

**CITY OF NORTH ST. PAUL  
REDEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE  
TASK FORCE  
Meeting Minutes  
NOVEMBER 29, 2021  
6:30 PM**

North St. Paul City Hall – The Sandberg Room  
2400 Margaret Street

**I. DISCUSSION**

- A. Review revised “Property Ownership”
- B. Review working draft “Changes Since 2012” map - Robert Dew noted Item 5 on the document Changes since 2012 Redevelopment Master Plan is misrepresented as it is listed as the Ramsey County Library and would be better suited to be listed as the “Former Community Center/Ramsey County Library” or “city owned leased property”. He also noted Item “b” City owned vacant lot is not actually owned by the city as the purchase fell thru.

Robert also inquired if there would be a decision to do a comprehensive update of the Redevelopment Master Plan? Morgan concurred that his take was it is up to the task force to determine what updates need to be made. Lisa Ritchie stated she had a question about the costs incurred to execute the plan, asking if it would come out of the EDA budget? Robert concurred it would as it was driven by the EDA. Robert asked Morgan if they could talk before next Tuesday as he would like an estimate. Scott Thorsen expanded on that and stated in EDA meetings, Robert had commented on the lack of use of this document. Scott’s hope is that they are mindful of the costs incurred and will be used in the future and they are doing it for a reason. Robert stated that the “drum he has been beating” is the 2040 Comp Plan is great but when you are sitting down with a potential developer that the developer asks, “What is the city’s vision for various parcels, the Comp Plan does nothing. Robert added the Redevelopment Master Plan is the document that he thinks will help bring alignment between what the vision is between the EDA and outside parties. He stated the EDA did use it like a playbook and would like to see it updated. He told Morgan he would like a quote. Morgan agreed and stated they had developed a SCOPE of budget and will do a Zoom call with Morgan. It is intended to be scalable as needed. The current plan has some good information so this will be an overlay update. Once they are done, the deliverable will look similar with more information, & updated goals and objectives.

Brandy moved back to the agenda. Her plan is to revisit the Maps. Scott Thorsen stated he would like to see the maps being more specific (previously existing businesses were removed from the map, which wasn’t the intention but definitely not good PR), general estimates instead of exact pricing, and clear communication of what the intention of this plan is. He would like to keep it realistic and not have it portrait grandiose images of businesses that would more than likely not exist. He said he understands what the purpose is but it’s kind of hard to get people of board when the plan portraits “pie in the sky” imagery. He just doesn’t

see that as reality. He asked if the plan was to approach this like they did last time which was...from this point down, we want to see different things other than what is there now. Robert stated he thinks it's fine what Scott is saying. He doesn't know if they want to get into casting some wand over downtown, saying we think there is a better use for this area. Any graphic depictions, he thinks its appropriate to indicate what things are. With the exception of the Lilli Building as they are for sale. It's a significant parcel on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave and we are engaged with them so it is completely acceptable to indicate that as a potential redevelopment area. Another area FKA the old medical site by sidewinders, From a development state point, if anything happens there, chances are something else is getting dozed over. Is something we wouldn't want to show. We would show the sight that's there. The process as these things go is you come in and sit down and if you need more help, you go get it. Lisa Wong asked, "To what degree are you looking for in redevelopment?" She thinks when opportunities arise, they should at that time be taken into consideration rather than making a plan and "blowing up" buildings to meet those plans. Robert stated he thinks she is correct, it would be no different than what we see in the Comp Plan that has these grandiose depictions that sit on top of existing buildings that are doing just fine. He understands the sensitivity to this and doesn't know that in this plan we need to get to that level of detail. If we do this right, and get the rhythm and cadence to the updates and maybe do the updates annually or bi-annually. The point that we are trying to identify is the visual alignment and picking up the things that get missed in the flurry of the development going on. As previously discussed, we want these downtown pocket parks yet we glossed over them and let things go up and we haven't put them in.

John Monge stated, "Our biggest sponsors are blue collar. We've got Berwald's and Schifsky's and that's what North Saint Paul has always been based off of too and we want to make sure they feel welcome and have an important place in the city.

Rick Gelbmann asked "Who is our audience?" He thinks of it as first of all, someone who may want to do some developing, but also residents. So, they can understand what our vision is. It would be really useful to emphasize property details on our maps. Size of lot, square footage of buildings and possibly the value. It gives people upfront a broad perspective of what may be possible to do.

Robert agreed with Rick commenting, his question is a great one. His perspective is we have an external audience, potential developers and folks we are trying to attract, but doesn't believe we need to go into depth on the detail of the properties. Developers know how to do that. The external message of showing them what's in place and what's available and what could be. But also speak to them about the city being aligned on what we want it to be. Internally, we've got Council, Commissions and Authorities and we are speaking to all of these groups so we all know what the vision is.

Morgan stated, he has seen in other cities where the city doesn't go thru this process, the developers will look elsewhere.

Rick stated, we should put emphasis on what our strengths are and opportunities are in a broad sense.

Robert stated he thinks the purpose of the Redevelopment Master Plan is a vision alignment for the city. It will get outside eyes so we want it to speak properly to those external audiences.

Morgan asked Robert, for the benefit of the group, to expand. He thinks terminology is very important. What are the top 3 or top 5 different areas within the city you think most need to be aligned with respect to this discussion?

Robert stated he is going to keep it to the downtown district. #1 Greenspace...

Morgan said he meant what parts of the city, like EDA.

Robert stated, EDA, Council, Planning, Parks, the Arts & Culture Commission and city staff. The other component to that is some residents will look at the map.

Don Jensen inquired if the final Redevelopment Master Plan will be posted in City E-News? Lisa Ritchie said it certainly could be. Morgan said the original plan is on the website. Don said we need to do our due diligence by making it available.

Robert noticed on the schedule an open house is proposed but would like to see it earlier in the process so residents can give their input. Previously, there was heavy reliance on the public's input.

The last piece is the existing business groups in town. He thinks that is part retaining them is being a city that has a vision and a plan.

Lisa Ritchie stated she would like to add to the conversation is the fact that what changed since the original Redevelopment Master Plan was the Downtown District used to be only by Conditional Use Permits and it's not any longer so the city is limited in executing the vision.

Robert agreed and stated that may be something that comes out of this on a different path. But he thinks the city still thinks we need to understand what we are doing and not say on this parcel it is going to be this or that. That's not what we are trying to do, per say. It is just, this is what we think fits it. Then when people are working behind the scenes or their day to day efforts, and someone comes in and says I want to do this, we want to put this thing in there.

Lisa Ritchie said that is usually after the fact, if the property is privately owned.

Robert said they may not ever show up if the property is privately owned. Which was the case in the K&J building.

Lisa Ritchie said, "It's when they apply for the business license is when it is brought forth."

Robert stated, "Some of that, we can't control."

Lisa Ritchie stated, "We can if we change it back to the Conditional Use Permit."

Rick said he doesn't think that is to our advantage to go back to Conditional Use Permits.

Scott Thorsen said the mindset before was to control what goes in. The Council said this is the special DD district, everything in here is conditional use and would only allow certain things to go in. He stated, "By listening to some of these comments, would it make sense to highlight our recent 2 major developments projects and how those unfolded as opposed to a vision? Talk about the Sentinel Building and how that was city owned property, and we partnered with 2

private entities. It was a pretty impressive how they negotiated the purchase of a private business, 2 parcels of land and how the city was flexible in working with the developer. We could get testimonials from the developer about working with the city to support the document. The other example is how the city got involved with the Anchor Block site. Explaining some obstacles that were overcome to potential developers. We could present a case study. This is what we are trying to accomplish. Not all development has to be city driven. We have a plan and these are 2 examples of how this came to fruition. That's more real world.

Lisa Ritchie stated her concern is that with all of the privately-owned buildings, unless the city somehow gains control, you wouldn't have a voice in the matter.

Robert stated he thinks we are getting too far in the weeds on that and emphasized the EDA and the developers know how to get that done if it needs to get done and the market dictates it to get done. Worrying about that is not something we should concern ourselves with at this point. The plan should be what do we want it to be and what is the vision. The messaging component should be, as a city we should agree on what we want it to be.

Rick said that is the communication should be, this is what is important to us as a city.

Morgan stated to Scott's point, it could be as simple as adding something to the guiding principles section that says that based on past successful developments, the city is interested in partnering with developers in these areas and reference those projects. In terms of developers how they look at city A vs city B, if they have a city willing to partner rather than just checking boxes they may pick more of the partnership approach.

Rick said we may not have full control in what goes where, we influence it and this document goes a long way to influence it.

Scott Thorsen stated, "One big aspect to look at right now, is: what is the code right now? There was a similar proposed project at the Sentinel location that was shot down as it was all apartments and our code is the first floor must have retail/office. Something business related. A variance was granted for less "business" space on the first level for the Sentinel. This is a good example of how the city partnered to make this happen.

Robert said Scott makes a good point and that a number of years ago, it was a contentious issue with developers for many years and some chose to go elsewhere because of it. Eventually, the right combinations happen and you can make it work.

Scott stated if the Sentinel location had apartments pictured in the original Redevelopment Master Plan, we could point that out.

Don stated from his experience, "Communities that are flexible are the ones large developers want to work with." Communities that are set in stone and you can't change anything.

There was general conversation around what North St Paul used to be and how it has evolved over the years and we can certainly expect more change to come so it is our responsibility to be prepared. Scott Thorsen stated that is why we should get away from type of plan. He thinks we shouldn't have specific examples. We should have color coded laid over the existing.

Robert stated we can look at iterations of the plan as we go along. He then asked if everyone agreed with who the audience they discussed would be for the Redevelopment Master Plan? Scott Thorsen added it should also include current businesses who may want to expand. Robert said he just wants to make sure we are all on the same page and it doesn't happen that planning commission recommends something to council but council shoots it down because of our lack of communication.

Morgan stated the final plan could be presented to each commission. Scott Thorsen added "Maybe we could make some recommendations to the Parks & Rec commission to turn some of the identified city property downtown and make it into a park." Robert stated if we go back to the original, we would see greenspace but it doesn't need to be in that exact place as long as we have it.

Scott Thorsen stated, "Our KFA annual report is a report of city owned property but there is no plan for that land. Could it be part of the Redevelopment Master Plan to incorporate plans for these city properties?" Robert said as an ancillary effort, if there are things that you are speaking of that council thinks needs to be cleaned up, we could do that. Scott said it was talked about at the last meeting. Scott pointed out a couple of places that have been cleaned up and are now being utilized as temporary "quiet space". He stated we need to be cautious of labeling "Park Space" cause once that is done, it's hard to undo.

For example: the FKA BP gas station was a property purchased by the city and looks a lot better now. We could make a recommendation to put up a "Welcome to North St Paul" sign that would go to each commission for review and then to council. Similarly, we could create a plan for all of the vacant city properties and we could all agree on a plan to make this happen.

Lisa Wong stated the Planning Commission is working on downtown seating. We are talking about greenspace and places to sit and this in the meantime, this can follow within the purvey of the planning commission.

Rick Gelbman is concerned about being about being too specific of what the seating properties would be. Scott said we don't have to be too specific, we would just say these parcels are up for redevelopment. Per Rick, we may also be able to plan a little bit further on describing the mapping process if we soften the edges. Rather than using boundaries, use drawn areas that are somewhat nebulous. Identifying what we would like to see in general areas such as housing.

Scott Thorsen inquired about if there is anything in the Buxton survey that would be helpful? They had exact statistics, something about if we had 100K people in a 3-mile radius, that is the information we should be presenting to developers as an attraction.

Robert confirmed Scott's statement is a key point as in recent discussions with the Port Authority and some of the work they are doing with the EDA now, something that is going to happen here in the very near future is the Hillcrest redevelopment. There will be a lot more housing/families and there is not a lot of retail in that area. When those people are looking for services, they will go the Hilltop area, White Bear Lake, Sunray or Maplewood. Rick stated the same thing with what is going in Oakdale just north of FKA Imation.

Lisa Ritchie asked if we should have the guiding posts for what type of businesses we would like to have downtown? Robert said he is really trying to get this back into Brandy's hands.

Brandy said the conversation we were having is really helpful and to answer the question, in terms of the vision we described defining those boundaries and being able to present this, it would be good to use character areas. With some specifications for design standards.

Morgan said they could prepare some things for the you guys to react to and that could be the starting point just like we did for some of these maps. Brandy added the committee could get as specific as needed on design standards etc. Rick thinks it should be kept at high level without the details. Lisa Wong stated she thinks it's important to identify what we do want and then see if there is a match.

Lisa Ritchie stated the reason she keeps driving her point is because the Antique Mall that just sold downtown was purchased by StarrLift which is a business that sells chair lifts. The plan to operate a non-profit in part of the building and StarrLift will most likely occupy the mainstore front. She said the last 3 commercial buildings that have sold downtown are Caring for Cats, the Adult Daycare and now StarrLift which are all businesses which are acceptable per our code but in getting back to Robert's comment about driving people over here from the Hillcrest area for retail, unless something changes...Robert said, from an EDA standpoint, with all of the new development and new people in the area, they need a place to eat and a place to get coffee. They are going to need these services. What has happened, happened. What's happened here is we don't have enough market force to allow someone to come in here and have a successful business. Would he prefer K&J wasn't going to be an adult day care, absolutely? He is talking to a developer about the city owned property across the street from city hall. Robert told them they need to come in here with something that makes sense.

Lisa Wong stated she thinks it's important for us to combine appetites of businesses and retail that surround us like Maplewood Mall. How do we provide service the people around here but also attract people to come here? Like the Car Show. How do we incentivize that? Providing incentives is a big driver.

Robert stated he was working in a city that has an ordinance that doesn't allow and chain restaurants or drive-thru. The result is they have a huge "boutique downtown". John Monge stated Stillwater was doing that and Don added, Grand Avenue is doing that. Robert stated he isn't saying that is the answer but that's an idea when we are creating a vision. We've got independent...Lisa Wong added, "small businesses, accessible, walkable." Robert concurred and said all we can do is say, this is what we would like and push and nudge along the way.

Rick said to continue with the discussion on national chains, it would really enhance the downtown and draw people would be a drugstore such as a Walgreens. He thinks it would provide a lot of services to people. In terms of traffic count, it seems it would be out of the picture but he wouldn't want to rule something like that out. Robert said he would put a Walgreens over by Target and not downtown. Scott Thorsen said it seems to him that was part of the Buxton survey.

Robert thinks Old National Bank will at some point in the near future be available. Morgan agreed that banks are changing. Less brick and mortar and changing the way they do business. The Buxton study was market driven and several years ago so needs to be viewed thru the lens of "is this adequate now?"

The committee the reviewed the Guiding Principles from the 2012 Redevelopment Master Plan and suggested minor adjustments. Brandy Howe took notes and will incorporate the changes into the revised Redevelopment Master Plan.

**II. NEXT STEPS**

III. WSB provides draft table of contents for new plan

IV. WSB updates existing conditions section of 2012 plan

**V. ADJOURNMENT**