



**MARCY
HOLMES**

HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD

MHNA
500 8th Avenue SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414

marcy-holmes.org
612.623.7633

March 17, 2017

Council Member Jacob Frey

Minneapolis City Hall
350 South 5th Street | Room 307
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1383

cc: Ken Slama, MnDOT
Don Pflaum, City of Minneapolis Public Works
Mary Altman, Public Arts Administrator
Gulgün Kayim, Director of Arts, Culture and Creative Economy
Senator Kari Dziedzic, SD 60
Representative Ilhan Omar, HD 60B

Re: 5th Street SE Pedestrian/Bike Bridge Replacement

Dear Council Member Frey,

I'm writing on behalf of the Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association to request your assistance in escalating in priority the 5th Street SE Pedestrian/Bike Bridge project, including having the City commit funds that will enable a successful and thoughtful design plan that will make the neighborhood, city and state proud. Our recent discussions with key players have led us to believe that important aspects of this project are being overlooked.

The replacement of the 5th Street SE Pedestrian/Bike Bridge is a significant project for our neighborhood and the city, and we have appreciated being involved in early discussions regarding its structure and location. We consider the bridge not only an important literal connection between the east and west sides of our neighborhood, but also a significant gateway to the university, this historic district and to/from the Mississippi.

For more than a year, we've provided feedback to MnDOT and the city regarding the project, including the attached letter from May 2016, which lists the priorities we hoped could guide discussions and decisions. These priorities came out of robust community engagement led internally in our Transportation and Creative Places committees and from surveys we've conducted of bridge users.

One of the priorities on which neighbors were nearly unanimous was that the bridge needs to be **visible with the 5th Street SE right of way** to retain the visible effect of the street grid, to ensure people unfamiliar with the neighborhood can easily see the bridge and to ensure that a structure can be seen from within the neighborhood. Also among the list of priorities are reconstructing the bridge so that it

- serves as **an icon of the neighborhood with a distinct aesthetic**
- is **visible at night**
- and **engages local artists** in any design or ornamentation.

On February 28, 2017, the Transportation & Public Works Committee approved a layout—with community input—that moves the bridge a half-block north of 5th Street SE, with entrance/exit ramps remaining on 5th. While we accept and understand the necessity for this design choice in order to avoid awkward switchbacks on the approach ramps, the plan only reinforces **the importance additional design elements will play** in maintaining the visual connection on 5th Street SE.

Bridging the divide between the two halves of our neighborhood is called out in our 2014 Master Plan; to do so requires both a physical and visual connection. Since design constraints placed on the project by the geometry of the roads prevent MnDOT's primary structure (the bridge itself) from serving as the visual connection, we need to use the design phase of the project to find ways to achieve that goal. Our creative community is eager to contribute ideas as to how to do this—as well as make the bridge an iconic, artful structure—**but we fear the importance of this critical aspect of the project is being overlooked.**

When a new MnDOT team assumed management of the project in 2017, they were not made aware of the neighborhood's prior input nor the attached list of priorities. Now, as we enter the design phase of the project, the City of Minneapolis will need to play a critical role advocating for a bridge that reflects the culture of the neighborhood and reflects its significance to the city (and state, for that matter, as the most trafficked pedestrian/bike bridge in Minnesota). Unfortunately, our interactions have so far indicated that this project is not a priority for the City of Minneapolis, with confusion regarding ownership and available resources, creating a risk that a key partner in the project will be silent in the process. For example, we were informed only recently that the project would not be eligible for the Art in Public Places program since it is a MnDOT project, despite the fact that MHNA has been asking staff at the City of Minneapolis about the possibility of leveraging funds from other sources for more than a year.

The creative challenge of maintaining the 5th Street SE visual connection—as well as the

opportunity to use design, ornamentation or narrative elements to create an iconic structure for the city and the neighborhood—should make this project a primary candidate for the city's priority. We ask that this project be escalated in priority and that the City commit funds from the designated CSAH/MnDOT Cooperative CIP project (PV074) in order to demonstrate the City's active role in ensuring that this critical infrastructure link will reflect the values of our

community-active, creative and connected neighborhood and city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jan Morse". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Jan Morse
President, MHNA Board



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May 18, 2016

Ron Rauchle, Area Engineer
Minnesota Department
395 John Ireland Blvd,
St. Paul, MN 55155-1899

Dear Mr Rauchle,

The Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association (MHNA) appreciates this opportunity to provide continued feedback to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) on the proposed reconstruction of the 5th Street SE Pedestrian Bridge over 35W (5th St. Bridge) within the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood of Minneapolis. As we understand the current timeline, MNDOT is in the process of selecting a design firm that will focus on the details of the project and continue the public outreach that MNDOT staff have already initiated.

This letter is in response to the discussion that was generated at the February 24, 2016 MHNA Transportation Committee meeting and supplemented by continued outreach in March and April at multiple MHNA meetings. This feedback is grounded in the neighborhood's recently updated Master Plan. We encourage any MNDOT staff and consultants working on the 5th St. Bridge to use the Master Plan in the same way, since we view it as an important anchor in conversations about how change can contribute to a high quality of life.

A key component of every discussion about this project has been identifying the neighborhood's priorities. We hope that this letter can serve as preliminary guidance to MNDOT on the most important ways that this bridge can contribute to neighborhood goals. At the February 2016, meeting, MNDOT showed the neighborhood two preliminary design alternatives, with each option having benefits and drawbacks. They also requested we provide a listing of the neighborhood's priorities that should guide design decisions. Therefore, rather than expressing a preference for one design or the other, we believe it would be most beneficial to outline how the community might prefer an option that would evolve from general principles, priorities and guidelines.

To determine these priorities, we convened meetings of the MHNA Transportation and Creative Places committees, conducted an online survey of nearly 150 users of the bridge, and presented the outcomes from this process to the general membership of the MHNA at its April 19 meeting for additional input. Based upon this community response, the neighborhood offers these key priorities:

First and foremost, there is nearly unanimous sentiment among neighbors that the bridge needs to be **visible within the 5th Street SE right of way**. Individual viewpoints supporting this goal include

retaining visible effect of the street grid, ensuring that people unfamiliar with the neighborhood can easily see the bridge, and ensuring that an iconic structure can be seen from within the neighborhood.

Another of the top three priorities is **eliminating conflicts for users** on the bridge and the ramps or stairs leading to it. The new alternative (“North” alternative) proposed at the February meeting achieves the goal of removing the switchbacks on the approach ramp, but at the cost of removing the significant visual presence on 5th St. Since location is of primary importance, we would like to continue conversations with MNDOT about possible designs that could address both priorities.

A third priority expressed by neighbors is that the reconstructed bridge be **visible at night**. Neighbors consider the bridge not only an important literal connection between the east and west sides of the neighborhood, but also a significant gateway to the university, the historic neighborhood, and to/from the Mississippi. Nighttime lighting is viewed as an opportunity to elevate the experience of passing over or under the bridge.

Following are the next most important priorities:

- **Eliminating conflicts at the street connection** - we are grateful that MNDOT has already started to work with the City of Minneapolis on this issue. The two half-block sections of 5th St SE on each side of the bridge are technically gaps in an otherwise complete bike boulevard that stretches from the University of Minnesota campus deep into NE Minneapolis.
- Enabling the bridge to serve as **an icon of the neighborhood with a distinct aesthetic**—either in design or ornamentation. We appreciate MNDOT engaging the neighborhood’s creative community early on in the design process, and working with the neighborhood and City of Minneapolis to explore options by which the visible impact of the bridge may identify it as uniquely located in this neighborhood and region of the city.
- Ensuring that **users can see and be seen** on the entire bridge structure - bridge users surveyed have described feeling trapped or confined on the bridge, and believe that the nature of a bridge (only two points of access) makes it a personal safety concern. The neighborhood encourages MNDOT to consider multiple entry points, even if some are not ADA accessible.
- **Engaging local artists** (city- or state-identified) in any design or ornamentation.

In closing, MHNA wants to express sincere gratitude to MNDOT for proactively engaging with neighbors on this project. While the project may be much smaller in scope than many others managed by MNDOT, this pedestrian/bike bridge is the most trafficked in the state and of significant importance to the community in which it resides. Its impact could be profound and we think that the approach demonstrated by MNDOT’s staff is a great example of great customer and community service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James Morse". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Jan Morse
President, MHNA

cc: John Griffith, MNDOT West Area Manager
Don Pflaum, City of Minneapolis Public Works
Senator Kari Dziedzic, SD 60
Representative Phyllis Kahn, HD 60B
Jacob Frey, Minneapolis City Council