



## Ballpark, transit hub fuel neighborhood ambitions

by [Dan Olson](#), Minnesota Public Radio

November 18, 2009

St. Paul, Minn. — Property owners in the North Loop neighborhood in Minneapolis hope the Target Field ballpark and adjacent transit hub are just the beginning of a positive transformation of the area.

Passengers stepping off the new Northstar commuter train at the downtown stop are treated to an unsurpassed view in one direction of the new ball park and downtown's soaring glass and steel skyline.

Turn around and the view is, well, different, says Minneapolis developer and architect Kit Richardson.

"Single story, vacant lots, industrial, parking lots and then just around to the left is HERC, the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center," says Richardson, whose company owns property in the area.

The neighborhood's unusual mix of uses also includes several large charities operating homeless shelters and dining services.

Richardson's vision for the North Loop includes more condos and apartments for folks who want to live in the area and more bistros to slake the thirst and fill the tummies of Twins fans.

Richardson, a partner in Schaeffer Richardson development, says the next chapter of North Loop development will be fueled in part by upzoning - city jargon that refers to allowing developers to build higher.

"The property used to be zoned for industrial uses, which, while they could be very intense, don't allow intense density of residential or commercial space, so upzoning allows for more density in this immediate area," says Council member Lisa Goodman, whose ward includes the neighborhood.

On Goodman's wish list for neighborhood development is a transportation station, something more than the two open air platforms that now serve Hiawatha and Northstar passengers.

Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin says one vision is for a building where the rail customers change trains and also where people can gather for food and shopping.

"You have over 2200 bus and train arrivals and departures right there at that hub that we're calling the Minneapolis transportation interchange," he says.

Hennepin County is seeking more than a hundred million in federal transportation dollars to build a station in the area.

Because of their growing numbers baby boomers and empty nesters have to be factored into any discussion of residential development.

Area resident and real estate businesswoman Karen Lee Rosar says she sold her suburban property to move downtown. Rosar predicts the cost of owning a car will influence more to make the same decision.

"As an empty nester how would I be able to connect with culture, arts, medical facilities, professionals, everything the whole shebang without a car and being in a dense community where I can be around people and not be isolated," she says.

Rosar, developer Kit Richardson and council member Lisa Goodman are clear about the current reality facing the North Loop neighborhood.

Not much will happen, Goodman says, until banks overcome their reluctance to lend.

"It's almost near impossible to get construction financing, more or less permanent financing in this environment," Goodman says. "So even the best and the largest of the developers are having a hard time securing financing to move forward."

There are other concerns.

One is how government historic preservation rules might limit development.

There are also lots of polluted sites left over from the area's gritty industrial past. There's concern how fast cleanup will occur.

Still, North Loop boosters are betting baseball, transit and boomers will help fuel the area's future.

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