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**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
ON CURRENT AND POTENTIAL AUDIENCES
FOR THE ST. ANTHONY FALLS HERITAGE ZONE**

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes qualitative information regarding the current and potential audiences for the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Zone. The Cincinnatus team conducted 16 in-depth individual interviews with two types of individuals: a) people who are knowledgeable about the current audiences; and b) people who can provide information regarding potential new audiences. (A list of interviewees is attached to this summary.)

It is important to point out that this research is qualitative only. The opinions expressed here are designed to stimulate our thinking about the riverfront area; they do not necessarily represent the opinions of other people. To provide accurate quantitative information about current visitors, an intercept survey is currently underway in the Heritage Zone. Sampling will continue into mid-June, with results available in July 2009. At this point, we can only speculate regarding who is and who is not actually visiting the area based on personal opinions of those who were interviewed. However, the interviews shed light on the question of who appears to be visiting today and support the assumption that some audiences are underrepresented in the area, particularly people of color.

CURRENT AUDIENCES

Who Visits the Area Today?

The general consensus among those who were interviewed is that the St. Anthony Falls area is visited by a wide range of people. Many mentioned local tourists, those individuals or groups who appear to be from the metro area and may be exploring on their own or with out-of-town friends and family. The next major group is made up of walkers, runners, and bicyclists. A few people mentioned seeing national and international tourists, often brought to the area by conferences or business meetings. "It's a great destination place for people who have guests from out of town," according to Brenda Langton, owner of Spoon River restaurant.

When asked who is visiting today, interviewees mentioned a broad range of humanity: the homeless and the wealthy, photographers, kayakers, historians, architects and urban planners, Guthrie patrons, and visitors to the Mill City Museum, dog walkers, lovers holding hands, naturalists, people attending events, young professionals and aging baby boomers.

According to Michael Rainville, Director of Community and Partnership Relations at Meet Minneapolis! more than 6 million people visit the metro area each year and more tourists are making use of the St. Anthony Falls area than in the past. Meet Minneapolis! works with local hotels to provide maps and send leisure tourists and convention goers to the riverfront. They often hold opening nights for conventions at the Nicollet Island Pavilion.

Importantly, the area is also home to a large and growing number of people, who have moved into the many condo and other housing developments in the area.

What Do They Do? Are There Patterns?

Attendance at St. Anthony Falls-area events and attractions is decidedly seasonal, with the peak occurring between June and September. Likewise, during the summer, more people visit Friday through Monday. There was also mention of the dedicated few who venture out despite the winter chill. The drawdown of the Mississippi River in early 2008 was cited as an example of events that attract a different group of people than those who typically show up during the summer.

What are people doing? Overwhelmingly, those who were interviewed described visitors out strolling around looking at things. From these observations, it's apparent that this is the predominant—and perhaps most satisfying—activity at St. Anthony Falls. Other frequently mentioned activities include walking, running, and bicycling for exercise. Several people also called attention to a growing number of bicycle commuters passing through the area. Activities are as diverse as fishing, eating in restaurants, walking the interpretive trails, watching the lock operate, visiting the farmer's market, riding a Segway, taking a boat ride or having a picnic on Boom Island.

Distinguishing Characteristics of the St. Anthony Falls Area

When asked to describe what sets this place apart from others, people gave a range of items, from specific features to general amenities such as restaurants and shops. The most common response was “the history,” referring to the change-over-time story of the place and the river itself. When compared to the lakes area or Uptown—which a couple of people did—this area offers more depth of interest and experience. Distinguishing features given most prominent mention include:

- Stone Arch Bridge
- St. Anthony Falls
- The river
- Scenery
- Restaurants
- Mills
- Trails and ruins

It is important to note that when people spoke of the history they quickly connected it to the beauty of the falls, or the scenic qualities of the urban landscape, the architecture. “History” in this context may be as much about sense of place as it is about the actual story of early Minneapolis.

“There’s no other place on the river that has this combination of elements all coming together in one place.” (Pat Pfundstein, Mill City Museum)

“You can walk around Lake Calhoun, but you don’t have the history, the services, nature, food, beverages, hotels.” (Ira Heilicher, restaurateur)

“The history and the raw beauty of the falls.” (Rainville, Meet Minneapolis!)

There was a strong sense that the St. Anthony Falls area offers a unique package of attributes that cannot be found anywhere else in the Twin Cities.

The St. Anthony Falls Neighborhood

When asked to describe the people who live in the area, real estate developer Kit Richardson said he is seeing middle-aged people who are committed to what living in the city has to offer. “People are outgoing and connected to the experience. They are looking for more than just a place to live.”

Other frequent descriptors included:

- Affluent
- Well educated
- Empty nesters (as opposed to families with children)
- Younger professionals
- Same sex couples

There is a sense that residents use the area in many of the same ways that visitors do.

Ideas for Building Awareness and Improving the Experience

Most who were interviewed said they believe the St. Anthony Falls area suffers from low public awareness. This awareness problem is manifest both within the district and outside.

Many who were interviewed lamented the lack of good signage, both to direct people to the district and within the district to build on-site awareness of the area’s features and amenities—from parks and trails to restaurants and museums. There were several references to the Larson Interactive plan developed several years ago.

Other ideas for attracting people and improving the experience include:

- More special events and festivals
- Provide more restrooms
- Foster a cohesive identity for the district (naming)
- Complete the trails
- Bring digital technology to interpretation and wayfinding
- Encourage private enterprise to develop more restaurants, etc.
- Access to refreshments
- Parking (convenient, low cost)
- Improved walking/biking paths

Several interviewees raised concerns about a lack of recognizable identity for the area, which is a challenge from a marketing standpoint. “One of the problems is that it’s disjointed, not the sense of place,” commented Ira Heilicher, owner of several riverfront restaurants. Some raised concerns about confusion over the name of the area. Names range from the Mill District to the Minneapolis Riverfront District to the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Zone.

On the other hand, Patrick Pfundstein, Visitor Services Manager at Mill City Museum, believes the river and waterfall provide a unique identity for the area. He is of the opinion that, “Get people here for whatever reason, then the district sells itself.”

Several interviewees said they believe safety is not a big concern or barrier. For example, some had observed a fairly large number of people walking across the Stone Arch Bridge late at night. Carol Oosterhuis, Crime Prevention Specialist with the Minneapolis Police Department, however, expressed concern about the safety of Father Hennepin Bluffs Park. “We have not had anything horrible happen but I am concerned about safety. This is the least safe area.”

Future Program Emphasis

Interviewees were asked to give their opinions about possible programs for the future. They were prompted with four examples:

- People who lived and worked here;
- The natural features, wildlife and ecosystems;
- American Indian culture related to the area;
- The industries and transportation of the area such as river traffic, railroads, and milling.

Many people were very reluctant to prioritize the list of possibilities; more than half said that all have potential for future programming. Seven out of the nine said that programs related to American Indian culture would garner strong interest. “American Indian programming would be big. This is a fascinating history and one that’s severely under told....This would be an attraction beyond the American Indian audience. The culture has a longer lasting impact than just the history. There are powerful stories to tell,” commented Patrick Pfundstein. Michael Rainville said Meet Minneapolis! has found that tourists are very interested in American Indian culture in the area.

Regarding other examples on the list, very few people mentioned stories of the people who lived and worked at St. Anthony Falls. Likewise, nature and wildlife drew little attention. Some would like to see more about the industries and transportation but others said the topics have been adequately covered.

POTENTIAL AUDIENCES

When people knowledgeable about current audiences were asked who they are *not* seeing in the St. Anthony Falls area, six out of ten mentioned people of color. “This is an opportunity audience for us,” said Pat Pfunstein. As a preliminary step toward understanding the expectations and potential barriers to successfully serve the Twin Cities’ increasingly diverse population, representatives of four different communities of color were interviewed: African-born immigrants, African Americans, Latinos, and Southeast Asians.

Findings About People of Color

Public Spaces Currently Serving Communities of Color

Each of the identified groups has certain spaces in the Twin Cities where they congregate, sometimes driving long distances to find a welcoming setting. For example, Hmong young people hold soccer tournaments at Lake Phalen and Como Park in St. Paul, where the City has developed outreach programs, and large clan gatherings are held in some of the suburban regional parks. Many Somali people congregate in Cedar Riverside Park, near their Cedar Riverside apartments, and there are large concentrations of Latinos near East Lake Street.

According to the interviewees, team sports, particularly soccer, are a huge draw for many ethnic groups. “If you built soccer fields over there, you would see people of all nationalities. There are not many soccer fields in Minneapolis, and people go to Fort Snelling to play,” according to Francisco Segovia, Center Director at Waite House. For these populations, the use of open space tends to be for group activities rather than for individual enjoyment, such as jogging or biking. Picnics play an increasing role as families who live in apartments and small spaces seek inexpensive places for families to meet and socialize.

A key theme from the interviews is that within these populations, there is a high interest in socializing with one another. For all groups, organized activities focused on their own community tend to draw large numbers.

All who were interviewed agreed that the St. Anthony Falls area is *not* currently a destination for these audiences. Only a few examples of people being attracted to the area were mentioned:

- African-American families from the north side sometimes use Boom Island.
- Some Latinos come to the district to eat, hear music and dance at a couple of restaurants in the area (Picoso and Conga).
- The audience for the fireworks displays tends to be somewhat diverse.

Barriers to Participation

Interviewees speculated that one of the main barriers to visiting the St. Anthony Falls area is lack of awareness. “People don’t know about St. Anthony Falls. I’ve seen them at Minnehaha Falls for picnics. They live in small neighborhoods and it takes them a while to know other neighborhoods and places,” according to Saeed Fahia, Executive Director of the Confederacy of Somali Community in Minnesota.

Beyond this, there is an underlying feeling of not being welcome—that this is a place for other people, not them. “Think about what you see there. I see folks sitting around, but they don’t look like me. Only a certain group comes here. I’m not sure there’s a feeling of welcome,” said Nothando Zulu, of Black Story Tellers. According to Doua Lee, Executive Director of the South East Asian Community Council, “The trails and walks are different from what we do. Signs are in English and about European history. There

is no connection. Even I prefer to be somewhere I feel safe and that I belong.” According to Segovia, “There are no icons that make you feel connected.”

Other barriers mentioned include:

- Lack of leisure time, particularly for newer immigrants who are working hard
- Language, particularly for the older generation
- Distance from home and transportation
- Concern for safety

An additional barrier for some Somali’s, according to Fahia, is the stress of their recent history. “Many Somali come from a hard life and they just want to rest. These things don’t interest them anymore. It is hard to get people outside.”

Interests in Specific Themes

Representatives of the ethnic communities were asked specifically to gauge their community’s interest in the following subjects:

- Nature, parks, trails, animals, birds, plants, etc.
- Information about the history of the riverfront area of Minneapolis
- Information about people who lived and worked in the historic riverfront area
- Information specifically about American Indian culture related to the area

Nearly all of the respondents who were able to answer this began by saying that interest depends upon the presentation approach. “Their eyes glaze over when we talk to them about history. But when it’s presented in the right way, then they engage. They [African-American children] like nature more than you’d guess. It’s just not promoted too much,” according to Nothando Zulu, Black Story Tellers. On the other hand, Lee stressed “The Hmong community loves nature, especially the older generation.” We could educate each other.”

Most respondents believe that audience-specific programs that convey common cultural themes could be delivered on any of these subjects. Cultural themes mentioned include:

- Immigration
- Shared traditions (e.g., between American Indians and the Benabirri Somali)
- Cross-cultural communication (e.g., between African Americans and American Indians)

Some felt the immigration story would have particular appeal. According to Segovia, “What a beautiful connection...that we value immigration! This area (the riverfront) was built by immigrants. It is a connecting point. I will feel connected with someone who had to travel a long distance and had to work hard to create this community. You could build a monument to all the immigrants and it would be very powerful.”

Segovia also mentioned the possibility of doing something at the site of the 35W bridge, where kids from Waite House were stranded on a bus when the bridge collapsed.

Suggested Strategies for Engaging People of Color

When representatives were asked what the SAFHB could do to attract currently underserved audiences, outreach was at the heart of every response. Various modes of outreach were suggested:

Programs that provide personal introductions to the area

“Hire a part-time person for work there, to greet them, be an outreach person.”

“You need someone to introduce people to the place.”

“They need something that says you’re welcome and we want you to be here. Just sit around and socialize.”

“If you connect with schools and bring kids, the adults will follow.”

“Partner with organizations.”

Cultural festivals and events

“You want to be together and socialize. If you create a good program they come.”

“We could attract more Africans if we start with more organized activities, soccer for the youth, families together, that’s the best.”

“Make connections with African-American festivals, for example Juneteenth. Join with them.”

Signs of inclusion

“Give them something visual as a sign of ownership in the area.”

Places for artworks from various communities

Signage in multiple languages

One interviewee stressed the importance of doing something beyond simply talking about it. “I am afraid that we have had conversations with the city and county about stopping Hmong violence. There is a lot of talk about civic engagement....a lot of talk and no action....Do you really want to take this on? Do you really want to commit to all these diverse populations? You must show it is more than talk. If this is like in the past, we just talk about this and 10 years from now, we just talk more about this. It is pointless for us to talk again.”

Perceived Benefits of the St. Anthony Falls Area

All who were interviewed appeared genuinely interested in making the area more accessible to people of their communities. In the case of Somalis, Fahia said that trauma studies of his population show that nature helps people to overcome the trauma they have been through. “Having people take advantage of this space for recreation would be useful for their mental health, to lessen depression.”

Similarly, Lee said the area has more appeal than many of the parks currently used by Hmong people for their picnics. “Those places don’t have a river or boat rides like this area does. They go to Phalen Park and Como Park for the soccer tournament, but there is no focus on this side of the Twin Cities.” Zulu pointed out that proximity is an advantage

for many African American people living in north Minneapolis. “You can walk or run there. There are healthy modes of getting there.” She mentioned the history of the Plymouth Avenue Bridge during periods of racial tension and said, “Perception is a lot of it. Changing this perception is good.”

Findings Related to the Downtown Audience

Sam Grabarski, President of the Minneapolis Downtown Council, offered insights regarding the people who live and/or work downtown and their potential connection to the St. Anthony Falls area. (Downtown is roughly bounded by the area near the Star Tribune printing plant, Elliot Park, I 35 and I 494 and the river.) Although distance is a perceived barrier, there are a number of developments that could favorably impact SAFHB’s ability to attract more people to the riverfront area from downtown.

At least 160,000 people work in the downtown area each day and 34,000 people live downtown. Based on extensive polling, the Downtown Council knows that people who live and work downtown are especially experiential, seeking out events, live theater, restaurants, etc. Unless they are out for exercise, their cruising range (by foot) is a half mile round trip. If a destination is beyond a quarter mile (one way) people are likely to get into a car. Consequently, the St. Anthony Falls area is beyond the normal cruising range of many downtown workers. The challenge is to make the riverfront area more accessible through easy parking or a shuttle.

Grabarski noted that, beginning in fall, 2009, free bus service will be offered throughout the downtown area and within 3 blocks of the riverfront. Thus, someone who lives and/or works downtown will be able to get within the typical quarter-mile cruising distance at no cost. The SAFHB may want to explore the possibility of extending the free bus district all the way to the riverfront.

A second development of potential importance to the SAFHB is the concept of a “string of pearls” series of parks linking downtown with the riverfront. This idea has been discussed for many years and now a blue ribbon panel has been appointed to work on the concept with assistance from the Trust for Public Land.

Grabarski mentioned other trends of potential importance. He said that, up until the recent economic downturn, one of the hottest trends has been historical and cultural tourism. Also, the emergence of libraries as community cultural hubs may have relevance, due to the riverfront’s close proximity to the new Central Library, which is located within the area of the “string of pearls.”

Facilities that would serve the needs and wants of the downtown audience include: bathrooms, attractive “furniture,” viewing points, extensions out into the river, formal trails to follow, bike racks, and programming such as recorded or guided tours, concerts, lunches, etc.

Findings Related to the University of Minnesota Audience

According to Jan Morlock, Director of Community Relations for the Twin Cities Campus of the University of Minnesota, the total number of students who live on campus or in close proximity is now approximately 17,000, a number that has been steadily increasing as the University has built more student housing. Only 3 percent of the staff, however, live within the immediate area. Other students and staff live at various places throughout the metro area, and they tend to recreate where they live.

People who live on or immediately near the campus have easy access to the river at the East Flats. New bikeways allow them to connect to Dinkytown and to the downtown trail. However, there are a number of real and perceived barriers to visiting the St. Anthony Falls area. Students tend to have packed lives and their social networks and electronic networks are connected in ways that transcend physical patterns. Awareness may be an issue as well as perceived distance. A physical barrier is the disconnect between the steam power plant and the area below the 35W bridge. She speculated that many people do not know the Dinkytown bikeway connects to West River Parkway.

A potentially important development is that the University District Alliance is interested in promoting better connections to the St. Anthony Falls riverfront. The University District Alliance, formed in 2007, is a partnership among the University of Minnesota, The City of Minneapolis, Augsburg College, and neighborhood communities adjacent to the University's campus in Minneapolis. One of the key planning themes for the Alliance is to "prioritize a complete and connected public realm." For the St. Anthony Falls area, this means developing stronger links through the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood to the businesses and amenities near the river. It also highlights the benefits of linking SE Main Street to East River Road.

Findings Related to Audiences with Disabilities

In speaking with Margot Imdieke Cross with the Minnesota State Council on Disability and Chairperson of the Minneapolis Committee on Disability, we were reminded that, "If you make it accessible, they will come. If there's no one with a disability there, then there's something wrong." She noted that for mobility impaired people, the area currently is a mixed bag: The Guthrie, Mill City Museum, Boom Island, and Nicollet Island are accessible, but many of the buildings and sidewalks on SE Main Street are not.

It's important to remember that people with disabilities will want to stay with the group they came with and not be given a separate experience. They want the same experience as everyone else and to be provided the same information as everyone else. "We don't need separate experiences, just the inclusive experience that everyone else is getting."

When asked what the SAFHB could do to attract more people with disabilities, she suggested that they include them in their imaging and marketing materials and provide clear information about accessible experiences. "Remember that 16 to 20% of the population has disabilities."

Interview Participants

Kathleen Clarke Anderson, long time resident

Margot Imdieke Cross, Minnesota State Council on Disability and Chairperson,
Minneapolis Committee on Disability

Saeed Fahia, Executive Director, Confederacy of Somalia Community in Minnesota

Sam Grabarski, President, Minneapolis Downtown Council

Deanna Hallen, owner, Twin Cities Cruises

Ira Heilicher, Restaurant Owner, Tugg's, Vic's, Pracna on Main

Brenda Langton, owner, Spoon River Restaurant and Café Brenda

Doua Lee, Director, South East Asian Community Council

Jan Morlock, Director of Community Relations for the Twin Cities Campus, University
of Minnesota

Bill Neuenschwander, owner, Mobile Entertainment

Carol Oosterhuis, Crime Prevention Specialist, Minneapolis Police Department

Patrick Pfundstein, Visitor Service Manager, Mill City Museum

Michael Rainville, Director of Community and Partnership Relations, Meet Minneapolis!

Kit Richardson, real estate developer

Francisco Segovia, Center Director, Waite House, a division of Pillsbury United
Communities

Nothado Zulu, Black Story Tellers, Minneapolis resident