

A TIMELINE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE UPPER HARBOR TERMINAL DEVELOPMENT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

UPPER HARBOR CONTEXT

The Upper Harbor, like the rest of Minneapolis, occupies indigenous Dakota homelands. European colonialism and land theft does not mark a singular point on this timeline; it is the context in which all of the events at the Upper Harbor must be placed. Settler colonialism is an ongoing process.

The Upper Harbor Terminal first opened as a commercial shipping facility, owned and operated by the City.

There were dozens of city-sponsored studies of the upper Mississippi stretch during this time, all of which grappled with questions around public access and ownership of the riverbank, connecting Minneapolis' existing trail and park system to the upper river, and improve environmental quality.

As per the recommendations of the ATF Master Plan, the city established the Above the Falls Community (formerly "Citizen") Advisory Committee (AFCAC). Since then, this committee has been one of the primary vehicles through which to solicit community input on Upper Harbor development plans.

1937

State legislation authorized the creation of an upper Mississippi harbor through a series of locks and dams on the river. The project began in **1948** and was completed in **1963**. Finally, the city acquired land for a terminal site in **1967**.

1968

The section of Interstate 94 that cuts through North Minneapolis was completed. The highway cuts off most of residential North Minneapolis from the historically industrial areas along the Mississippi River.

1970-2000

The City of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board together adopted a sweeping plan envisioning the future of the northern stretch of the Mississippi River. The plan, entitled [Above the Falls: A Master Plan for the Upper River in Minneapolis](#) called for reducing the industrial footprint around the river, developing new riverfront park space, and connecting North Minneapolis neighborhoods to river access. A fact sheet about the original plan and the outcomes it spurred called for redeveloping the UHT as a site geared towards mixed ecological, recreational, residential, and commercial use.

2000

2004

The City contracted architecture firm Hess, Roise and Company to produce a report about the UHT site and its historical significance. The report, [Upper Mississippi Harbor Development Architectural/Historical Survey](#), determined that the site was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as well as local Minneapolis landmark status. UHT has not been named a landmark under either of these designations.

2010

MPRB established the [Minneapolis Riverfront Development Initiative](#) (MRIDI) to guide scoping of the RiverFIRST proposal. Priority projects included the Northside Wetlands Park which “could anchor and create value for the Upper Harbor Terminal redevelopment.” This proposal was to turn 25 of UHT’s 48 acres into wetland restoration (see pages 32-37).

2012

Minneapolis approved the [Above the Falls Master Plan Update](#). The updated plan had an increased focus on market and feasibility analyses. It provides several land use, zoning, and economic development guidelines, suggesting that the Upper Harbor redevelopment should focus on “high intensity, job-generating uses, particularly office and light industrial.” The plan also included a Community Development and Housing section which addressed housing and affordability impacts of redevelopment.

The City of Minneapolis, together with environmental nonprofits Friends of the Mississippi River and American Rivers, published an [Upper Harbor Terminal Redevelopment Study](#). The study was advised by the Department of Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED), Minneapolis Public Works, and the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB). The recommendations from this report were intended to fall within the scope of the ATF Master Plan. Notably, the study anticipated that redevelopment could begin as early as 2006 or 2007. AFCAC was the main method for gathering public input in the development of this study (results from this public comment can be found in Appendix A).

2007

The MPRB and The Minneapolis Parks Foundation, in partnership with the University of Minnesota College of Design and Walker Art Center, launched the [Minneapolis Riverfront Design Competition](#). The international competition was focused on a 5.5 mile stretch of the Minneapolis waterfront from the Stone Arch Bridge to the river’s northern city limits. Out of 55 proposals submitted, TLS/KVA’s RiverFIRST design was chosen as a winner. The design team was a collaboration between Tom Leader Studio (Berkeley) and Kennedy & Violich Architecture (Boston), including several Minnesota-based partners. RiverFIRST was selected through a jury of parks professionals, design experts, and political officials.

2011

MPRB formally adopted the “RiverFirst” framework for the upper Mississippi. This vision helped guide the revision of the ATF Master Plan update.

2013

2013

Minneapolis City Council adopted an updated [Climate Action Plan](#) for the city. The [Environmental Justice Working Group](#) recommended that the city further adopt a Green Zones model to target environmental disparities in designated marginalized and historically underserved communities.

2014

The City released an [Upper Harbor Terminal Technical Analysis Study](#) with a goal to analyze how to allocate parcel redevelopment between green space and other uses. The study highlights several case studies from around the country of large developments on formerly industrial sites, mostly along riverfronts. In addition, the study evaluated several redevelopment design alternatives in consultation with developers. Developer recommendations included “create a destination (that may be park-related) at Dowling Avenue N. and the riverfront...that gets people to the river and interested in this site.” Another recommendation was “Consider a master developer that would take on marketing and developing the entire site.”

2014

The Upper Harbor was officially closed to commercial navigation.

2015

After convening for almost a year, a Green Zones Workgroup released a [report](#), detailing a series of guiding criteria for Green Zones implementation in the city. A key recommendation of this workgroup was “to develop strategies and activities that advance racial equity and prevent displacement and gentrification” in the Green Zone areas. This aligns with a [staff directive](#) released in 2016 from the city to include best practices for improving Green Zone sites without displacement of marginalized communities.

The Minneapolis Riverfront Partnership (formerly the Minneapolis Riverfront Corporation) published a report entitled [Riverfront Vitality Project](#). The goal of this report was to comprehensively examine the riverfront’s potential through the lenses of economic health, environmental health, cultural resources, riverfront access, and

2013

Under mandate from Federal Authorities, the Upper St. Anthony Falls lock was closed to prevent the spread of invasive carp down river. This ended the Upper Harbor Terminal’s viability as a commercial portage site.

2014

A group of senior undergraduate students at Carleton College completed a capstone project entitled [Historic Preservation on an Industrial Waterfront: Local Perspectives of Minneapolis’s Upper Harbor Terminal](#) examining the site’s historical significance to nearby North Minneapolis residents and visions for its redevelopment. Based on focus groups with residents of Marshall Terrace and McKinley neighborhoods, they found residential preference for public green space, housing, and commercial development rather than historic preservation. An outdoor amphitheater was also mentioned by a few participants.

2015

Most of North Minneapolis was federally designated as a Promise Zone (including the Upper Harbor). These zones are meant to incentivize economic activity through partnerships between Federal agencies and local organizations to leverage private investment and spur economic activity. [North Minneapolis Promise Zone goals](#) include building a more inclusive economy, improving health and safety, and promoting stable housing for residents.

2017

Following these working group recommendations, a [City Council resolution](#) created the Northern Green Zone in order “to address the environmental justice overburden in North and Northeast Minneapolis.” The Northern Green Zone includes the Upper Harbor Terminal site.

2017

The City again contracted an architectural and historical evaluation of the Upper Harbor, marking ten years since a previous survey had been conducted. The resulting report was produced by the 106 Group entitled [Intensive Architecture/History Evaluation for the Upper Harbor Terminal](#). The purpose of the report was to provide an update on site eligibility for landmark status. The 106 Group concluded that UHT is eligible for local landmark status, but not for national landmark status.

2018

As part of the City of Minneapolis’ comprehensive planning process (as mandated by the Metropolitan Council), the City released a draft of its [Mississippi Corridor Critical Area Plan](#) which includes the UHT site.

UPPER HARBOR PLANNING PROCESS

2014

United Properties (owned by the billionaire Pohlad Family) teamed up with Dayna Frank, owner of First Avenue (a large local music company), to explore a joint-development proposal for the UHT site. Soon after, United Properties and First Avenue reached out to Ravi Norman, CEO of Thor Cos. (formerly the third largest Black-owned business in the country), to join their team. According to Brandon Champeau, United Properties and First Avenue felt they needed a “credible community partner” in order to viably continue development plans.

2015-2017

2017

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency negotiated a settlement with Northern Metals, a metal scraper that has operated in North Minneapolis for decades and significantly contributed to air pollution and health concerns. Under the settlement agreements, Northern Metals agreed to pay \$2.5 million in penalties and relocate to a non-metro location by 2019.

2017

Former Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton designated 5 Opportunity Zones in North Minneapolis. Like Promise Zones, Opportunity Zones are federally designated areas designed to spur private sector investment and economic growth.

2019

United Properties Senior Vice President Brandon Champeau first approached the City to propose a major redevelopment project at the Upper Harbor site. Specifically, this included conversations with Ann Calvert, principal project coordinator with CPED, to discuss the possibility of large-scale industrial development

2015

The City and MPRB developed a series of [redemption goals](#) for the Upper Harbor to set the scope and vision for the site.

CPED and MPRB jointly released a 19-page [Request for Qualifications](#) (RFQ), soliciting proposals for a complete redevelopment of the Upper Harbor Terminal site with the redevelopment goals in mind. The RFQ was released in August with a deadline set for October (2 months later).

2016

In October the City announced it had only received one response to its RFQ and was closing applications for evaluation. In November, the City hosted a community meeting to gather [public input](#) on the United Properties/First Avenue/Thor Cos. proposal. There were an estimated 80 people in attendance. An additional 210 people provided feedback through an online survey.

2017

The City of Minneapolis proposed \$15 million in bonding to jumpstart environmental remediation, early design, and initial infrastructural improvements at the site which the City would match with an additional \$15 million.

2018

Facing mounting community concern about the redevelopment process, the city vote on the Concept Plan was delayed multiple times between late 2018 and early 2019. Councilmembers Cunningham and Ellison proposed [several amendments](#) aimed at “disrupting gentrification and displacement” and exploring “community ownership,” including: establish a [Collaborative Planning Committee](#) (CPC); consider that the UHT land to be held in public trust; research the possibility for a community benefits agreement; set more ambitious goals for affordable housing; a commitment to explore long term displacement mitigation strategies; and community input on the proposed concert venue “if it [remains] within a 7,000 to 10,000-person capacity.”

2016

United Properties, First Avenue, and Thor Cos. together responded with an [RFQ proposal](#). In a highlighted excerpt from this submission, the development team wrote “...our goal is to create a unique and beloved place; a place that invites the region, but respects the wishes of the neighborhood and contributes to its quality of life - economic, social, and cultural...”

2016

The Minneapolis City Council and MPRB selected the United Properties/THOR/First Avenue to be the Master Developer for the Upper Harbor site. In August 2017 the City, MPRB, and United Properties entered into an [Exclusive Rights Agreement](#) which guaranteed the United Properties redevelopment team control over at least the northern half of the UHT site. The agreement also set a timeline of approving a Concept Plan for September 2018, designating one year for community engagement and input. This public engagement was led by Thor with help from Northside arts nonprofit [Juxtaposition Arts](#).

2018

A group of Northside residents, community activists, and representatives from various environmental organizations came together in late 2018 as the Co-Creation Team. The Co-Creation Team rooted their opposition to the development in the UHT process, citing a lack of trans-

2018-2019

January

After several delays and amendments, the Minneapolis City Council approved the [Concept Plan](#) in February. Since approval, the City, MPRB, and the development team have turned their eyes towards the next phase: creating a more detailed “Coordinated Plan” with input from community engagement efforts.

April

Following council passage, in April Mayor Frey [approved the allocation](#) of \$100,000 from the Livable Communities Demonstration Account to the UHT project. This account is part of the Metropolitan Council’s Local Housing Incentives Program.

May

MPRB also approved its [community engagement plan](#) with respect to the Upper Harbor.

May

The City and a McKnight Foundation-funded team with the non-profit Pillsbury United Communities (PUC) launched into a [revamped community engagement process](#) as initially mandated through amendments incorporated into the Concept Plan. In addition to the CPC, this community engagement strategy involves a series of community Learning Tables and a Core Team with representatives from the City, PUC, and the development team. As designed, this strategy aims to funnel community lessons from the Learning Tables through the CPC for discussion and deliberation and onto the Core Team for analysis and synthesis.

June

The development team started showing signs of trouble when Thor Cos. was sued by Sunrise Banks for over \$3 million. During this period, CEO Ravi Norman left the company but continued his working relationship with United Properties and First Avenue [according to public statements](#) from the development team.

February

Thor Construction [officially folded](#) after months of troubled speculation. Parent company Thor Cos. pledged that it would continue development consultation in some capacity under the leadership of Ravi Norman.

April

The City Council appointed 17 people to the Upper Harbor Collaborative Planning Committee (CPC), representing different districts and interest groups. The CPC was given a strict deadline to provide recommendations to the city council by March 2020 to align the Coordinated Plan approval with anticipated bonding funds from the state.

May

At the end of the legislative session the Minnesota State Legislature and Governor Dayton approved a bonding bill [including \\$15 million for UHT Phase 1](#) infrastructure and park development. This funding was previously matched with another \$15 million from the City of Minneapolis and MPRB.

June

The CPC held its first meeting. Topics raised included a request for a third party analysis of financial limitations for the project rather than relying on developer projections. [Notes from the meeting](#) do not mention any follow up to this request. The second CPC meeting [reiterated this request](#).

August

In early June the city has put out a call for a meeting facilitator to organizer and steward the CPC meetings. By August the city selected St. Paul-based facilitation team LaCroix Dalluhn Consulting

In the August 14th CPC meeting Erik Hanson, CPED Director of Economic Policy and Development, presented a [proposed reworking of the Concept Plan](#) based on feedback about the distribution and placement of public and private uses on the site. This involved moving the location of several parcels, including moving the proposed concert venue further south and away from the main access point on Dowling Avenue.

August

September

Based on complaints of confusion, lack of clarity around scope, and moving too quickly, the engagement process was amended in September. Erik Hansen described these changes in a [memorandum](#) to the City.