



Lowry Avenue Strategic Plan

An Update to the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan



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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Overview
- 1.2 History
- 1.3 Background
- 1.4 Related Plans & Policies
- 1.5 Existing Conditions
- 1.6 Market Summary
- 1.7 Public Participation

2. Land Use and Development

- 2.1 Existing Policy
- 2.2 Land Use and Development Intensity
- 2.3 Development Objectives
- 2.4 Design Themes
- 2.5 Development Opportunities

3. Transportation and Infrastructure

- 3.1 Historical Context
- 3.2 Existing Conditions
- 3.3 Corridor Improvements
- 3.4 City Transportation Policy
- 3.5 Objectives and Strategies

4. Housing

- 4.1 Overview
- 4.2 Housing Objectives
- 4.3 Housing Types
- 4.4 Redevelopment Strategies

5. Economic Development

- 5.1 Overview
- 5.2 Business Development
- 5.3 Redevelopment Strategies

6. Implementation

- 6.1 Overview
- 6.2 Organizational Strategies
- 6.3 Implementation Matrix

Appendix
(Bound separately)



1. Introduction

- 1.1 Overview
- 1.2 History
- 1.3 Background
- 1.4 Related Plans & Policies
- 1.5 Existing Conditions
- 1.6 Market Summary
- 1.7 Public Participation

1.1 Overview

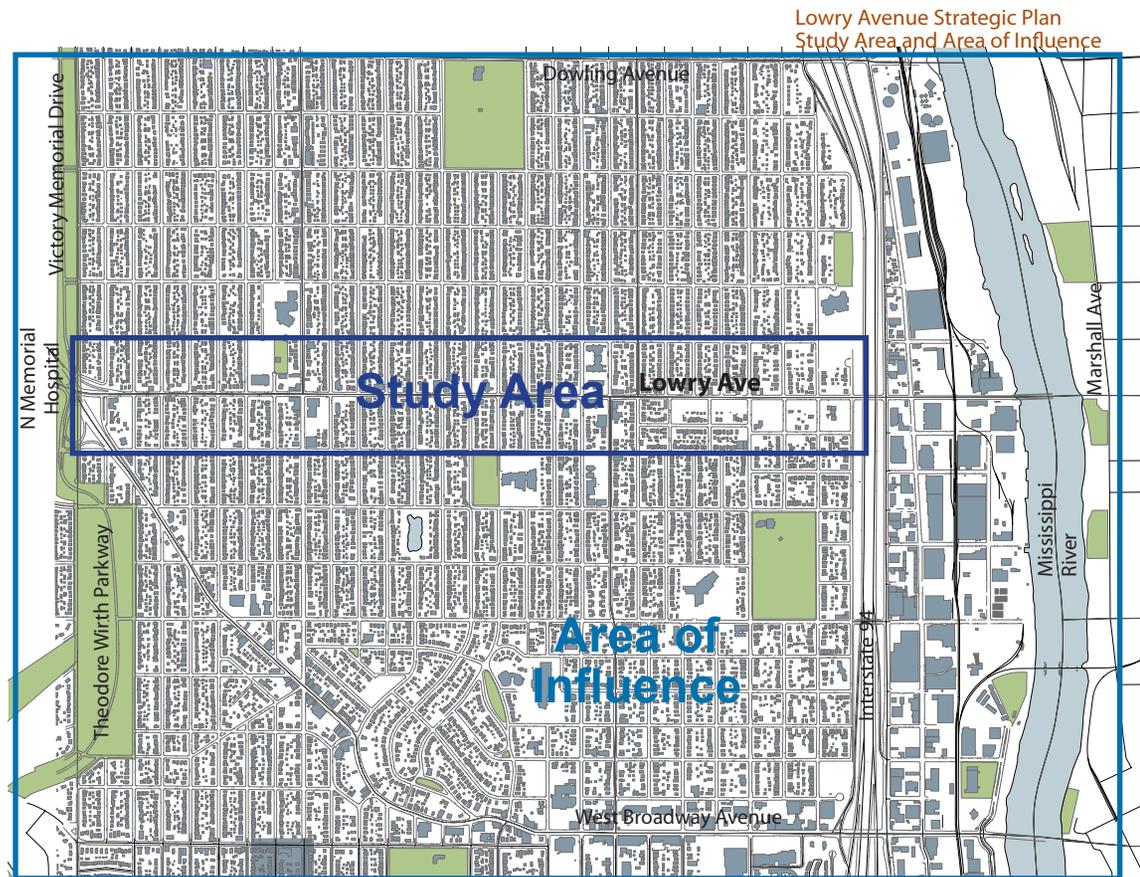
Lowry Avenue has a new look in North Minneapolis. Outfitted with planted boulevards, wider sidewalks, new benches, bus shelters, and light fixtures, the recently realigned and repaved Lowry is the first major physical change resulting from the 2002 Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan.

The Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan established a compelling general vision for Lowry Avenue, and emphasized the public infrastructure improvements that could be made to make the corridor more appealing and attractive. This plan, the Lowry Avenue Strategic Plan, builds on the foundation established by the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan, providing a complementary focus and recommendations. It includes the development of more detailed long-term land use and development guidance than was offered in the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan. And it offers a holistic implementation program for incentivizing property and business investments along Lowry Avenue. The implementation program is comprised of strategies and actions that can be initiated and supported by various Lowry Avenue stakeholders such as the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, the neighborhood organizations, Lowry Avenue businesses, and developers.

The plan's study area was the subject of detailed consideration. It extends from the city limits on the west to the Mississippi River on the east, and from 30th to 33rd Avenues. But the study area is subject to many important influences that are outside of these boundaries. Important examples include the Mississippi River to the east, North Memorial Hospital to the west, and the retail offerings on West Broadway Avenue.

There were three parts to the planning process:

- **Background Scan.** Initial review of materials, study area and market conditions. Community meeting and focus groups focused on project introduction, and community goals and investment priorities.
- **Sharpening the Vision.** Land use and development guidance utilizing development scenarios for several key areas along Lowry Avenue. Community meeting and focus group input was solicited in response to analysis, maps and development scenarios.
- **Implementation Plan.** Implementation strategies for Lowry Avenue development and placemaking. Community meeting was held and feedback solicited on proposed implementation strategies, and a detailed future land use map.



1.2 History of Lowry

Lowry Avenue was shaped by many influences over the course of the last century. Settlement patterns and demographic shifts, changes in transportation technology and American shopping habits--these and other elements contributed to the present appearance and functionality of Lowry Avenue.

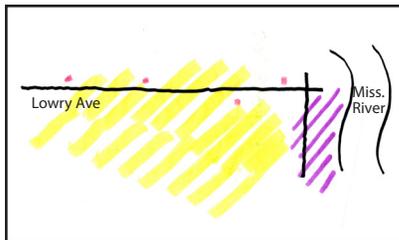
Although it is beyond the scope of this document to capture its history in depth, the sketches below highlight some of the events that were significant in this story. Some additional historical information related to transportation can be found in Chapter 3.

1.3 Origin of This Planning Initiative

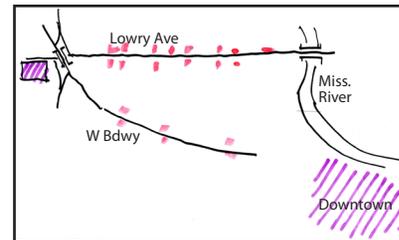
This Plan is the result of a process initiated by the five neighborhood organizations that border on Lowry Avenue—Cleveland, Folwell, Hawthorne, Jordan, and McKinley. At the conclusion of the reconstruction of Lowry, a much more attractive and pedestrian-friendly street and sidewalk environment had been created. This led to discussion between the neighborhoods about how to foster the complementary private investments on Lowry that would keep the momentum going, and make the corridor more attractive and vibrant. They agreed to collaborate on a planning project

that would focus community and City attention on the Lowry corridor, identifying additional strategies for revitalizing the corridor. The process was funded by neighborhood NRP monies and a City of Minneapolis Great Streets grant.

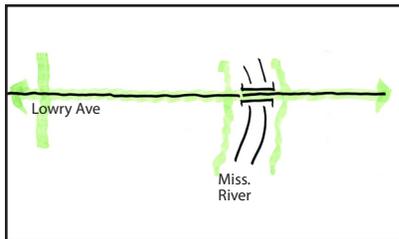
CPED Planning Division staff served as the project manager. The Cuningham Group, in collaboration with key personnel from Donjek and Biko Associates, was hired to assist with the development of the plan and the community engagement process.



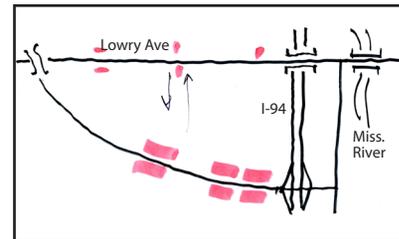
1900s:
Development reached Lowry.



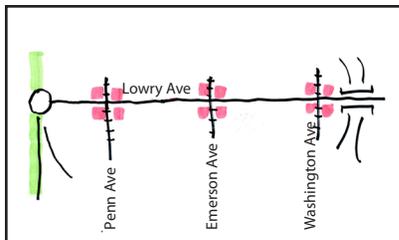
1950s:
North Memorial established.
Downtown grew.
Bridge over Lowry replaced traffic circle in the 1960s.



1915:
Park Board planned to use Lowry as northern path of Grand Rounds.
Bridge linked North and North-east Minneapolis.



1980s:
I-94 completed without access to Lowry.
Emerson & Fremont became one-way pair.



1930s:
Streetcars served Penn, Emerson and Washington Avenue.
Traffic circle connected Lowry, West Broadway, and Crystal Lake Road.



2002:
Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan envisioned new road and streetscape, three retail nodes.

1.4 Related Plans & Policies

Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan (2002)

The foundational plan for Lowry Avenue, the Corridor Plan includes recommendations related to street and streetscape improvements, transit facilities, the commercial nodes, green space connections, and phasing.

Neighborhood Commercial Nodes

The Lowry Avenue Corridor plan recommends consolidating the scattered commercial businesses into three commercial nodes—at Penn, Emerson-Fremont, and Lyndale Avenues. Each of these north-south corridors hosts a bus line. Specific recommendations for the nodes include:

- Penn: consolidate commercial uses.
- Emerson-Fremont: add retail and residential and extend 31st Avenue between Dupont and Humboldt Avenues. Designate as a transit node, a key intersection for the Bottineau transit corridor.



- Lyndale: add retail and residential.

For all areas, the Corridor Plan recommends rezoning and supporting incremental change.

Green Space Connections

The Corridor Plan advocates for green space connections to connect Lowry to nearby amenities and add value to the corridor. These include:

- Enhancing the connection between Lowry Avenue and the Victory Memorial and Theodore Wirth Parkways.
- Connecting Jordan Park School to Folwell Park with a green corridor along Humboldt Avenue.
- Connecting Cityview School and Farview Park with a green corridor along 4th Street.
- Making a strong connection with the Mississippi River as recommended in the Above the Falls Plan.

Retail Market Analysis (2005)

The Retail Market Analysis looked at the Emerson-Fremont and Lyndale Neighborhood Commercial Nodes on Lowry, and made recommendations for retail development for the two areas.

- Emerson-Fremont: Expand the range of retail and service businesses for an expanded market area.

- Lyndale: Add destination retail and service businesses on both south corners.

North Minneapolis Market Strategy (2008)

The North Minneapolis Market Strategy was an independent look at the entire North Minneapolis retail landscape. Its important general conclusion is that there is insufficient customer market to sustain high quality retail businesses at the numerous retail nodes and centers that exist in North Minneapolis. It devotes specific attention to each designated retail area, including those along Lowry Avenue. It offered the following recommendations for the Lowry Avenue Neighborhood Commercial Nodes.

- Penn: retain as strong neighborhood business district with a focus on convenience retail and fast food, as well as some non-retail commercial such as medical offices.
- Emerson-Fremont: consider reinventing as an Asian-focused ethnic specialty commercial district since the node is currently weak.
- Lyndale: maintain some convenience retail, but due to limited trade area it should be mostly residential

1.4 Related Plans & Policies

continued

West Broadway Alive Plan (2008)

The West Broadway Alive Plan is a plan for the revitalization of West Broadway Avenue. From the Mississippi River to James Avenue, West Broadway is about a mile south of Lowry. At James Avenue, West Broadway turns northeast, and intersects with Lowry at the western city border. West Broadway is a direct influence on Lowry, as it is the center of North Minneapolis commercial activity. In comparison with West Broadway, Lowry Avenue serves as a more neighborhood-focused retail area. The economic analysis conducted as part of the West Broadway Alive process includes information relevant to Lowry Avenue.

Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth (2009)

The Minneapolis Comprehensive Plan, the City's overall guiding planning document, designates Lowry Avenue as a Community Corridor. According to the Plan, a Community Corridor is a minor arterial with moderate traffic volumes, and "is primarily residential with intermittent commercial uses clustered at intersections" called Neighborhood Commercial Nodes. The kinds of commercial uses that characterize Community Corridors and Neighborhood Commercial Nodes are "generally small-scale retail sales and services, serving the immediate neighborhood." Three Neighborhood Commercial Nodes are designated in the comprehensive plan along Lowry Avenue—Penn, Emerson-Fremont, and Lyndale.

The recommended scale of development in Neighborhood Commercial Nodes is high density (50 to 100 du/acre). On community corridors it is medium-density (20-50 dU/acre), with transitions to low-density in surrounding areas.

Homegrown Minneapolis (In Progress)

Homegrown Minneapolis is a policy initiative which strives to "improve the growth, sales, distribution, and consumption of fresh, locally grown foods in order to positively impact the health, food security, economy, and environment of the city and surrounding region."

Land Access Recommendations from a 2009 progress report include the following:

- Establish a system that makes readily available open spaces accessible to residents who want to grow food.
- Develop a city land use policy framework that strategically prioritizes and preserves land in every sector of the city for food production purposes.
- Design new development and redevelopment projects (residential and commercial) in the city in ways that allow potential food production.



1.5 Existing Conditions

Population

The study area includes parts of the five neighborhoods of Cleveland, Folwell, McKinley, Jordan, and Hawthorne. As of 2000, approximately 31,000 people lived in these five neighborhoods, based on the US Census. Population numbers remained stable or grew between 1980 and 2000. Neighborhood demographics are heavily weighted toward children, youth and young adults. In Hawthorne, Jordan, McKinley, and Folwell, about half the population is under twenty-five years of age. Cleveland is an exception, with a more balanced age profile. All neighborhoods recorded an increase in minority and immigrant populations between 1980 and 2000.

There are distinct differences in income levels and number of people living in poverty between the neighborhoods north and south of Lowry. As of 2000, households in Cleveland, Folwell, and McKinley (north of Lowry) averaged from slightly below to just above the Minneapolis median household income, while average household incomes in Jordan and Hawthorne (south of Lowry) are significantly below the city average.

Housing

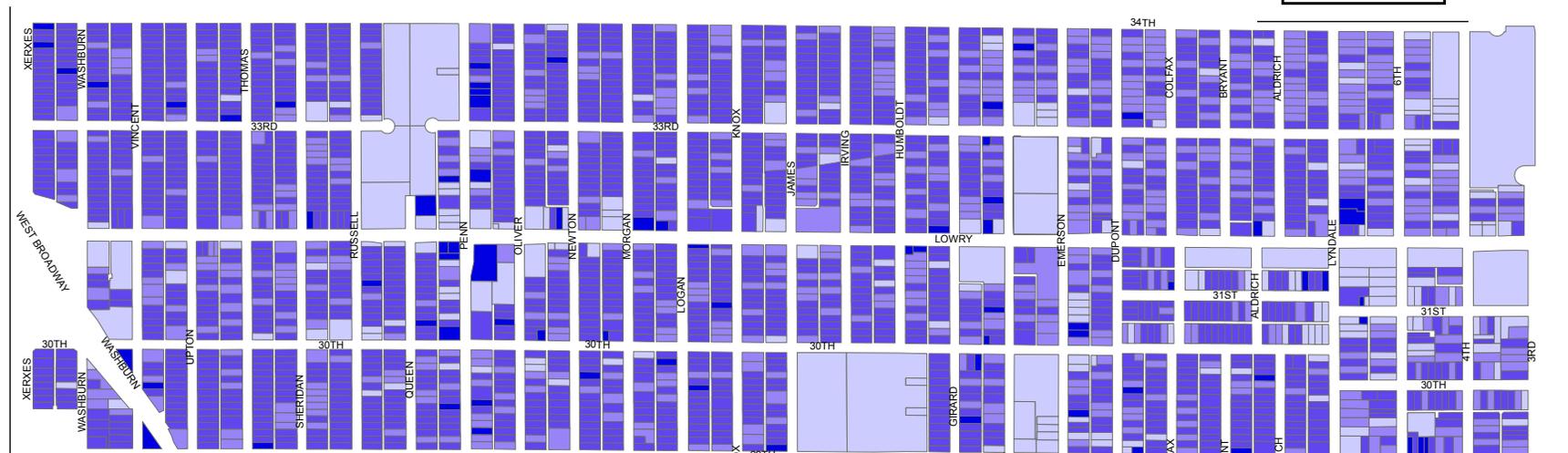
Housing in the five neighborhoods consists mostly of single-family detached houses built in the early 20th Century. A limited number of flats in high-rise buildings exist in Jordan and Hawthorne. Other multi-family housing development,

ranging from duplexes through small apartment buildings, are found scattered throughout the five neighborhoods.

In the Hawthorne Neighborhood, there are a good many more renter-occupied houses than owner-occupied. In Jordan there are roughly equal numbers of both. In the three neighborhoods north of Lowry Avenue, most single family homes are owner-occupied.

The foreclosure crisis has impacted all of the Lowry Avenue neighborhoods, as evidenced by for sale signs, vacant and boarded buildings, etc.

Lowry Avenue -- Value per Square Foot



1.5 Existing Conditions

continued

Commercial

Commercial uses are concentrated primarily at two intersections: Penn, and Emerson-Fremont. But other retail and service businesses are found intermittently along the length of Lowry, interspersed with housing. There is a high vacancy rate in commercial properties along Lowry, and some buildings are in disrepair.

Amenities

In North Minneapolis, Theodore Wirth Parkway and Victory Memorial Drive anchor a pattern of higher residential values on the west side of the study area. Conversely, impacts from Interstate 94 contribute to lower residential values on the east. The amenity value of the Mississippi River does not seem to influence property values on Lowry, which testifies to both its disconnection from these neighborhoods, and the fact that park and recreational features have not been developed along this part of the City's riverfront.

Other community assets contribute to the value of the Lowry Avenue neighborhoods. These include schools, parks, and institutions, as well as neighborhood retail and services. The newly constructed Lowry Avenue, with generous sidewalks, benches, and unified feel has become a community asset in its own right. Specific amenities identified by stakeholders include:

- Established neighborhoods
- Community pride
- Schools and parks

- North Regional Library
- Anchor businesses
- Transit Service
- Excellent north-south access
- Stable residential markets in Cleveland
- New developments like the Hawthorne Eco-Village
- Proximity to downtown
- Future access to the Mississippi River
- Planned greenways
- Access to Grand Rounds
- North Memorial Hospital

Victory Memorial Drive



1.6 Market Summary

Commercial Marketplace

Lowry Avenue once was a thriving commercial corridor. Over time, however, cultural and technological shifts led to households buying fewer goods and services in their own neighborhoods. More shopping is now done further away in big box oriented commercial destinations. Lowry can and should recapture a greater local customer market, but it will continue to contend with competition from destinations further afield. Closer to home, it will need to carve out a niche as an attractive source of neighborhood goods and services alongside the destination-oriented goods and services offered at nearby West Broadway Avenue.

Lowry Avenue's commercial buildings are characterized by substantial vacancy rates. Despite a limited supply of commercial space, vacancy rates are high and rents are extremely low. The low rents place downward price pressure on all commercial space on Lowry, further decreasing the viability of the marketplace. Commercial vacancies on Lowry have been aggravated by the current recession and associated stress in the real estate market.

Because commercial space is sparsely scattered along the length of the Avenue, customer traffic around and between the commercial areas is limited. This adds to the sense of emptiness, and the perceived lack of safety in some areas. It also hampers the benefits retailers and office users could receive from additional foot traffic and the mixing of patronage between businesses.

Despite the challenges, Lowry Avenue has some

significant commercial success stories. Many businesses, such as So Low Grocery, North End Hardware, and Tooties, thrive by filling niches for items desired locally and around the region. Aldi and Family Dollar also draw from the larger community.

Still, the attraction of West Broadway as a community hub for products and services, negative perceptions of North Minneapolis in the region, and a profile of commercial space that spreads foot traffic over a lengthy area—each of these factors impacts the prospects for reinvigorating Lowry Avenue's retail and office marketplace.

Housing Marketplace

The residential marketplace is similarly stressed, with the foreclosures and vacancies compounding long-standing neighborhood conditions which undermine renovation and reinvestment efforts.

Although the housing marketplace is improving, the neighborhoods on the Lowry Avenue corridor continue to struggle with the impact of recession on both the job and housing market.

These stresses are not limited to areas on and around the Lowry Avenue corridor, but the market here is more sensitive to the negative consequences of these shifts due to homogeneity of housing stock and perceptions about the neighborhood that already limit the homeowner and investor markets.

Marketplace Opportunities

Although the availability of commercial and residential space and comparatively modest prices reflect challenging neighborhood conditions, they are also seeds of opportunity from an economic development perspective. They can be leveraged as an asset to attract new market interest in the Lowry area.



1.7 Public Participation

Planning Process

Over a six-month period, there were three community meetings, focus groups and interviews, and regular meetings with the steering committee and technical advisory committee .

Steering Committee

The steering committee helped guide the process and served as liaisons to the neighborhoods and businesses. The 20-member steering committee met monthly. Members included:

- 8 neighborhood representatives.
- 3 community representatives.
- 1 business owner.
- 1 non-profit developer.
- 3 organization leaders/directors/managers.
- 1 Minneapolis City Council member.
- 2 CPED representatives.
- 2 Hennepin County representatives.
-

Sub-Committees

Three sub-committees helped with public outreach



Project Schedule

efforts, public workshop hosting, and focus group organizing and assembly. Sub-committees met several times throughout the process, and individuals from each sub-committee distributed materials, recruited participants, and helped to organize workshops and focus groups.

General Public

Each of the three public workshops consisted of a short presentation followed by discussion. The first two workshops used a small group activity format for participants to comment, offer feedback, and suggest ideas. The third workshop used an open house format to field responses from participants.

The public workshop schedule was:

- November 19: Background.
- January 28: Sharpening the Vision.
- March 25: Implementation.

Focus Groups

The following focus groups were assembled for more specialized discussions:

- Neighborhood residents from each of the five neighborhoods.
- Business owners from the Penn and Emerson-Fremont nodes, and from areas between the nodes.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with the following key stakeholder organizations.

- Project for Pride in Living
- North Memorial Hospital
- Wellington Management

Bus Tour

The steering committee took a tour of local developments and similar commercial areas in Minneapolis that could serve as examples for future development on Lowry Avenue. Some sites visited were:

- Franklin Avenue
- Phillips Park
- Portland Place
- Eat Street
- 38th Street
- West River Commons
- Main Street Bungalows

1.7 Public Participation

continued

Several methods were used to gather feedback from participants in the planning process:

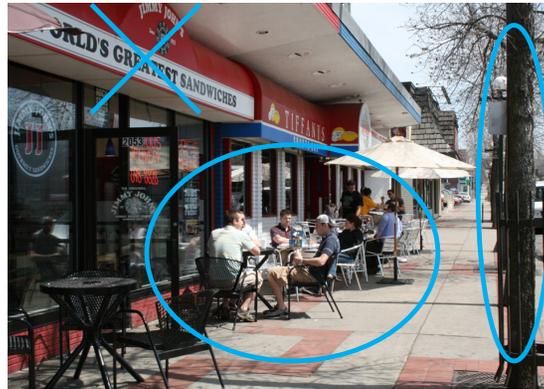
- Small group discussions.
- Keep & change exercises.
- Photo response surveys.
- Photo ranking exercises.
- Small group responses to proposed project objectives and challenges.
- Individual responses to maps and drawings with attached sticky-notes.

Photo Survey Sample Response Poor Examples for Lowry



Not Suitable: Parking lot in front of building.

Photo Response Survey Sample Responses Good Examples for Lowry



Desirable: A place to meet (not gather), small businesses good.



Desirable: Public gathering, seating, open air, canopy, stimulating, destination, landmark.

Resident Focus Group Sample Response What would you keep at Emerson-Fremont?

- Library
- Historic Bremer
- Bremer Way
- Troy's Auto Repair (business)
- So Low Grocery
- Buildings on NE corner

Public Workshop Group Sample Response What would you like to see in 10 years at Penn?

- Public square
- Butcher/baker
- Community center (+1 vote)
- Greenhouse (to help grow food for grocery)
- Bank
- Sit-down moderately-priced restaurant (+1 vote)
- Mixed-use retail/housing
- Greater non-profit presence
- Car share (Zipcar, Hourcar)

1.7 Public Participation

continued

Public Input

The following are key ideas about the future of Lowry Avenue that emerged from the community meetings and focus groups.

Transportation

- Keep and add good transit connections.
- Create transit hub at Lyndale.
- Have good bus and light rail service.
- Add more parking for new buildings.
- Don't have parking fronting the street.

Open Space

- Keep green spaces.
- Add community gardens.
- Keep urban farm idea.
- Keep farmers market idea.
- Add public space.
- Make greenway connections.
- Add more trees.

Business Development

- Keep and recruit useful businesses and institutions.
- Focus on local and neighborhood-serving businesses.
- Add more businesses.

- Add daily use places to spend money.
- Add new office space.
- Add professional services.
- Add sit-down restaurants.
- Add a bank.
- Add a co-op grocery.
- Add a medical clinic.
- Add more amenities to draw people here.

Redevelopment

- Keep character-defining buildings.
- Make property improvements.
- Restore old buildings and build new buildings.
- Add density.
- Keep small town feel.
- Increase housing density along Lowry, not in the neighborhoods.
- Focus commercial at nodes but continue supporting existing commercial in-between.
- Build new kinds of housing.
- Add upscale housing.
- Add affordable and supportive housing.
- Add market rate housing.
- Develop public land first.
- Invest in what's here before building more.
- Add mixed-use development.
- Clean up building facades.

- Make new development pedestrian-friendly.
- Build on existing amenities.
- Develop standards for operation and design.
- Decrease number of blighted properties.
- Decrease commercial and housing vacancies.

Communication

- Identify roles for county, city, developer, property owners, and residents.
- Focus on better communication and better ability to work together.
- Create better relationship with City.

Other

- Reduce crime.
- Make it easier to keep tenants.
- Reinforce and build on existing amenities.
- Host events that celebrate Lowry.
- Develop "sustainable" theme for North Minneapolis.
- Reintegrate Lowry with neighborhoods and Mississippi River.

