



Pilot Project Profile: Saint Paul, Minnesota

History and Background

University Avenue is the main commercial corridor linking the downtowns of St. Paul and Minneapolis. It has long served as the unofficial boundary between neighborhoods. Frogtown, to the north, has hosted a succession of immigrant communities, and is currently home to one of the largest Asian settlements in the region. Since 1976, there has been a large influx of Hmong, Vietnamese, Thai and Cambodian immigrants. Over half of the residents of Frogtown speak a foreign language as their first language. To the south, Rondo is the largest African-American community in the city. Like Frogtown, it is a racially diverse community with African-Americans comprising approximately 36% of the population and an increasing Hispanic and African population of Somalis and Ethiopians,

Virtually no new housing has been built in the corridor over the last seventy-five years, and recent national and regional development booms bypassed the corridor.

Catalytic Project/Shifting Sands Dynamic

An eleven-mile long light rail project developed by The Metropolitan Council, scheduled to begin construction in 2010, has been approved to run down the middle of University Avenue. The line will pass through the affluent neighborhoods adjoining the University of Minnesota to the west and to the vulnerable and diverse communities of Frogtown and Rondo to the east. These two neighborhoods are already beset with an array of issues including high unemployment, school dropouts, sub-standard housing, crime and currently, mortgage foreclosures.

Affordable housing is a critical issue in the community, which will be exacerbated with the coming of the light rail. In addition, there is a considerable need to expand employment. There is a well founded concern that the dramatic change anticipated by the construction of the light rail line and related development will cause disruption to existing businesses, displacement of the vulnerable population, and gentrification.