

# Bridging the Gap: SEARS Redevelopment's Efforts to Overcome I-94's Impact

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA, UNITED STATES, March 29, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The construction of I-94 in the 1960s inflicted profound and lasting harm on the Rondo neighborhoods. As the highway was built, it not only physically divided the community but also caused extensive destruction. Countless homes, families, and businesses were demolished to make way for the freeway trench, leaving behind scars that remain visible across the city's landscape to this day. According to the article "Connecting past, present, future" by Reconnect Rondo, more than 700 African American families were forced to sell their homes in the 1950s, often receiving inadequate compensation for their properties. Additionally, approximately 300 small businesses and institutions met the same fate, further exacerbating the economic devastation in Rondo. As a result of these displacements and demolitions, the Rondo neighborhood experienced a staggering 61% population loss.



The birth of Interstate 94 (Photo Courtesy: Streets.mn)



Examples of 3D Virtual Reality and Immersive Theme Park (Photo Courtesy: SEARS. St.Paul)

The impact of urban highways like I-94 on communities of color was undeniably severe. What stands out is the stark reality that these communities lacked the necessary influence to push back against the construction projects. During that era, the voices of communities of color had little to no influence, leaving them vulnerable to decisions made without their input. The deliberate routing of highways through predominantly Black neighborhoods not only destroyed homes, businesses, and generational wealth but also perpetuated racial segregation and

inequality. As stated on the Twin Cities Boulevard website, in Minneapolis, 80% of Black residents lived in the area where I-94 was built. Similarly, in Saint Paul, more than 6,000 individuals and numerous businesses were displaced by I-94, including the historic Rondo neighborhood, the vibrant heart of the city's Black community. This pattern of urban development further underscores the systemic injustices and inequalities faced by communities of color.



Additional Examples of 3D Virtual Reality and Immersive Theme Park (Photo Courtesy: SEARS. St.Paul)

According to the article, “I-94 Harms Minneapolis and Saint Paul Communities” by Twin Cities Boulevard, in the 1950s, during the planning stages of I-94, the Minnesota Department of Transportation tried to silence opposition by offering promises of the highway's benefits. For instance, these benefits included solutions for congestion and traffic deaths, as well as an increase in property value. However, the article mentioned that those promises were not fulfilled over 60 years. The communities along I-94 have endured decades of negative impacts from the highway. For example, increased traffic and noise pollution are obvious, while others remain hidden but equally harmful. The community has been facing harsh realities, ongoing challenges, and injustices for many years.

Observing such a significant and distressing impact on the community, the SEARS Redevelopment Project has collaborated with Reconnect Rondo to explore solutions for mitigating these impacts. The SEARS Redevelopment Project has proposed hosting a potential interactive exhibition at the 3D theme park. The 3D Virtual Reality and Immersive Theme Park will potentially offer an interactive journey through the Rondo neighborhood's past and present.

The first floor of the SEARS building will host a cutting-edge 3D Virtual Reality and Immersive Theme Park, poised to evolve into a dynamic event center featuring ongoing cultural programming and immersive exhibitions. Through the 3D Virtual Reality and Immersive Theme Park highlighting the history of the Rondo neighborhood, visitors will have the opportunity to experience simulations of its pre- and post-Highway 94 construction eras through the Virtual Reality Platform. This innovative approach enables everyone to witness how the community looked before and understand the impact of the construction of Interstate 94 through 3D simulation. The exhibition will tell the story of the Rondo community, remembering its past. Visitors will have the opportunity to reflect on the community's history and collectively honor its experiences. It offers visitors dynamic and engaging experiences that foster greater awareness and educate future generations.

The SEARS Redevelopment project is committed to fostering sustainable development within the community. The primary objective is to listen to the community's concerns and address the challenges resulting from construction. The goal is not only to repair the damage incurred but also to bring potential benefits to the community. Many individuals within the BIPOC community have deep roots in the Rondo and Frogtown neighborhoods, further emphasizing the dedication to their well-being. SEARS redevelopment seeks to strike a balance — promoting progress without resulting in further damage and destruction of the neighborhood. The Redevelopment project firmly believes in the importance of progress, yet it is equally committed to preserving the integrity and vitality of the community.

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