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TASK FORCE SEeks FEEDBACK FROM GRAND AVENUE VISITORS AND AREA RESIDENTS
Volunteer-driven effort gathers feedback to guide the creation of recommendations for City

Saint Paul's Grand Avenue Business District is changing, and a new volunteer-driven effort is conducting a study to examine experiences along the avenue. The public is invited to share their everyday experiences of visiting, shopping, and dining on Grand at rebrand.ly/grandexperiences to help shape recommendations for the city and to assist local associations in community improvement efforts.

The Future is Grand Task Force is a group of business owners and residents from the Summit Hill Association (SHA), Macalester Groveland Community Council (MGCC) and the Grand Avenue Business Association (GABA).

The Task Force was created in March and has been working to identify existing barriers and opportunities for Grand Avenue visitors, residents and businesses. The fourteen-member group will develop recommendations to deliver to the City of Saint Paul to improve access, create vitality and enhance the brand of this successful and historic community corridor.

The Task Force is co-chaired by Sherry Johnson, a resident of Summit Hill and owner of Cultivate Strategy, and Brian Wagner, a resident of Mac-Groveland and realtor at Coldwell Banker Burnet of Crocus Hill. The group of concerned residents and business owners has embraced principles of inclusive participation, asset-based thinking, and creative experimentation that aligns with local values. While the group began meeting to address vacant properties specifically, Task Force members realized they needed to broaden their approach.

Co-Chair Brian Wagner stated, “We know that Grand Avenue has played a vital role in providing experiences as a commercial and residential avenue, enriching the neighborhoods along its corridor. The Avenue is ever-changing and yet has been an historical gem for the City of Saint Paul. The changing landscape of commerce and growing need for increased density have created the need to re-examine our collective thoughts and feelings of the Grand Avenue we desire.”

In its outreach efforts so far, the Task Force has received feedback from over 60 businesses, landlords, and property owners along the avenue. It has also researched best practices and innovative approaches in other communities. The group is now collecting community experiences in order to align common values with commercial interests using an innovative approach to community feedback.

“Our work is taking place in two phases,” said Co-Chair Sherry Johnson. “We are currently in the research phase and are now launching a narrative assessment to capture people’s experiences, past and present. We want to understand what attracts people to the avenue. This way, we can
advocate for our business community while making sure we stay in line with our community’s values.” Johnson stressed the need to ask for experiences, rather than opinions, as a best practice for uncovering commonly held values.

During phase two, the Task Force will share commercial and community responses with the neighborhood and facilitate innovative placemaking through the SHA, MGCC, and GABA.

The Task Force is accepting experiences through August, and everyone interested in sharing their experiences can visit rebrand.ly/grandexperiences and share as many experiences as they would like. The assessment takes just 10 minutes, and responses remain anonymous.

Questions for the task force can be addressed to thefutureisgrand@grandave.com.