

U-Plan Community Planning Studio

Application for Assistance

U-Plan Community Planning Studio is now inviting requests for technical support for planning projects impacting the University Avenue Corridor. U-Plan offers a variety of technical resources and support services including 3 computer work stations fully equipped with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, AutoCad and SketchUp architectural graphics, Google Earth, PhotoShop and other state-of-the-art visioning and design tools, as well as a large format color printer that can generate maps and graphics. Professional staff proficient in GIS mapping and architectural design are available for consultation and assistance.

The mission of U-Plan is to facilitate planning and design efforts at the “grass roots” level to better enable the community to engage with the official land use and transportation planning processes that are occurring along University Avenue. Located in a storefront at 1956 University Avenue, U-Plan also provides meeting spaces for design charrettes and smaller planning sessions.

U-Plan has created a five person Management Team to oversee operations of the studio on a day-to-day basis and to select projects and tasks for the staff of U-Plan to work on. The Management Team is: Linda Winsor, Hamline Midway Coalition; Tim Griffin, St. Paul Design Center; Jeff Matson, University of Minnesota CURA; Nieeta Presley, Aurora Saint Anthony Community Development Corporation; and Brian McMahon, University UNITED.

How U-Plan Will Operate

Assistance from U-Plan can take several different forms:

Tools/ Technical Assistance This type of assistance would require the least amount of staff time and would typically involve making maps or graphics from data that has already been gathered and is available in the studio. An example would be a District Council requesting a GIS map for a particular area showing zoning and/or traffic counts, and the like. The staff of U-Plan could accommodate requests for these smaller projects without needing the approval of the Management Team. The Steering Committee is in the process of creating a booklet with a “menu” of work products that will soon be available from U-Plan.

Consulting U-Plan would provide a full package of services involving a significant commitment of technical staff time. For example, this could be a visioning exercise for an area as part of an extended community process. A number of GIS base maps could be developed incorporating a variety of data. A design charrette could be organized and presentation materials could be prepared, etc., such as what was done for the SE corner of Lexington Parkway and University Avenue (the Frank’s site) for the Summit University District Council. Projects of this scale would need to be approved by the Management Team and would require the completion of a formal application by the requesting organization. For projects that are selected, the applying organization and U-Plan would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding that would: identify the project goals and work program; spell out the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties; define decision makers; and include schedules, budgets, and expected outcomes.

AIA 150 Architects from the local chapters of the American Institute of Architects have offered to work with local property owners on a “Block by Block” program. This would require considerable staff commitment of U-Plan in preparing base maps, and the like, but would be complimented by the many volunteer architects who will be participating in this effort. University UNITED, working closely with the District Councils and Neighborhood Associations along the Avenue, will take on the responsibility of coordinating the logistics of identifying blocks and property owners that would participate in this effort.

The volunteer architects, starting March 2007, would undertake approximately 10 to 20 “Block by Block” projects. The Steering Committee recognizes the challenge of identifying the potentially divergent interests of property owners (landlords) and the business tenants. There is strong consensus on the need for protecting the interests of the business owners, which may require an additional set of support services including the assistance of groups like the Neighborhood Development Center, or the City. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of local merchants’ groups and the possibility of creating Business Improvement Districts. Because planning and design for upwards of 10 to 20 blocks will be done under this program, it is also possible that opportunities for redevelopment could be identified along the corridor that could be shared with existing businesses.

Project Review It is envisioned that there will be a need for U-Plan to occasionally review development proposals. However, this would only be done at the request of, and for the benefit of, the impacted District Council(s) or Neighborhood Association(s). The Steering Committee felt it important to continue to emphasize the preeminent role of the District Council and Neighborhood Association in land use matters.

Unlike the pro-active approaches described in the Consultant section above, with Project Reviews the work of the U-Plan staff would be reactive - offering technical advice and/or design suggestions. Requests for Project Review services would need to be approved by the Management Team and would require the completion of a formal application by the requesting organization. As with Consultant Projects, a Memorandum of Understanding between the applying organization and U-Plan would also be necessary.

U-Plan will not take a formal position on proposed development projects, or an advocacy role in any issues. It will merely be providing technical advice to its member stakeholders, who are in turn able to use such information for advocacy purposes.

The Steering Committee recognized the varying capacity of District Councils and Neighborhood Associations to engage in land use issues, both in the context of reviewing development proposals, and in the context of participating in the services of U-Plan. It will encourage the Management Team to be sensitive to this concern, and expressed the hope that the District Councils and Neighborhood Associations will develop a collaborative and supportive network that could provide assistance to each other as needed. In addition, it was agreed that U-Plan could play an educational role by documenting and sharing the experiences of District Councils and Neighborhood Associations over time in land use matters, and would be able to provide “institutional memory” about “best practices”.

Project Criteria The Steering Committee identified a number of criteria that should be used in selecting projects:

Does the project have broad application or value as a demonstration project?

Does the project have special importance to the organization applying for assistance?
Is the project more of a planning project, or design project, and are appropriate U-Plan staff available?
Would a project require additional research and/or data gathering, and who would do it?
Is a project being nominated by a single organization or a group of organizations that intend on collaborating?
Is it likely that the work of U-Plan will lead to implementation or action?
How much work by U-Plan is required for a project?

Locational Criteria

Projects on University Avenue would have top priority.
Geographic diversity is important – selected projects should be spread all along the corridor.
Projects off the Avenue could be considered, but as a lower priority and depending upon staff availability.

Timing Criteria

Priority would be given to projects that are addressing imminent development proposals or initiatives. However, the Steering Committee cautioned against expending the resources of U-Plan on these reactive “crisis” efforts to the detriment of long range planning and visioning.

Central Corridor Vision The Steering Committee anticipates that the vision and plan for University Avenue that is being developed by the Central Corridor Task Force will be the framework used by U-Plan and applied to all of its work.

November 14, 2006

U-Plan
Community Planning Studio
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Application For Assistance from U-Plan Community Planning Studio

Eligible boundaries for this application are the University Avenue corridor from the state capital to the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota.

Date:

Name of Applicant:

Contact Information:

Is this a collaborative project?

Type of Assistance Requested (Circle one):

Tools/ Technical Assistance Consulting AIA 150 Project Review

Please describe the assistance being requested and expected outcomes for the project:

Is this request in response to a proposed development project or initiative with a time constraint?

Does the applicant(s) have independently generated data that it can provide for U-Plan?

Please note that if your application is approved by U-Plan a written agreement may be required that would identify the project goals and work program; spell out the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties; define decision makers; and include schedules, budgets, and expected outcomes.