

Union Park District Council

Board Meeting / February 1, 2023

Board President Sarah Dvorak / Minutes: Submitted by Amy Gage

Members present: Scott Berger, Rachel Callanan, Bruce Corrie, Sarah Dvorak, Ellen Fee, Kirsten Fryer, Amy Gage, Joe Hughes, April King, Henry Parker, Allen Saunders, Demetrius Shaw, Kent Treichel, Claire Warren

Members absent: Dan Elenbaas

- Open seats: Grids 1, 2, 6, 9, Macalester College and University of St. Thomas

Staff members: Leah Timberlake-Sullivan, executive director

Guests: Keith Baker, Reconnect Rondo; Kingsley Hollon-Coleman; Noelle Jacquet-Morrison, WSNAC co-chair; Jim Marti and Mary Morse Marti, neighbors; Jane McClure, *My Villager*; Jean Schroepfer

Welcome: Sarah Dvorak, president, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

- *Action:* Warren/King moved to approve the February 2023 agenda. Warren/Callanan moved to approve the January 2023 minutes.

UPDC business: Sarah asked committees to talk about work plans, which the City of St. Paul requires. We also need a board secretary.

Guest speaker: Keith Baker from Reconnect Rondo: <https://reconnectrondo.com/>

The “negro population” in St. Paul in 1930 was concentrated in Rondo. Cultural context drives where people choose to live, though red-lining and some “soft pockets” of covenants also affected that. Once the scattering of the Black community occurred, they had fewer options than others.

- 1983: First Rondo Days held. Keith calls that the “pivot of a healing process.” It started as a reunion, where folks came from around the country who used to live there.
- 2009: The idea of a freeway cap emerged. When the light rail corridor came through, there were no stops planned in Rondo. The environmental impact study didn’t take into account the historical impact of the African American community.
- 2011: Lawsuit filed demanding that the Central Light Rail Project redo its environmental impact assessment and look at mitigations that would help businesses along the corridor.
- 2015: Commissioner Charlie Zelle and Mayor Chris Coleman both formally apologized. A commemorative plaza notes the damage done by freeways.
- 2017: ReConnect Rondo forms. Keith Baker no longer was working at the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).
- 2019: Keith became leader of the organization in 2019. MnDOT was talking about infrastructure, but not the social, economic and environmental aspects.

- 2021: Invited to speak at the Legislature during COVID. Secured \$6.2 million for pre-development work; now they're in the master planning process.

Rondo Roundtable: Launched an African American Context Study, studying 1837 to 1976.

Two routes were possible for I-94, but Rondo, which the city designated as a slum, was chosen.

- 700 homes, 300 businesses; loss of intergenerational wealth (\$35 million); a wealth gap due to loss of home equity
- Annual earning gap of \$370 million between greater metro area and Rondo itself.

Rondo scorecard: self-actualization, esteem, love and belonging, safety, physiological needs.

- Air quality, food security, access to exercise and healthy food, heat island effect, proximity to pollution, leisure time security and generational ripple effect are among the particular items mentioned.
- <https://reconnectrondo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rondo-Past-Prosperity-Study.pdf>

“Our mission is to revitalize the Rondo community,” he said. The land bridge is about community building: social, economic, cultural, spiritual and environmental fabric of a community that was scattered. Remnants still exist.

- \$13 to \$15 million for pre-planning costs
- \$392 million: bridge and infrastructure design, engineering and construction; federal monies can cover 80%. Only \$80 million needed from the state.
- \$167 million: buildings, utilities, parks and open spaces

Feasibility study goals: neighborhood connections, housing affordability, equitable development, public health and green space (13.8 acres), community leadership. For that to happen, up to 21 acres are needed.

- Public, private, philanthropic and people: 4P financing model. By holding the air rights over the structure, then any ROI goes back into the community. For example, if you own the building, someone who wants to put cellular towers on the exterior would have to lease that from you. In this case, the freeway belongs to MnDOT, but the community would get the benefits.
- North Minneapolis, Rondo: In his 40 years in the Twin Cities, Keith said he has not seen “tangible investment” in these communities.

1,800 new jobs, 576 housing units, 108,000 square feet of retail or business incubation space, about \$4 million in revenue to the city annually.

Question: Bruce Corrie said he's excited that the community can own the project. The community is the master planner and developer, Keith said.

- \$348 million, US Bank stadium, public money
- \$350 million, Target Field; an element of it sits on top of the freeway.

Rondo Roundtable: A letter went to Our Streets from this group.

- Union Park, Seward, Lex-Ham are among the organizations along the corridor that have participated in the Rethinking I-94 process in some way.
- Mobility. Environmental. Infrastructure. Livability.
- All of these ideas emerged before April 2022, when the Twin Cities Boulevard idea emerged.

Next steps: 2.5 FTEs are part of Reconnect Rondo; also have strategic consultants. Keith has had 2,000 conversations himself since last summer (2022). Anti-displacement and community investment strategy.

- City comp plan, city's climate goals, state's climate goals, Met Council's Thrive 2040: But rarely do we look at the intersection of those policies. That's a Restorative Development approach.
- Small-area plans must be considered in Reconnect Rondo's master plan process.

Concerns: Housing and living units, economic development, recreation and amenities are among the top priorities for participants in events from summer 2022 and the Selby Jazz Fest.

Questions:

- Henry Parker: How do you ensure that the benefits of the land bridge accrue primarily to the descendants of people displaced? The board is made up of descendants. The Rondo Community Land Trust is one member of the Rondo Roundtable, and "right to return" is a value.
- Leah Timberlake-Sullivan asked what an equivalent stretch would look like on, say, Grand Avenue or another part of the city.
- Mary Morse Marti asked how Reconnect Rondo and Twin Cities Boulevard can collaborate on their projects? Keith said it's important to evaluate who has been wronged, when Our Streets put out a proposal without dialogue but instead to say: *This is good for you.* "What has to be addressed is the dismissal and lack of acknowledgement," he said. How do you build that "bad faith" back into good faith? He spent 90 minutes speaking with two leaders of Our Streets and suggested that Union Park do the same. Recognize "that African Americans can lead, we know transportation, we know what's good for our community," and then the collaboration cannot happen, he said. "We're wide open to anyone who wants to work with us in good faith."
- https://www.ourstreetsmpls.org/rethinking_i94
- Scott Berger: Maxfield Elementary is on the freeway: 87% free or reduced-price lunch. Keith said they look at mitigation for emissions and greenery of land bridge will help.

Committee reports

Land Use and Economic Development: Bruce Corrie, co-chair, said the group went through their work plan. The University of St. Thomas will be at the February 27 CLUED meeting to discuss the proposed hockey and basketball arena on south campus.

Neighborhood Sustainability and Vitality: Ellen Fee, co-chair, said the committee will have Andy Rodriguez, director of Parks & Recreation, to talk about cell tower funds on February 21.

Transportation: Scott Berger, co-chair, said the group met in person at Starbucks on January 16. The main topic was I-94. And he mentioned that the 90% version of the Summit

West Summit Neighborhood Advisory Council: Henry Parker said a meeting was held January 31 about the south campus arena. Another meeting will be held at Merriam Park Library at 6 p.m., sponsored by the neighbors. The next WSNAC meeting will be on February 14.

Staff report: Sarah asked board members to respond to the retreat survey, so a date can be selected. Leah said the calendar has been updated on the website, and agendas and minutes from committees are more accessible. She's been voted onto the board of Neighbors United Funding Collaborative: <https://midwayunited.org/>. One more board initiation meeting will be held.

Parker/Callanan moved to adjourn at 8:45 p.m.