



PRESS RELEASE

BUILD A BRIDGE TO BETTER

Rondo Effort for a Land Bridge over I-94 Being Heard at MN Legislature Tuesday, Seen as a Restorative Move Broadly Embraced in the Post-George Floyd Era

Newly-released “Past Prosperity Study” confirms for the first time the extent of damage to homes and businesses creating a \$270m financial gap Rondo never overcame

ST. PAUL, MN (JAN 29, 2021) — Once discounted as a “moon-shot,” the persistent effort by St. Paul’s black community to “cap” and reconnect the community torn apart by the construction of I-94, is being seen in a whole new light in the post-George Floyd era, starting with a hearing Tuesday at the MN State Legislature as part of its 2022 bonding cycle.

The vision of the project is to make approximately 15 acres of untaxed land, created by a “land bridge” over the Interstate, the centerpiece of an African American cultural enterprise district. City officials hope this becomes the pride of St. Paul — and the State.

“The government-sanctioned displacement of Rondo remains a painful reminder of the lasting injustices and economic devastation this community has faced,” said Mayor Melvin Carter. “Amid the enduring impact of our national reckoning on race and racism, the Rondo Land Bridge represents a bold vision towards expanding the vital reconciliation, economic self-determination, and healing of our community.”

The legislative hearing, before the MN House Transportation Finance & Policy Committee, (Tues Feb 2, 1pm) ([REMOTE LINK](#)) features St. Paul’s mayor and two leaders of ReConnect Rondo (www.reconnectrondo.com). New documentation will be presented for the first time, quantifying the financial damage inflicted on Minnesota’s largest concentration of African American families. The Rondo community never recovered from the destruction of more than 700 homes and 300 mostly black-owned businesses, resulting in a \$270 million gap ([LINK](#)) — \$370m when including the greater Rondo South neighborhood.

The transportation committee will hear from two leaders of ReConnect Rondo, the organization spearheading the effort — Chairman Marvin Roger Anderson, and Executive Director Keith Baker, who both hope the session will result in the writing of two pieces of legislation: One to fund the approximately \$6m of planning and pre-design costs; and the other to slot construction costs for the land bridge as part of the legislature’s 2022 bonding bill.

Baker, a veteran with years of MnDOT leadership experience, acknowledges that the Rondo land bridge is by far the most complicated project of his long career, given the environmental,

technical and multi-layered bureaucratic hurdles endemic to state transportation. The project, says Baker, places center stage the issue of whether Transportation ultimately embraces responsibility for, and acts on, its impact on communities of color. “Creating an African American cultural enterprise district connected by a community land bridge is an extraordinary opportunity, not only as an amazing physical achievement, but also for the model it would powerfully represent as a way forward in addressing – and helping to heal -- racial disparities and injustice,” said Keith Baker, Executive Director, ReConnect Rondo.

The effort to “reconnect Rondo” comes with the backing of a nationally trusted source, and a major feasibility study. In 2018, the Urban Land Institute convened the country’s foremost land use experts to carry out an extensive study ([LINK](#)), concluding that building and developing a land bridge in St. Paul was an exceptional and timely opportunity. The Land Bridge Feasibility Study was a joint effort between the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County and MnDOT. It clearly confirmed the project’s viability, pointing to the significant value created by new-found tax revenue via capping and creating 15+ acres of land adjacent to downtown St. Paul that experts say could yield 1,800 new jobs and 575 new housing units — an opportunity intensified by the stark reversal of fortune cast upon the once-thriving black middle-class community that formerly resided there.

New leadership that is coming with the Biden Administration has further emboldened Rondo leaders. Pete Buttigieg, the incoming Secretary of Transportation, has been outspoken in his views around the need to address the correlation between transportation policy, spending and its impact on racial equity. And the MN Legislature’s Select Committee on Racial Justice has attempted to face head-on the role bias plays in public policy ([LINK](#)), creating a new landscape that may make the complex task of the land bridge’s ultimate completion more likely than ever.

Anderson, a Rondo native and co-founder of Rondo Avenue, Inc., has long envisioned a land bridge as the centerpiece of an African American cultural enterprise district created through an equitable development framework that would keep gentrification in check, while helping to infuse his old neighborhood with jobs, affordable housing and the financial resources to better support its many social service organizations. Anderson’s father developed quality-built apartment buildings to afford Rondo’s black residents improved living conditions — properties that were razed, and a family business shattered due to the construction of the highway.

In hearing about Anderson’s vision, Walz asked him to be an advisor on the Governor’s “One Minnesota” task force. Said Anderson, “the Governor implored that the work needed to be done through the lens of One Minnesota.” Said Walz, “When Mankato thrives, Moorhead thrives. When Rondo thrives, the Range thrives.” With this effort, we are putting that premise to the perfect test of our time.”

MORE ABOUT RECONNECT RONDO — *ReConnect Rondo is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring equity and opportunity in Rondo by leading a united effort in pursuit of one common goal — a revitalized African American cultural enterprise district connected by a community land bridge.*

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For more information, go to our new [website www.reconnectrondo.com](http://www.reconnectrondo.com) or contact Josh Kohnstamm (josh@kohnstammadvisors.com) at 651 470-7163. Additional materials from the legislative hearing are available at <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/Committees/home/92028>