

# Mississippi River Corridor Critical Access (MRCCA) Ordinance

## Background

- MRCCA is a state, regional, and local government program that provides coordinate land planning and regulation for the 72-mile stretch of the Mississippi River through the seven-county metropolitan area.
- Local governments administer MRCCA plans and zoning regulations.
- Saint Paul has been trying to pass this ordinance since 2023. The first time they tried, proposed language would have added requirements that would have made it nearly impossible to build at RiversEdge.
- Due to substantial comments received in 2023, Saint Paul Planning staff released a new version in March 2025.
- In May 2025 there was a public hearing at the Planning Commission (PC) for the new version of the rules that were favorable to RiversEdge. There was significant public testimony against the proposed ordinance.
- Following the public hearing, staff made edits responsive to public testimony and presented findings at the Comprehensive & Neighborhood Planning Committee (CNPC) and PC. One of those edits is to Structure Height Limits.
- The edit includes a formula for calculating base heights in the Urban Core (downtown) that limits heights which would otherwise be determined by underlying zoning. This edit would cap heights at RiversEdge to 85' from the bluff toe (Shepard Road level) or 1-story at Kellogg.
- On October 1 the CNPC reviewed edited language and recommended to advance the ordinance that includes the language with the base height calculation to City Council for consideration.

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Action Date</b>
Staff presents edits at CNPC	Wednesday 10/1
CNPC recommendation and vote at PC	Friday 10/17
30-Day Notice published in Legal Ledger	Monday 10/20
First reading at City Council	Wednesday 11/12
Second Reading & Public Hearing at City Council	Wednesday, 11/19
Final reading and Council vote and adoption	Wednesday, 12/3*

\*Anticipated

## Implications for Downtown

- The proposed ordinance includes language that creates height restrictions in downtown for properties located along the river between the Lafayette Bridge and Eagle Parkway. (see attached MRCCA Overlay Zoning District Map)
- There may be implications for District Energy, the redevelopment of RiverCentre ramp, Ramsey County East building, the Science Museum, the vision for the Arena Complex entertainment district, and other future projects as the push for the revitalization of downtown continues.
- The Downtown Investment Strategy was developed to align stakeholders and limited resources to achieve a shared vision of a more vibrant, active, inclusive, sustainable, and economically resilient downtown via a set of implementable next steps including prioritizing redevelopment of RiversEdge and the RiverCentre ramp. Proposed ordinance language works against achieving that vision.
- Due to the curvilinear nature of the river at the site, these height calculations create different height limits within the RiversEdge redevelopment project site making it difficult to administer and create significant design challenge for future developers (see attached Ramsey West Site analysis by PED).
- Saint Paul Planning Staff provided the following recommendation: Staff does not recommend amendments to lower base heights as proposed by public hearing testimony, because the suggested height amendments from public testimony are:
  - inconsistent with the guidance the from the DNR's model ordinance, which suggest creating sub-districts if cities wish to apply less subjective tiering requirements;
  - inconsistent with the approach to heights that every other city that is required to adopt MRCCA provisions has taken, undermining the goal of promoting coordinated land use planning and zoning along the 72-mile river corridor;
  - difficult to administer due to the irregular and curvilinear nature of the rivers and bluffs, potentially difficult to survey district boundaries, and at times unreliable data to assist staff in discerning what is a natural vs. man-made bluffs;
  - overly restrictive in the UC district and would not permit reasonable downtown development projects as envisioned without height; and the setback formula in the RTC and UM districts would not result in less subjective tiering requirements for most new developments.