historical significance to the East Side. Their application was approved by the state historic preservation board and submitted to the National Park Service for listing on the National Register.

According to Stephanie Harr, longtime East Sider and Project Development Consultant for JB Vang, due to the size and challenging nature of the site, historic tax credits are essential to its redevelopment. “It’s unlikely that any

developer could develop a historic property like this without those historic tax credits,” Harr said. Clapp, who formally submitted an application to be named tentative developer of the site himself, is certainly well aware of this fact. In the same letter in which Clapp objected to the designation, his lawyer states that Clapp actually supports it, at least in theory. The letter reads in part:

“[Mr. Clapp and his businesses] are champions for the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and welcome tools and resources that support their current and proposed work at the Hamm's site. They are committed to historic preservation and recognize the potential benefits of a listing.”

Due to the rules of the historic designation process, Clapp’s objection effectively blocked the historic designation and any tax credits that would have come with it. Any owner of a private property parcel on the site is allowed to register an objection. If the owner or owners of the majority of parcels object, then the National Parks Service will not add the site to the National Historic Register. After buying the former 11 Wells distillery building from its previous owner last summer, Clapp now owns four parcels within the proposed Hamm’s Historic District. There are a total of seven privately owned parcels, giving Clapp a personal veto over the process.

While the process of historic designation through SHPO is now effectively dead, there is an alternative path in which the city itself can grant designation and pass it on to the National Parks service for inclusion in the National Register. This process includes open City Council hearings at which anyone can register their objections, but does not allow for veto by private property holders. The City of Saint Paul is currently working on this second designation process.

In the meantime, Clapp has taken his objections to the public. In February, Clapp created a new website, hammstown.com, imploring the public to use a provided email template to pressure city representatives to slow down the development and focus on the historic preservation of the west end buildings before removal of the east end parking lot. Clapp also went on something of a media blitz, with favorable articles quoting him and amplifying his concerns in the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, Kare 11, 5 Eyewitness News, and others.

In both Clapp’s letter to SHPO and his other public statements, he has claimed that the city failed to communicate with him and that he received inadequate notice about the historic designation process. However, in a letter dated February 6th, 2025, the executive director of the Saint Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority refutes these claims, providing evidence of

correspondence between the city, JB Vang, and Clapp about the historical designation going back to at least April of 2024.

JB Vang is currently working on rezoning the site to allow for residential apartments, as well as securing the capital necessary to close the sale of the property and commence construction. In December of 2024, JB Vang was informed that they had not received a large allocation of funds requested from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), despite being the highest scoring project from the metro area. They are working with the MHFA to reapply this year. According to Harr, the previous bid likely failed due to a technicality around funding the parking beneath the east end apartments and the overall size of the request, which is near the maximum usually awarded by MHFA. Despite this, Harr says that JB Vang remains optimistic the project will receive the required funding in 2025. This money is vital, as the 4.7 million dollars already promised by the City of Saint Paul for the project is contingent upon the MHFA funds.

“These are normal parts of development,” Harr says. “This is a very complex development. It’s normal in the process to have to take a look at the plan, come back and adjust it to make it more cost effective or make it fit better on the site. You’re always learning new information, so it’s a very iterative process.”

Once the center of economic life on the East Side but long a symbol of decline, there’s hope shovels will hit ground for the next phase of life for the Hamm’s site in 2027.

Get the Lead Out



by Mandy Okonek

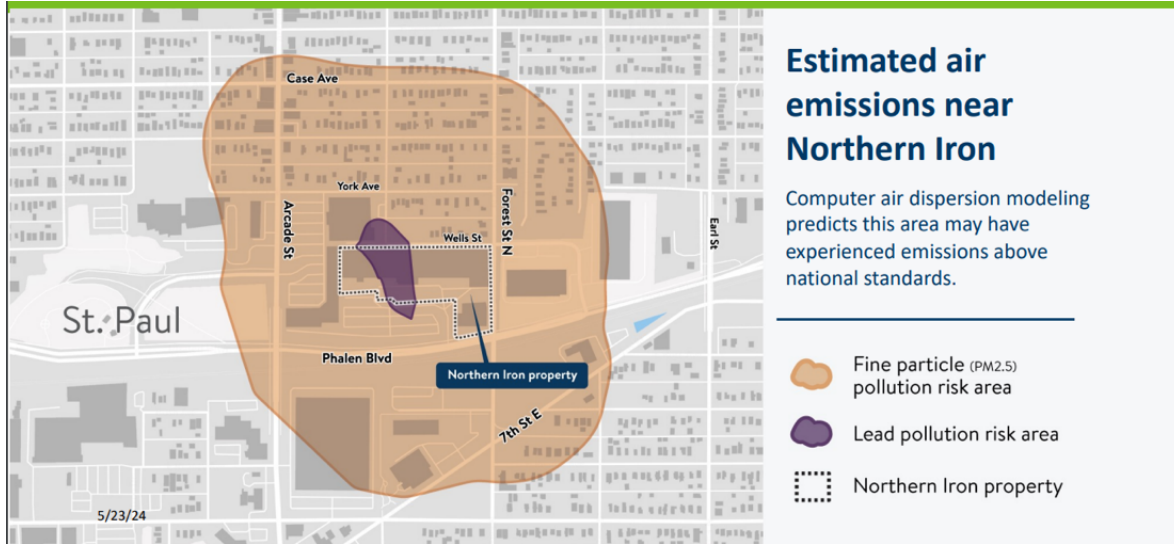
It is “highly likely” that unsafe amounts of lead particulates are in our air. Direct neighbors of Northern Iron and Machine Facility (867 Forest Street North, Saint Paul), report a strange smell in the air, and dusty residue on their vehicles.

On April 18, 2024, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), mailed out a two-sided flyer with verbiage stating it is highly likely airborne lead levels near the facility exceed National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). These standards define how many pollutants, such as lead, can float around in our air without a negative effect on the health of the community. The MPCA states, “no level of lead is safe for people and elevated levels of lead can impact residents’ health. Children are most at risk for health impacts.”

Northern Iron began operating in 1906. The MPCA opened its doors in 1967. Decades before government regulations, Northern Iron did what foundries do: melted scrap metal down into usable items like car parts. This process creates toxic byproducts including lead, which can escape into our air from smokestacks atop the facility. The side effects of lead particulates are devastating to children and the elderly and are known to cause lung cancer.

More on the maliciousness of lead [here](#).

The MPCA uses a process called modeling (think weather predictions, it is very similar) to predict the amounts of emissions released into the air.



The tan blob in the picture depicts how far the polluted air will travel on any given day. Emissions may travel further depending on atmospheric conditions.

If you live on the East Side, you are likely already living with lead exposure. Many of us have lead in our soil, paint, and the pipes that carry our water. Most East Siders live in what is known as an Environmental Justice Zone. Communities in Environmental Justice Zones live with environmental hazards that directly impact residents' quality of life. Justice communities are one byproduct of the racist practice adopted by realtors called redlining — restricting diverse and working-class people's home-buying options to areas including industrial neighbors.

The MPCA oversees regulating the amount of pollution companies like Northern Iron emit. A meeting organized by the Payne-Phalen Community Council with the MPCA and Northern Iron CEO Alex Lawton had both parties pointing fingers. MPCA representatives originally claimed Northern Iron's permit violation was a clerical error. However, local writer Andrew Hazzard [reports](#), "... an internal MPCA memo dated February 28, 2023, reviewed by Sahan Journal showed that MPCA engineers believed that lead levels from Northern Iron may have been exceeding federal standards more than a year ago."

Northern Iron CEO, Alex Lawton, stated that he had inherited these permitting issues when Lawton-Standard purchased Northern Iron in 2022.

Research shared by community member and environmental lawyer Melissa Lorentz reveals Northern Iron's history of compliance challenges and the MPCA's languid approach to regulation.

Correspondence collected by Melissa Lorentz reveals a history of Northern Iron's compliance challenges. In a letter dated November 21, 2012, Tom Zarnke, Facility Manager of Northern Iron, reached out to MPCA permit engineer Steve Pak regarding challenges to meet NAAQS standards. Zarnke states, "A major concern is that in our efforts to minimize emissions from this facility, we may never be able to strictly achieve compliance with NAAQS." The MPCA advised Northern Iron to "hold off" on a new permit application and never followed up. Fast forward to 2020 and the MPCA announced that they discovered unauthorized changes to Northern Iron's equipment resulting in increased particulate emissions. According to Lorentz, these changes occurred in 2007.

Here is the most recent timeline in the ongoing battle of the MPCA versus Northern Iron.

- July of 2023: The MPCA required Northern Iron to conduct air-quality modeling including a fine of \$41,500 for air permit violations.
- February of 2024: The MPCA stated publicly that modeling data reflected a "likelihood of air emissions exceedances."
- April of 2024: The MPCA issued an administrative order requiring Northern Iron to use scrap metal with less lead and reduce operating hours. *Northern Iron violated this order repeatedly.*
- May 15th, 2024: Northern Iron filed a temporary injunction against the MPCA in District Court, arguing the validity of the MPCA's modeling data.
- July 11th, 2024: Ramsey County District Court judge Leonardo Castro temporarily lifted the MPCA's administrative order.
- August 22nd, 2024 - Today: Judge Castro extended Northern Iron's injunction. The MPCA now requires a new smokestack test. Although Northern Iron installed new pollution control equipment and updated its modeling, the MPCA claims the model is flawed and inconsistent with previous filings, requiring revision after the stack test. MPCA also notes that Northern Iron's monitors are unapproved and non-compliant with federal law, making their data questionable. Despite this, the monitors show PM2.5 violations, contradicting Northern Iron's claims of compliance.
- September 16th, 2024: Northern Iron submitted significant supplemental application materials on Sept. 16, and the MPCA has deemed the application administratively complete. The agency will now proceed with a

thorough technical permitting process. Upon further review, however, the application was found to still be missing important information.

- February 21st, 2025: Ramsey County District Court Judge Leonardo Castro ordered a stay in the case between Northern Iron and Machine and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to allow the state to evaluate the foundry's latest permit application.
- March 3rd, 2025: East Side Resident Brittney Bruce filed a class action lawsuit against Northern Iron, alleging failure to adhere to pollution standards and inviting all residents and property owners within a half-mile of the foundry to join the litigation
- March 27, 2025: Northern Iron submitted materials, once again, for an updated air permit. The MPCA is reviewing the application materials. If the application is not deemed complete this time the MPCA will “take appropriate action to consider a permanent amendment... up to permit revocation.”

With the MPCA's history of lackadaisical enforcement, neighbors with valid public health concerns are continuing to meet. A newly formed group of neighbors, East Side Environmental Justice, is discussing shared concerns. A lack of clarity— in both the air and the MPCA communications team— is catalyzing our community to find strength in a collective and collaborative voice, which feels underrepresented by both Northern Iron and the MPCA.

If and when the MPCA finishes work on an amended permit for Northern Iron it will share a draft of this permit with the public. According to Lorentz, “The permit amendment will be a crucial leverage point for interested people. From a legal perspective, you lose your right to complain about a permit if you do not engage then.” It is also important to note that public opinion is also admissible in court in the eventual settlement of this ongoing conflict.

To keep tabs on the MPCA, you can sign up for their newsletter, [here](#). To share your thoughts about Northern Iron, click [here](#) for information on the next East Side Environmental Justice meeting.

Please reach out to your primary care physician and get yourself and your children evaluated for lead.

Purple Line Opens with More Rapid Bus

Transit in the Works



Photo Credit: Mandy Devens

by Michaela Corniea and ESU Staff

Americans, to put it simply, are obsessed with cars. However, cars come with lots of financial and environmental costs. With their greenhouse gas and particulate matter emissions damaging the earth, and gas and insurance prices rising, it's a perfect time for cities to look toward increased public transit and transit-oriented development (TOD).

Currently, the Twin Cities transportation resource, MetroTransit, is expanding two of their five bus rapid transit (BRT) lines, have three new BRT lines under construction, and are planning several others ([MetroTransit](#)). Two of these projects are set to have broad implications for the East Side.

Opened in March of 2025, The Gold Line stretches along I-94 from St. Paul to Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale, and Woodbury. The first rapid transit bus line in Minnesota to run predominantly on a dedicated roadway, it includes frequent, all-day service in both directions, pre-boarding fare payment, access to Park & Ride lots, real-time arrival and departure information, and heated shelters. Additionally, a planned extension is supposed to connect the line to downtown Minneapolis by 2027.

Like most large scale infrastructure projects, The Gold Line was not built

without [controversy](#). Initial plans for the line had it continuing further East along I-94, before local opposition in Lake Elmo forced MetroTransit to scrap that plan. The Purple Line, a second proposed rapid transit bus line with major implications for the East Side, has seen similar pushback from suburban communities.

As currently proposed, the Purple Line would link downtown Saint Paul to downtown White Bear Lake. Early plans for The Purple Line mapped out space along the Bruce Vento Regional Trail for the bus route. Maplewood community members formed a coalition protesting the rush line's presence along the trail, insisting the conversion from regional trail to bus line would destroy "the tree canopy and scenic beauty of the trail" ([norushline](#)). The No Rush Line coalition also called out BRT presence near school playgrounds and parks in the area, through residential areas, and alongside proposed walking/biking trails as reasons for their protest of the planned route, in addition to "lower property values." Per the coalition, the bus line would be a harmful and unnecessary addition to their community.

The No Rush Line coalition did indeed achieve their goal, and the Purple Line was moved away from the Bruce Vento Regional Trail. Ultimately, the Maplewood city council voted to retract support for the project, causing it to be withdrawn from the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grants. Project committee meetings have since been put on pause.

Meanwhile, residents of East Side Saint Paul had their own concerns about the Purple Line's planned route. A proposed stop on Arcade Street in the Payne-Phalen neighborhood is "in the middle of a field, behind a retaining wall, down in a gully" and community members are not happy. Not only is the spot not accessible for those with limited mobility, it is also not a location that will be easy to reach amid cold, snowy Minnesota winters, nor do community members feel safe with how far the planned stop is located from the street and businesses ([PPCC](#)). Though the Payne-Phalen neighbors are excited for more transportation options in their neighborhood, they feel there has been little consideration for the community in the Purple Line BRT plans.

The Payne-Phalen Community Council "is advocating for the design and location of the Arcade Street station to be integrated back into the fabric of the commercial corridor and already transit-dependent neighborhoods of the community." Looking at the long-term ramifications of the BRT stop location, the community council worries that having the station located so far from the existing businesses and community areas will discourage developers from transit-oriented development in the area. Per MetroTransit, transit-oriented

development is a walkable development supported by transit, and “includes a mix of housing, retail, employment, retail and recreational choices, allowing people to live and work in vibrant places with less dependence on a personal car.” For more on transit-oriented development in St. Paul, this [2016 MinnPost article](#) shares three major examples of the community connection and value TOD brings.

When moving away from car-only infrastructure and towards public transportation, cities and other developers must walk a fine line, working with community to create the greatest possible impacts for TOD, while working around the kind of NIMBYism and anti-transit views that wealthier suburban areas sometimes espouse. Of course, at the end of the day communities deserve to keep their neighborhood green spaces, and everyone should have access to safe and efficient public transportation. At its best, transit-oriented development can and should allow for intentionality and cooperation between transit and the community. Public transportation is necessary, and it can enhance the cities and communities it serves through careful planning and the incorporation of transit-oriented development.

Community Resources

[HOME Line](#)

HOME Line provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems.

For assistance, you can [send an email](#) to a HOME Line attorney or call 612-728-5767.

[Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services \(SMRLS\)](#)

SMRLS provides free, high-quality legal help to low-income people in critical civil matters, like securing food, shelter, and safety.

For assistance, call 1-888-575-2954 or [apply online](#).

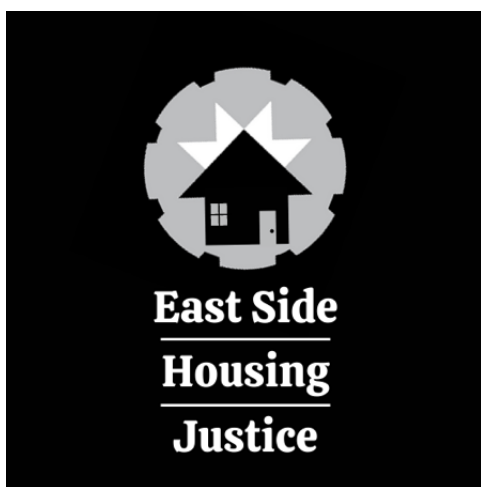
[Affordable Homeownership Program: Livable Communities](#)

The LCA Affordable Homeownership Program provides grants to support

affordable homeownership development, including acquisition and rehabilitation, for projects that best meet the following two priorities:

- **Racial Equity Priority:** create homeownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other ethnic or racial groups that own homes at disproportionately lower rates than white households in the region; and
- **Geographic Choice Priority:** create affordable homeownership opportunities in parts of the region where it is most challenging to do so.

To schedule a meeting for more information, [click here](#).



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