

Position Letter on the Ramsey County Study of Rice Street

Prepared by the North End Development Team

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The North End Development Team (NEDT) is an organized group of residents, business representatives, community groups and city officials committed to improving the North End/Rice Street neighborhood through identifying and supporting economic and housing development opportunities for the area. Since 2013, NEDT has secured and distributed funding to North End businesses for their capital improvements.

The NEDT envisions a future Rice Street where existing businesses are thriving and new businesses fill empty storefronts and vacant lots. We know that to achieve this vision, it is imperative that Rice Street becomes more attractive and amenable to pedestrian traffic. While the NEDT respects the desire to efficiently move traffic through the Ramsey County system, we can no longer put cars before people in our highly residential neighborhood arterial streets. This four-lane highway has contributed to loss of community, housing deflation, poverty, injury and even death in the North End.

The NEDT warmly welcomes Ramsey County's decision to initiate the process required to reconstruct Rice Street in the North End from University Avenue to Larpenteur Avenue. As its staff conducts the Rice Street Study, the NEDT proposes the following treatments be applied to Rice Street. From an economic growth and vitality lens, these changes and improvements cannot wait.

- Historic District, South of Maryland:
 - Reduce driving lanes from 4 lanes to 2 lanes all day, every day. The conversion of Rice Street to a two-lane should start at (or before) University so that commuters from downtown to the suburbs select a more appropriate route.
 - Add key left-turn lanes as needed beginning at Como or Pennsylvania. The lack of left turn lanes causes traffic to back-up behind a turning vehicle and impatient drivers to veer into the right lane to pass.
 - Add permanent, striped on-street parking on both sides of the street. Permanent parking for customers that is clearly marked is key to the health of our local business community.
 - Limit turning action intersections to create smoother traffic flow; one-way only (or even closures) in some instances could be considered.
 - Add signals with leading pedestrian interval, pedestrian count-down timers and ban vehicles from right turns on red, where appropriate.
 - Place a high-visibility crosswalk and planted pedestrian refuge median in the crossing area between Lawson and Cook across from the Wellstone Elementary School and Rice Street Rec Center.
 - Widen the sidewalks in no parking areas where the roadway is against the curb and add bump-outs where possible.

- Install wayfinding signage on Rice Street directing commuter traffic from downtown Saint Paul to I-35E and I-94; John Ireland, University, Pennsylvania, Sycamore.
- Business District, North of Maryland:
 - Reduce driving lanes from 4 lanes to 3 lanes (including a center turn lane) all day, every day.
 - Maintain a continuous shoulder on both sides of the street that provides a safety zone for pedestrians and bicyclists.
 - Widen sidewalks and add green boulevards and/or planted medians, where possible.
 - Replace tall street lights with modern, pedestrian scale street lamps.
 - Reduce the speed limit to 30MPH and engineer the road to naturally slow traffic.
 - Add a left turn arrow at Rice and Maryland and designated left turn lanes to avoid back-ups behind a turning vehicle.
 - Add high-visibility crosswalks and consider a pedestrian refuge median at Ivy, Hoyt, Wheelock and other high-traffic, un-signalized intersections.
- Throughout, University to Larpenteur (and beyond):
 - Additional green space, shade trees and planted boulevard where appropriate.
 - High-visibility, marked crosswalks at all traffic signals and other key intersections.
 - Sidewalk infill (and widening, where possible and necessary) all along Rice Street.
 - Add sidewalk or recreational path on the south side of Larpenteur between Dale and Jackson, providing an important connection to Rice Street.
 - Full reconstruction of the street (vs. mill and overlay) for the entire corridor. Mill and overlay would simply delay needed structural repairs.
 - Implement lane changes using paint and signage for the entire corridor as soon as possible since construction is likely to occur in segments over several years.
- Adopt Existing Small Area Planning for Rice Street and Cross Streets
 - Adopt and implement the recommendations of the Safe Routes to School Plan for Washington Technology Magnet School.
 - Consider the pending recommendations of two studies focusing on the northern section of Rice Street including the Rice and Larpenteur Gateway Study (due Dec 2017) and ULI Healthy Corridors Initiative (due Spring 2018).

In summary, the Rice Street reconstruction is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Rice Street and North End businesses and residents to improve safety, livability and economic vitality of the area. We appreciate your careful consideration of these recommendations.