

# Ford, MPCA say contamination shouldn't limit development of St. Paul plant site

Company wants to finish cleanup at the former assembly plant in 2019.

By [Jessie Van Berkel](#) Star Tribune June 23, 2016 — 10:22pm



Jim Gehrz, Star Tribune Site of the former Ford Assembly Plant in St. Paul, as shown in 2015.

St. Paul leaders have an idyllic vision of a bikeable, transit-oriented community on 122 acres by the Mississippi River, complete with a variety of jobs, housing types and mixed-use buildings.

And Thursday evening, Ford Motor Co. and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency officials said contamination from decades of assembly plant operations at the site should not get in the way of that plan.

“We’re going to be on the site for the next few years cleaning up,” said Rob Cory, Ford’s director of Global Real Estate Services. “By the time we’re done, we expect, based on what we know today, that the majority of the site will be available for the types of things the city has been talking about for a number of years.”

The company expects to finish cleaning up the site and sell it to a developer in 2019, Cory said.

When Gov. Mark Dayton and St. Paul officials visited with Ford executives in March, Cory said, “We made the commitment to get it done as quickly as we could — but get it done right, and this stuff, it just does take time.”

Ford began removing hazardous materials at the site and demolishing buildings in 2012. It is currently excavating soil and backfilling areas with clean dirt, said Mike Hogan, Ford’s site manager.

The company probably would begin marketing the land in 2017 or 2018, Cory said, and wants one master developer to buy and redevelop the full site.

They are looking for a developer who understands the city’s vision for a mixed-use community and would not just build a big-box store and movie theater there, Cory said.

As he laid out a timeline for the property at Thursday’s community meeting, a large group of St. Paul residents listened closely. Afterward, Principal City Planner Merritt Clapp-Smith joked that she would give everyone 20 seconds to absorb the “information that you’ve been waiting years to hear.”

The site where the assembly plant long stood is a prime piece of real estate, sandwiched among Ford Parkway, Cleveland Avenue and Mississippi River Boulevard in the Highland Park neighborhood.

“The development opportunity this site presents is rare, and we look forward to seeing this re-emerge as a connected, livable community,” Mayor Chris Coleman said in a statement.

### **City studies continue**

While Ford cleans up the land, St. Paul is conducting numerous studies to plan for the future of the property.

Officials recently completed a jobs strategy report that outlines the types of businesses and industry that would best suit the area and suggests financial strategies to attract them.

Community members would like to see a balanced mix of institutional, light industrial, office, retail and service jobs, the report states. The city will begin recruiting businesses for the site in 2017, according to the report.

St. Paul is also studying energy, the real estate market and traffic in the area. This fall, city staff plan to hold public hearings on zoning and a public realm plan, which would guide the location of infrastructure, including streets and parks, on the site.