

Elliot Park Neighborhood
Urban Design Guidelines

The Centennial Commons



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P r e f a c e

Through interventions of good work and good fortune since the mid-1980s Elliot Park Neighborhood has been able to retain its identity as a unique downtown urban neighborhood. This might not have been the case had the trends of urban renewal been allowed to continue their destruction of the neighborhood fabric by clear-cutting of entire blocks to provide surface parking for automobiles or by selective elimination – after years of purposeful neglect - of older buildings that often had both historic merit and rehabilitative potential. By the time this book is being produced, however, in 2008, that trend has been halted and even reversed. New development has come to Elliot Park as part of the residential, commercial and cultural rebirth of Downtown Minneapolis.

Neighborhood residents, as well as particular institutions and organizations, have been responsible for the preservation of valuable assets that make Elliot Park a special community. Volunteers who founded and continue to contribute to the citizen participation neighborhood organization, Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc., have for nearly three decades sponsored initiatives to improve the quality of life in Elliot Park. An institution such as North Central University made conscious decisions to remain in the neighborhood rather than abandon its spaces and move to the suburbs. Aeon (formerly Central Community Housing Trust), a premier developer of affordable housing, remains headquartered in Elliot Park, and has been instrumental in rescuing several historically-designated buildings from blight, reclaiming them as quality rental properties.

The experience and efforts of those who live and work in Elliot Park Neighborhood inform this book on neighborhood design guidelines. It is the result of hundreds of hours citizen volunteers devoted to working on the *Elliot Park Neighborhood Master Plan*, reviewing and evaluating development proposals, and participating in workshops focusing on how best to express the neighborhood identity and culture in built form. These design guidelines are meant to honor both the history and the aspirations of our community. Whether read as principles or specifications, the topics addressed in these guidelines should be regarded as constituting a workbook to inspire creative response in design and development.

The advantages Elliot Park Neighborhood offers are visible both in the enduring legacies of its past as well as in the need for new infill development presented by the noticeable gaps in its structural density. Unique street patterns, intriguing spaces and distinctive landmarks offer the urban designer and the developer opportunities to help reweave the fabric of this burgeoning urban core neighborhood. This is most especially true in the sector identified as the “Centennial Commons,” an eight block area occupying the geographic center of Elliot Park Neighborhood. Because the Centennial Commons sector features so many of the defining elements and qualities of the neighborhood the immediate hope is that these guidelines will help direct specific development initiatives that will begin to reclaim and revitalize this “heart” of the Elliot Park Neighborhood. But beyond this particular sector, the design guidelines are meant to highlight the primary characteristics that define the essential sense of place and the best examples of built form throughout all of Elliot Park Neighborhood.

The principles and practices suggested in this book are an invitation to the urban planning, design, and development communities to collaborate with Elliot Park in applying them as guidelines to explore new, successful ways to create the places that make our neighborhood a sustainable and livable community.

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