

Ford site project moves ahead in St. Paul

Plant's closing was a blow for St. Paul, but new development will be an asset to the city and region.

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St. Paul moved one important step closer this week toward realizing the largest development opportunity in its history. City leaders announced that a [deal](http://www.startribune.com/major-announcement-planned-for-ford-site-in-st-paul/564801312/) (<http://www.startribune.com/major-announcement-planned-for-ford-site-in-st-paul/564801312/>) has been struck with Ryan Co. to begin work on the vacant Ford plant site in Highland Park — a mixed-use urban village project that has been in the making for more than a decade.

It's a groundbreaking project that appears to meet the highest 21st Century standards for city living — including significant amounts of mixed-income housing, business and jobs creation, walking and biking options, park and other open green space and energy efficient power. And it's a project that by 2040 will increase St. Paul's taxable value by \$1 billion, and send \$18 million a year in taxes to the city, schools and county tax base.

The agreement is between Ryan and the city. Mayor Melvin Carter said he expects the City Council will vote to approve the plan by the end of the year.

Using a combination of public and private money, more than \$92 million will be spent on infrastructure to create a street grid and utilities on 40 new city blocks. The city's \$53 million share, from tax-increment financing, is less than what Ryan previously requested. Still, the developer likely will ask for additional public funds to help build affordable housing on the site.

Carter told an editorial writer that the exciting [project](https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Planning%20%26%20Economic%20Development/Ford-Site-Ryan-Redevelopment-Proposal.pdf/) (<https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Planning%20%26%20Economic%20Development/Ford-Site-Ryan-Redevelopment-Proposal.pdf/>) fulfills numerous city goals for development, not the least of which is affordable housing. He said that of 3,800 new housing units, 20% (760 units) will be affordable and not concentrated in one building or area. Project for Pride in Living, CommonBond Communities and Habitat for Humanity will assist in developing the affordable housing component.

In addition to having 50 acres of green space, 10 acres of new parkland and 1,000 new trees, the site will use water-, wind- and sun-generated power with the state's largest urban solar array. Zero-emission buses or streetcars are envisioned to help the site leave the smallest possible carbon footprint, as is reusing Ford's old steam and wastewater plants and a network of underground utility tunnels.

The project will be an extension of an already-thriving neighborhood village, adding shopping and dining venues, along with 256,000 square feet of offices and other work sites on the development's east side. Tree-lined streets with a stream-like water feature at the center will be home to a mix of mid-rise buildings (no higher than six stories), townhouses and some single-family homes along the river.

Council Member Chris Tolbert, who represents the area, said the project will generate \$27 million in property taxes that will be reserved for building affordable housing throughout St. Paul, helping to fill one of the city's greatest needs.

When Ford announced that the plant would close, it was seen as a devastating loss of jobs and tax revenue. Yet on the site of that loss, an even more valuable development is taking shape for Highland Park, St. Paul and the Twin Cities.
