

Citizens League
84 S. 6th St., Room 530
Minneapolis, MN 555402

August 15, 1985

STATEMENT TO LEGISLATURE AND METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
ON BLOOMINGTON DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

Summary: If ever there were a time when the Legislature needed the Metropolitan Council, that time is now. If ever there were a time when the Metropolitan Council needed to demonstrate its value to the state and region, that time is now.

The \$1.5 billion development proposal for the old Metropolitan Stadium site in Bloomington is unparalleled in its significance for the metropolitan area and is a unique economic development opportunity. But it poses immensely difficult questions for the Legislature to resolve, with a multitude of ramifications for the area's future. Unfortunately, the debate has focused mainly on parochial concerns of one city versus another.

The Metropolitan Council is the one body specifically set up to present a regional, not parochial, view. In conducting their hearings, House and Senate Committees should invite the Council's testimony. The Council now should assume leadership on this clearly big metropolitan issue in order to have complete, comprehensive and decisive recommendations for the Legislature.

1. The Metropolitan Council should be prepared to address these questions to the Legislature:

—Is the Triple Five proposal compatible with Metropolitan Council policies that call for two, not three, major centers?—The Council's development framework (as well as proposed revisions, now under consideration) calls for two metropolitan centers, in the central business districts and immediate surrounding areas of Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Should the Council's development guide be amended, to reflect a third major metropolitan center? Or should the Council's policies on metropolitan centers be repealed? Or should the Triple Five proposal be modified so that it does not conflict with development of existing metropolitan centers? Or should the Metropolitan Council use its authority to suspend the project for a year to allow more time for study?

—Can the metropolitan area afford the public debt that would be required if both the Triple Five proposal and the newly-announced Minneapolis Convention Center were built?—Hundreds of millions of dollars worth of public borrowing are likely if both the Triple Five proposal and the Minneapolis Convention Center proceed as planned. How much unused public bonding capacity remains in the metropolitan area? Would these projects squeeze out other possible uses of that bonding capacity, for such purposes, for example, as garbage burning plants or transit systems?

—Who should decide where public dollars that subsidize private real estate development should be spent in the metropolitan area?—The Metropolitan Council by law is charged with promoting the orderly and economic growth of the metropolitan area. Is the use of public dollars to subsidize development of what might be called a third metropolitan central business district essentially an issue for city government, with no metropolitan significance? If not, what kind of influence should be exercised by the Metropolitan Council? Is there a regional interest in whether subsidies are provided from direct or indirect tax sources?

—If any metropolitan financial support is justifiable, should the metropolitan tax-base sharing law (fiscal disparities) be used?—The Metropolitan Council advocated passage of the law in 1971 and was a party to its defense in subsequent court challenges. The proposed financing package would exempt Bloomington from contributing to the tax-base sharing pool for growth since 1971 in the entire 900-acre Airport South area, including the 85-acre Triple Five project. How many dollars would be lost by other metropolitan area communities? How would it affect the Metropolitan Council's development framework? What would be the likely consequences if further exemptions were given? Should existing exemptions be repealed? If the tax-base sharing pool should not be used, what other method of metropolitan assistance would be preferable?

—What impact would additional infrastructure investments have?—It is widely agreed that major improvements in highway, transit and airport facilities would be required to serve the Triple Five project. Clearly, the Council needs to know the cost. In addition other questions need to be faced.

Highways—How much additional highway construction, beyond that originally contemplated for the site, would be needed? Is it possible to design enough capacity into I-494? Would highway improvements in the vicinity of I-494 and Cedar Ave. cause delay in construction of other projects elsewhere in the metropolitan area?

Airports—How will Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport need to be modified to accommodate additional takeoffs and landings, parking of airplanes, and parking of cars? Will a second terminal be needed? Is it conceivable that traffic will be so heavy or noise so disturbing that an entirely new second major airport will be needed? Where might a second airport be built? If it were built several miles away, would success of the Triple Five project be endangered?

Transit—How will large volumes of people be moved daily between the airport and the Triple Five site? Where will people who work there live? How many of them will have access to transit for their work trips? How will conventioners and tourists, staying at hotels around the metropolitan area, get to and from the site?

The Council already is working on infrastructure issues as part of its review of the project's "metropolitan significance." Highway, airport and transit projects require investment of huge sums of money over long periods of time.

2. The Metropolitan Council should do much more than an administrative "metropolitan significance" review as provided in existing law.—We are encouraged that the Metropolitan Council intends to review the question of metropolitan significance of the Triple Five site on its own, without waiting for a petition. But the Council's chief role is serving as a policy body for the metropolitan area, not as a state agency dutifully following established administrative procedures.

We don't underrate the importance of a metropolitan significance review. In fact, if it wanted to, the Council could hold up the Triple Five project for one year.

The Legislature's timetable, not the Council's, will determine how fast the Council needs to move. A preliminary timetable calls fo the Council to complete its metropolitan significance review by December. Should the Legislature be called into special session this fall, the Council undoubtedly will be asked to comment before it would prefer. In fact, legislative hearings might well be scheduled before any special session is called.

Therefore, Council members and staff should be anticipating now that they will need to offer testimony to the Legislature before completion of the metropolitan significance procedures.

Should a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) of the Triple Five proposal be available soon enough—a published schedule looks to mid-October—the Council should use the findings of the DEIS in developing its recommendations to the Legislature.

The Council was on the sidelines when the Legislature debated the location of the Metrodome, the race track, the world trade center, and the convention center (round one). For its own good—and that of the region—the Council belongs at the center of policy analysis and debate.