

WINTER IS COMING—EMBRACE IT

Minnesota Winter: You're probably intimately familiar with it. The Weather Channel, the MySpace of weather, noted earlier this year that the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area has the coldest average winter temperature of any large metropolitan area in the country. And you complained! And your friends and your coworkers and your neighbors complained, because if it weren't for weather, no one in Minnesota would ever talk to anyone about anything ever.

But have you ever gotten the sense that it's mostly just marketing? Like have you ever gotten the feeling that we all like summer because summer sells terrible domestic beer and January timeshares in Boca Raton? Lately, I've gotten that feeling. Even with our long-ish winter this year—winter's not that really that bad.

The funny thing is that the opposite of Minnesota Winter is Sun Belt Summer. The first time I moved to Minnesota, it was from Pensacola, Florida. You know what's considerably worse than shoveling a sidewalk in Minnesota in January? Mowing a lawn in Pensacola in July. Six months after you're complaining about how cold it is, someone in Houston is complaining about how hot it is. Secret: No one in Florida goes outside from May to September.* People shuttle themselves betwixt air conditioned environments in an air conditioned vehicle on eight lane roads. People in Minnesota do, in fact, go outside quite a bit in the winter, and they should go out more.

When Gil Penaløsa was in town a few months ago, one of the main points he made was that it seems like a bad idea to plan our city around the 15 days of winter that are admittedly pretty bad at the expense of the 200 days when things are pretty great. It's possible that there are more than 15 of those bad days, but not really that many more than 15, and some years, there are fewer. Either way, we managed to build an entire one story building covering the second floor of both of our downtowns because we're scared of those couple weeks of relative discomfort.

A couple weeks ago, I was at the corner of 4th Street South and 2nd Avenue South, and a couple from Chicago asked, quite innocently, "Where are all the stores around here? Don't you have any stores?" My friend and I had to direct them up into the skyway. It was kind of embarrassing. Minneapolis Skyway System is a hot topic on streets.mn, and you will find many opinions here.

A very realistic one, maybe, would aim to compromise, and admit that the skyways aren't going anywhere, but advocate for banning the construction of new retail space in the skyways. My general feeling is that people who are regularly in and around Downtown Minneapolis are very much in favor of the skyways. But they obviously and objectively suck the life out of our streets and confuse tourists from Chicago.

So we need get people out on to the streets in the winter. We need to figure out a way to use winter as an amenity all around the city, building on the good stuff we already have and adding more. The public firepits in renderings of the new Nicollet Mile (see page 44) are brilliant. We need more of those. And we need more winter-specific events. The St. Paul Winter Carnival is good, though we certainly need a bigger ice palace. The Yard in Minneapolis needs to be designed with winter in mind—outdoor ice rink, aforementioned firepits, etc. The planned winter marketplace at Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis is a very good idea, and a very good start. Theglühwein shall flow freely. That's the kind of unique (i.e. Fogo de Chao, not Olive Garden) thing that will actually get people into Downtown Minneapolis. Also, we should do some ridiculous hipster ironic ice fishing event on Lake Calhoun. I have an ice auger we can use.



Doable

We don't have to be ashamed about winter. We can roll with it. Harbin, China, one of Minneapolis' sister cities, has set up a whole identity around their frigid winters, and theirs are worse than ours. But most importantly, we all need to stop complaining about it. It'll be here in a few months.

Source : <http://streets.mn/2014/08/06/winter-is-coming-embrace-it/>