



Minneapolis 2040 Plan Comments

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Minneapolis City Council
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The Center for Economic Inclusion appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft Minneapolis 2040 plan as the City finalizes this important document that will guide the investments in infrastructure, development, and planning that position Minneapolis as a world-class city over the next 20 years.

The Center for Economic Inclusion (the Center) is the nation's first organization dedicated exclusively to advancing inclusive growth to achieve regional prosperity. By elevating data-driven promising practices, advocating for inclusive policies, coordinating cross-sector, community-driven development, and piloting strategies that truly close racial and economic gaps, we partner across communities and sectors to shape a Minneapolis-Saint Paul regional economy that works for everyone. We can unlock our region's potential by connecting people, jobs, and opportunity through housing and transit, entrepreneurship and investment, and fair wages and talent development. To do so, the Center connects communities excluded by Race, Place, and Income with cross-sector leaders to cooperatively design an inclusive and exciting new blueprint for growth that leverages both market forces and our region's diversity.

The Center is advocating to municipalities across the region who are submitting comprehensive plans to the Metropolitan Council that their plan includes goals that will enable the development of an inclusive economy. The Center urges cities write strategies for identifying and closing gaps between white and non-white residents in access to affordable housing, transit, living wage jobs, and economic development. In addition to being explicit about goals to reverse racial inequalities, the Center expects cities to embed the practice of using a racial equity tool in making policy and budget decisions. Further, the Center believes strongly in the power of municipalities engaging in a process of robust data collection (disaggregated by race), intentional data analysis and learning, adaptation of programs and policies based on that learning, and transparent communication of the process and learning with the community. Finally, the Center stands ready to partner with policy makers to do the work of developing racial equity tools and collecting data by race to research outcomes on communities of color.

It is with this lens that the Center reviewed Minneapolis 2040 and now offers comments on the draft comprehensive plan. While the Center is a regional organization and is urging all of the cities in the metropolitan area to identify racial equity as a goal, embed a racial equity tool into all policy and budget decisions, and collect and disaggregate data by race, we are submitting specific comments on the plans of the five largest cities in the metro area. The long-term goal is that all comprehensive plans are explicit in ways that build an inclusive economy. During this regional planning process, we urge all the leaders of the metropolitan area to strive for that goal. Our short-term goal is to shape the plans being developed in the five largest population centers in the region in order to have the most impact at this critical time.

Minneapolis 2040

The Center strongly supports the City Council adopted goals for the plan because of their very clear focus on racial equity and economic inclusion. For a city like Minneapolis, with high levels of inequality across a number of key measures, addressing racial equity and economic inclusion in the comprehensive plan is essential. The Center recognizes that the emphasis on racial equity in Minneapolis' comprehensive plan goes beyond what previous plans have done and is supportive of its directness in addressing these issues.

While the plan's racial equity goals are aspirational and clear, the plan's policies are uneven in their application of two important elements in the drive toward racial equity: evaluation and data. The Center believes in evaluating programs, practices, and policies for their impact on racial equity and supports the development of a racial equity tool for use in designing and evaluating all City efforts. It is also imperative that data inform and drive our decision making, and that data must be disaggregated by race in order to dismantle racial inequities and achieve a prosperous economy, and an inclusive city.

A few of the policies in the plan address pieces of a racial equity evaluation tool. For example, the policy on expanding homeownership (policy 42) calls for an evaluation of programs by how well they serve communities of color. While this is an important idea, it is too buried and included in too few policies. A more powerful position would be for the City to develop and adopt a racial equity tool to inform and evaluate all of its policies and programs and to codify that adoption within this plan. The implementation of such a tool should be a central part of this plan and be applied broadly across all policies to fully assess if they are improving or worsening racial inequities.

The plan also includes a policy on data-driven decisions impacting housing issues (policy 48). This policy aligns closely with the Center's mission to focus on data-driven practices, but in the Center's view is too narrowly focused on housing. The policy of using data-driven decisions should be applied to the full plan, directing decisions on every issue in front of the City. To accomplish this, we assert that data on all programs and policies should be consistently collected, disaggregated by race, and shared publicly on the open data portal. This will help the City – and the entire community – improve outcomes by reviewing and building off of the same data, explicitly addressing race, and innovating together to establish and monitor goals that improve the City for all of its residents.

The Center believes that consistently implementing a racial equity tool and collecting data disaggregated by race would greatly improve the plan and its effectiveness in addressing its stated goal of reducing racial inequity. We urge the city to include these components in the final draft of the plan.

The Center's comments on the rest of the plan are below and are organized around our three, interdependent focus areas: Human Capital, Economic Development and Transit & Access.

Human Capital

The Center appreciates the plan's focus on workforce development programs, employment programs, and partnerships that are culturally specific and reduce race-based employment disparities. While these statements are important in guiding the City's workforce efforts over the coming decades, they beg for more specifics and urgency. The Center urges the City to include as many specifics here as possible (which partners?, what programs?, which sectors beyond advanced manufacturing?) and incorporate what the City's workforce development program knows is working. This policy area is one of great importance given both the workforce shortage and the employment gaps in communities of color. The Center calls on the City to immediately focus on and commit resources to identify what works and invest significant resources in implementation.

For example, in developing North@Work, a workforce program specifically for African American Men, the Center is learning what it takes to increase employment in targeted populations. The City of New Orleans applied an approach very similar to North@Work to address identical employment inequities, however their Mayor led the effort to get employers to hire African American men. Also, the City allocated resources to redesign their own workforce system and invested in data-driven racial equity tools and strategies including a local hiring ordinance. With bold leadership of a Mayor and the commitment of City resources to appropriately staff and measure efforts focused on specific populations, New Orleans saw drastic reductions in unemployment in African American men in less than 2 years. This demonstrates the power that a city can bring to bear when it fully gets behind an initiative and the Center encourages the next draft of the plan to include this level of commitment for culturally specific employment programs in multiple workforce sectors with a lens toward sustainability that a comprehensive plan can offer.

Economic Development

The Center supports the plan's strong emphasis on economic growth by supporting businesses. The focus on removing barriers and developing assistance programs that promote business growth (policy 54), with specific policies focused on entrepreneurship (policy 55) and small businesses (policy 56) are welcome. We are especially supportive of the call to develop programs in each of these policy areas that are tailored to the needs and barriers experienced by business owners of color and indigenous business owners.

While this focus is laudable, the Center would like to see the policies drive further into what barriers the City has identified for business growth for these business owners and how the City will remove them, as well as how the City will connect entrepreneurs of color and indigenous entrepreneurs to resources. These are not new challenges, identifying what we know about the barriers and the vehicles for supporting these businesses will more clearly guide the City's work on these issues. Policy 56 gets more specific on creating opportunities for business owners of color and expanding participation in city contracting programs, but it could go further still by stating how this work will take place and setting goals for participation in city contracting.

The plan's emphasis on investing in commercial districts and corridors (policy 58) is an important statement that will help support small businesses across the City (especially the focus on affordable commercial space). The Center urges the City to augment future drafts of comprehensive plan with specific goals and criteria for selecting the commercial districts and corridors most in need and generously allocating resources (staffing, public realm investments, and business loans and grants) to carry out the work.

Transit & Access

The Center is supportive of increased density, especially in communities of opportunity and in transit corridors. Increased density does not solve, but provides the basic conditions necessary to achieve, two important goals of the Center – improved access to transit and housing.

The Center supports the plan's acknowledgement of the racial discrimination that was behind many historic zoning decisions and that the plan sets out to begin to address this discrimination by allowing greater housing density in more parts of the City (policy 1). Allowing increased density along transit corridors and allowing increased density in high opportunity neighborhoods are conditions that can improve access to opportunity for more people. However, this increase in housing density is not a complete solution to solving the City's affordability issue or racial inequities. Greater housing density is an important ingredient but will not solve access to opportunity on its own. Careful attention must also be paid to ensuring that housing affordability is part of the mix.

The Center believes that access to a robust and equitable transit and transportation system is an important ingredient to addressing the City's racial inequities. It supports the plan's policy on transportation and equity

(policy 15) and the statement that the City should ensure that the quality and function of the transportation system contributes to equitable outcomes for all people. Prioritizing equity considerations is the right way for the City to plan its transportation investments. Immediately following the adoption of the plan, the Center urges the City to develop the measurements it will use to track how the transportation system is contributing to equitable outcomes.

The Center is particularly supportive of high density development near METRO transit stations that include affordable housing and employment centers (policy 80) and create affordable housing near transit corridors and job centers (policy 38). The availability of affordable housing near transit and jobs is a powerful way to increase access to opportunity and reduce living expenses for vulnerable families. However, policy 38 could be stronger on this point. Policy 38 (b) should direct the City to identify opportunities for large scale development, *including affordable housing*, near transit stations. And policy 38 (a) should set a goal for affordable housing near transit.

Minneapolis 2040 includes many solid policies focused on affordable housing. These policies (policies 33-37) set out the right direction and recognize the importance of affordable housing for the City. The focus on the lowest income residents, innovative housing types and strategies, and naturally occurring affordable housing are all good directions for the City. In general, these policies should be more specific, however; including what the City can do now with existing tools, establishing goals for affordable housing production and preservation, and including timeframes. The mention of inclusionary zoning as a tool to expand (policy 37) is an example of the kind of specificity the policies around affordable housing should move toward.

The Center values the connections between transit and transportation networks and affordable housing for the access they provide to opportunities. To successfully achieve these opportunities, investments must be made in a coordinated fashion, considering housing, transportation, and jobs and lifting every neighborhood of the City. The plan's Coordinated Development Strategy (policy 23) is an important step toward coordinating City investments and processes towards achieving communities of opportunity for all residents. This practice should be implemented widely and combined with the policies laid out in Comprehensive Investments (policy 44). This policy, however, should be expanded to include investments in economic development, as well.

Conclusion

The Center is supportive of the City of Minneapolis' efforts to directly address racial inequities in its Minneapolis 2040 plan. There is much to appreciate in the draft plan. However, the Center believes the city would be well served by identifying in the plan a few of the polices for early and decisive focus, funding, and implementation. Our priorities for the future plan would be to focus on small businesses growth (policies 54 - 56), workforce development programs (policies 49 and 52); equitable transportation investments (policy 15), and affordable housing, especially near transit and jobs (policies 33, 34, and 38). With a greater focus on detail, a broader application of data-driven decision making, and the development, adoption and evaluation of use of a racial equity tool; this plan will help move Minneapolis in a more equitable direction.