

# The delights that will beckon Myrtle and Harry to the city

By Garrison Keillor

For every great plan that man has conceived and carried out to fruition (Wagner's "Ring" cycle, the Minneapolis park system, the Edina kid hockey program), there are 10 others that crashed on take-off (the trans-Atlantic kite), fell apart with no warning (the Deacon's one-hoss shay) or failed to meet the needs and aspirations of the people (the North Dakota Artichoke Co-operative).

This teaches us that even the best planners run the risk of becoming humorists, and that ordinary folks may be forgiven if, on looking at the latest plan with its models, scale drawings, feasibility studies, timetables and flow charts, they are reminded of the Gateway Redevelopment Project, the U.S. Pro Soccer League, Esperanto, Operation Candor, Glenn Turner's Dare To Be Great, Inc., and other schemes that haven't worked out yet.

I am thinking particularly of the plans to redevelop, upgrade and revitalize parts of Minneapolis and St. Paul, of which there are many, and Burlington Northern's plan to develop the downtown riverfront is only the latest. A small army of planners in flowered shirts and double-knit bellbottoms is hard at work revitalizing us, it seems, and we can expect more. I'm all in favor of vitality, but some of these plans got no clothes on.

The plans (Cedar-Riverside, St. Paul's Lower Town, etc.) offer us high-rise apartment buildings integrated with commercial developments such as restaurants, small shops and theaters. Often a mall. Usually with some old buildings restored to make an "Old Town." In the architects' sketches, us folks are shown strolling hand-in-hand along tree-shaded greenways or holding animated conversations under striped awnings in a sidewalk cafe.

We are all well-dressed in these drawings, youngish, in no hurry, and we have plenty of money to spend in the small shops. There are no old ladies with shopping bags, whose feet hurt. There are no old men with bottles of mescal, looking for a toilet. Just us young, affluent, well-educated, upward-mobile folks in the \$25 blue jeans.

The little shops aren't grocery stores, either. They're boutiques (every "new-town-in-town" development must have boutiques — it's in the planners' code) and candle shops, pottery shops, cheese shops, little shops that sell Danish stoneware and herbal lipstick and authentic Peruvian shoelaces and greeting cards with the sayings of Thoreau and Khalil Gibran and big posters showing young couples running through tall grass. And more shops. And shoppes. And little ethnic restaurants. And a pub.

These developments will revitalize the inner city. They will make it lively and gay, attract visitors. More important, they will lure the middle class back from Edina and

Burnsville to live in the tall buildings. The middle class is needed in the city to provide leadership. Without it, the city will become a ghetto of the black, the poor, the young and the elderly. It will die. This is why we need more boutiques and older streetlights and expensive apartments.

My personal favorite of the plans I've read, is "Mississippi/Minneapolis — A Plan and Program for Riverfront Development" authorized by the city council and published in 1972 (which the Burlington Northern development messes with, or integrates into, or whatever planners say to mean "is part of"). It is full of jargon and marvelous nonsense about "passive-oriented spaces" and such, full of architects' sketches showing folks getting it on in the redecorated riverfront environment ("Graphic variety along Main Street would attract visitors to the recreation-commercial environment" is one caption), and flashes of urban-planning poetry:

*THE MISSISSIPPI/MINNEAPOLIS . . . Old Man River . . . brown oiled silk rolling under hot summer skies . . . glittering sequins of silvery blue on a wind ruffled surface . . . Always passing, casting reflections of the changing cityscape through which it slides.*

*MAIN STREET . . . an historic promenade down a granite block street, a spine connecting two river edge plazas . . . a colorful bustling residential/commercial district where the banners of cafes and boutiques under gas lights will beckon to visitors.*

And visitors will be beckoned. They simply will be. It's part of the plan.

*The panorama of pleasures accessible to City residents and visitors on a typical summer evening could be as broad as the imagination. As suggested in district plans:*

*—Moving or stationary "show" boats would serve meals, cocktails, and live entertainment.*

*—Old Town commerce on Main Street would invite strolling visitors to sidewalk cafes, restaurants serving ethnic foods, taverns, ice cream parlors, a beer garden, old-time movie theater, boutiques, and antique shops.*

*—Lourdes Square might have a folk dancing festival scheduled, with the many ethnic societies of Minneapolis congregating in their native costumes.*

*—On the roof of the Riverfront West Marina Towers, dining and dancing or just looking at the sparkling hues of City lights reflected in the river would fill several delightful leisure hours.*

It is all there in the plan, perfectly orchestrated, from the delighted visitors to the high-density housing to the dancing Poles to the passive recreational spaces to the



high-class graphics to the cheese on the veal scallopine. It will all happen. Through imaginative planning and creative financing, we will achieve delight in Minneapolis.

The question is: Who needs it? Who is going to put on a turtle-neck shirt and become a wall-on character in the city coordinator's drama of swinging downtown? Who is going to do it a second time, and a third? Will people come to Minneapolis from all over the country to stroll around Old Town and eat tortillas and fill several delightful leisure hours observing sparkling hues? And how many tortillas will they eat on those days when the river's sparkling hues are dimmed by the waste products of tortillas eaten in Anoka?

Will the cops have special instructions to deal with rheumy-eyed winsos who might vander into this panorama of pleasures and spit on it? Or hippie freaks who might like Lourdes Square too much and lie around on it and take off their shirts and unbeckon the visitor? Will the plan permit William Braatz to stroll through the colorful district passing out undelightful (and poorly designed) socialist pamphlets?

Will the Aunt Myrtles and Uncle Harrys in the stucco bungalows with the hand-trimmed lawns and the bird-bath take the Bryant-Johnson bus down to Main Street, and will they enjoy it and feel welcome there, and can they afford the ethnic lunches?

I myself doubt it. I believe the planners have some other person in mind, who will buy more barley-scented soap and paisley toilet paper, than somebody who lives on a limited income. All I can say is that, with prices going up

the way they are, Minneapolis had better attract the middle class fast while there's still one to attract—a middle class that appreciates the finer things, that is.

Not the Craigs and Cyntlias with the four kids and the eternal revolving alimony mortgage. But the Dicks and Janes with the zero kids and professional jobs and cash to burn, who'll want to spend time in Old Town soaking up all that quality-of-life, who'll buy the mosca-sins, drink the \$1.50 drinks, order the \$12.95 dinner and attend the Housing and Redevelopment Authority Arena Theatre.

You, dear reader, are probably not included in this plan, nor, please God, am I. I get a lot of passive recreational pleasure out of undeveloped Minneapolis. I like Loring Park, where the many ethnic societies of Minneapolis congregate in their native blue suits and cotton dresses. I like Oakland Av., where swishing lawn sprinklers create a sparkling display of tiny droplets separating the warm south Minneapolis sunlight into many-splendored rainbow colors. And likewise Chicago Av., where corner groceries beckon the strolling visitor to purchase Salada Tea.

And let us not forget scenic Lake St., where the rich historical heritage of the '50s is preserved by teen-agers cruising past Porky's, where streamers of gaily colored pennants and light bulbs above the used-car lots are reflected in the windows of furniture stores creating a kaleidoscope of visual images. If Old Town is the alternative, I intend to like Lake St. a lot. Lake St. is real.

Garrison Keillor is a writer living in St. Paul.