

> **The 3M site**

Try to sell it. If that doesn't work, then raze for rebuilding

I have great admiration for the 3M Community Advisory Committee members who gave up hours and hours of family time over 11 months to consider ways to redevelop the 1.5 million square feet of building space that comprised what used to be the 3M Company's St. Paul Campus on the East Side. My admiration grows when I think of all the mind-numbing data they absorbed over the course of a year. This is participatory democracy at its best.

After all, as everyone on the committee agreed, this exercise was a golden opportunity to recapture some of the economic vigor of the early part of the 20th Century on St. Paul's East Side. Those were the days when mom, dad or both would pack their lunch pails and head off to work at one of the many manufacturing plants along East Seventh Street. There was 3M, of course, but there also were good paying manufacturing jobs at Whirlpool, Stroh's Brewery and the Globe Building Materials Plant.

But today, only empty buildings and parking lots evoke memories of these companies. And what of the hard-working East Siders who made careers there? Those careers are gone, along with the healthy paychecks they provided.

The St. Paul Port Authority, as it always has done, is working to replace these behemoths with miniature 3Ms, Strohs, Globes and Whirlpools – or companies that one day just might rise to the stature of those forebears. The Port fully participated in the advisory committee process and has hired a national real-estate firm, Colliers Turley, to market some of the 3M buildings for reuse.

If after two years, the real-estate agents' and the Port Authority's own efforts to find a company willing to invest the considerable amount of money needed to refit those buildings are unsuccessful, then the Port wants to raze the buildings so a prospective company can build to suit its needs.

So far, so good. But here comes the rub. This plan has caused some community members to cry foul. Why, they say, did the Port go through a community process if it intended to demolish the buildings on the site all along?



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First, the yearlong community engagement process featured extensive architectural reviews, market analysis, historic designation consideration, environmental contamination assessment and communi-

ty participation. Second, the compromise reached through this process – to hold and aggressively market some buildings and demolish others – was fair. Everyone wins if some of these buildings can be reused to increase St. Paul's job and tax base.

Most importantly however, the Port Authority, like any business entity, cannot simply buy property and sit on it indefinitely, paying tens of thousands of dollars annually in holding costs for vacant buildings. If the two-year marketing period does not result in reuse, then raze the buildings and market the clean sites. It makes no business or community sense – nor does it make sense to those of us involved in community building. Imagine living, working, driving or walking by outdated, dilapidated or unused shrines to a bygone era of magnificent growth and vitality. That warm feeling you might get turns stone cold if you are out of work and see acres of land in the heart of the city sitting fallow.

Gone are the days when we preferred shrines to jobs – if there ever was such a day. Shrines don't feed families, pay the rent or send the kids to college. They just sit there as reminders of the good old days. And, really folks, reminders don't taste good or bad, they don't taste at all.

I respectfully urge the support and acceptance of the compromise reached by the Port and members of advisory committee.

Dan Scott chairs of the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce board of directors.