

**SUMMARY**

In March of 1997, the Blaine City Council appointed a 22 member Task Force to study the issue of community facilities within the city of Blaine. The Task Force was formed, in part, to study the effects of Blaine's population growth on the space requirements of city government. The population of Blaine has more than doubled since 1970, growing from 20,000 to 43,000. As Blaine grows, so does its need for adequate community facilities. The task force identified the police station and city hall, as two facilities whose needs the community should address.

The police station has been housed in a converted public works garage since 1988. The building does not meet current state building or correctional codes. It does not have a single toilet that is handicapped accessible. The detention area is housed in a converted closet. The building also lacks adequate space for officers to do their paperwork and a private space for officers to conduct interviews. This facility is inadequate for the current staff, and it will not accommodate a department growing parallel with the city population.

City Hall was built in the late 1960's to house the staff for a city of 20,000 - 30,000. The public spaces have been well maintained, but conditions are very tight where day to day operations occur. These conditions

adversely effect all areas of city government. City staff are forced to share work stations. The building lacks adequate meeting and layout areas. It also lacks adequate space for storage and building maintenance. Although Blaine has the lowest percentage of city employees per thousand residents of any comparable metropolitan city, the current city hall is inadequate, and its need for space will also grow parallel with city growth.

The Task Force was also asked to study the need for other community facilities, such as meeting, recreational, or social. A growing city needs more than just increased space for city government, it needs to continually reevaluate its identity. One of the goals of the task force was to discover and articulate Blaine's vision of its community identity.

The Task Force listened to the residents of Blaine to discover the elements of their city, both present and absent, that create its identity. The Task Force held numerous public meetings, several open houses, conducted surveys, and talked to Blaine residents for nearly two years.

In general, the Task Force found a need for indoor recreational and social space, and a need for a place that people can call the Heart of Blaine. The City has an excellent park system, but it has a shortage of indoor

facilities. Blaine does share some indoor space with the three school districts, but competition for that space is strong. Such competition lessens the accessibility to those facilities. School space is also inappropriate for adult recreation and informal youth recreation, especially for those youth who do not participate in organized sports. Additional facilities are needed for meeting, banquet, and multipurpose rooms. Nearly all groups interviewed by the Task Force mentioned a need for these spaces.

The Task Force examined numerous alternatives for the siting of a facility, or facilities, that would address the changing needs of Blaine. They considered the cost of doing nothing, and the possibilities for expanding or renovating existing facilities. They considered building new facilities dispersed throughout local neighborhoods, and they compared that to building a new centralized facility.

After considering these alternatives, the Task Force recommended finding a new site near the geographic center of Blaine, for a centralized facility with a campus atmosphere. This location would help to realize the community's vision of a "civic heart" for Blaine. It would also allow room for the facility to expand in the future. Such a location would provide greater accessibility from all

**SUMMARY (cont.)**

areas of the community and an opportunity for the city center to pair itself with other amenities that are located nearby, such as the National Sports Center and Blaine Soccer Complex.

In November and December of 1997 the Task Force presented their findings, which included the following 5 recommendations:

- Approval of a city center that would include a community center, police station and city hall.
- A central location for the new facility that would create a heart of the city vision, have more land to develop, greater accessibility within the city and relate to other recreational amenities already located in the area.
- An accessible facility that would serve the needs of all ages. The facility should include a youth center and space for families to gather.
- The center should be affordable so that it can be used by as many residents of the community as possible. To help achieve this, a mix of funding options, including partnerships, should be explored.

- The facility should be planned to accommodate a growing city population.

A second Task Force was appointed in February 1998. They worked to develop the first Task Force recommendations into a building program with a proposed site and budget. They conducted a user group meetings which included seniors, city staff, and youth. They investigated the existing site, and they worked with the City to develop a reasonable budget for the city center complex.

With the aid of Ankeny Kell Architects the Task Force developed a program for a city center complex that includes and new City Hall and Police Station, and a new recreational community center. The community center proposal includes community meeting rooms, a banquet room with catering kitchen, a leisure and fitness aquatic area, family locker rooms, an aerobics fitness area with workout equipment, and 8 gymnasiums.

The budget for the proposal is \$21 million, which will be funded through existing City resources, revenues generated by the facilities, and by

general obligation bonds authorized by the citizens of Blaine. The requested G.O. Bonds would result in increased property tax assessments of about \$4.50/month for a home valued at \$100,000.

In September 1998, the second Task force presented their findings to the City Council. The Council accepted their findings, and passed a resolution calling for a special election on the question of the City issuing general obligation bonds in a total amount not to exceed \$12 million for the construction of a city center complex. In November 1998 the citizens of Blaine will have the opportunity to decide if the City should proceed with this project.

As the City of Blaine grows and changes, so do its needs for community spaces and activities. This study reflects the findings of the Task Forces and moves forward to develop a tangible response to these findings.



In April 1997, the Blaine City Center Planning Task Force began to investigate the need for new community facilities within the City, including a relocated city hall and police station. The task force consisted of senior citizens, local business representatives, residents, and high school students. Their first goal was to define a mission statement that would guide the evaluation process.

*"The Mission of the Task Force is to listen to our community, collect information, coordinate options, develop a consensus, and communicate a recommendation to the City leadership in regard to a City Center for the City of Blaine."*

**Blaine City Center Planning Task Force**

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Dottie McKinley</i>  | <i>Gloria Brownlee</i>  |
| <i>Jerry Young</i>      | <i>Gary Robertson</i>   |
| <i>Mark Giancola</i>    | <i>Robert Moffit</i>    |
| <i>Sarah Geisler</i>    | <i>Gerald Schilling</i> |
| <i>Dave Mitchell</i>    | <i>Gary Melby</i>       |
| <i>Keith Munson</i>     | <i>Betty Melby</i>      |
| <i>Pastor Tim Roehl</i> | <i>Lyn Ruetten</i>      |
| <i>Matt Elhadad</i>     | <i>Suzanne Reis</i>     |
| <i>Connie Conner</i>    | <i>Mary Strand</i>      |
| <i>Steve Klein</i>      | <i>Jerry Hiniker</i>    |
| <i>Greg Orvik</i>       | <i>Brad Nelson</i>      |

The definition of the mission statement began a process of evaluation that included community meetings and testimonials, a mail-in survey, telephone survey, visioning session, and bi-weekly meetings. This process recognized the needs and desire of the Blaine community.

**PROCESS & ANALYSIS**

Throughout the seven month process, information was gathered from various groups and individuals. Not only were special interest testimonials received, but the community residents were given opportunities to express their interests. Some of these opportunities included public meetings and surveys. In addition to collecting this information, the Task Force toured local community centers, such as Plymouth and Maplewood, to learn and evaluate how those facilities function in their respective communities.

**SPECIAL INTEREST TESTIMONIALS - MAY 1997**

Individuals from the City government and other interest groups gave testimony about their respective community needs. Individuals and groups that participated include: City Manager Roger Fraser; Police Chief Dave Johnson; a representative of the National Sports Center; City Park and Recreation

**Blaine City Center Planning Task Force**

Director, Jim Peterson; City Public Works Director, Ken Urban; Steve Kerr of the Anoka Hennepin School District; Gary LeBlanc, Deputy Adjutant Director of the National Guard; John McClelland, Superintendent of Independent School District 12; Tom Ploson representing the Volleyball Sports Club; Dave Brownlee and Ann Roman of the Zasadzinsk of the Spring Lake Park Youth Hockey Association.

Findings from these testimonials include:

- Population of Blaine has doubled since 1970 and will continue to grow.
- Blaine has nearly the lowest expenditures and smallest staff of any comparable metro area. Staff will grow with city.
- Current city hall site is valuable for commercial use
- Good communication and efficiency of government functions demand that they be located together.
- Current police department location was intended to be a temporary facility. It has a number of deficiencies such as lack of garage space. It is not centrally located



and has accessibility problems.

- Preferable for the police station to be near the city administrative offices but it could continue to use some "satellite facilities" such as fire stations.
- National Sports Center is interested in partnering and sharing facilities in a city center.
- Outdoor recreational space is adequate but indoor recreational space is lacking. The only facilities for indoor use exist in the schools. Competition for this space is increasing.
- Lack of informal recreational space for youth.
- City is open to considering a public/private partnership.
- The City Public Works Center is conveniently located and satisfied with their facility.
- Places needed for youth who are not interested in structured activities.
- Adults not served well by school facilities. Adults and youth are competing for space.

- Childcare facilities needed as district is growing by the rate of one new elementary school per year.
- National Guard interested in partnering a new facility as it does in other communities.
- Gymnasium space needed for activities such as growing volleyball program.
- Space, other than schools, is needed for youth programs.
- Shortage of meeting and banquet space.

#### **VISIONING SESSION - MAY 1997**

At this meeting, participants were asked to provide descriptions or elements embodied in their concept of community. The number of participants was low.

#### **BLAZIN' 4TH SURVEY**

A survey was distributed at Blaine's Blazin' 4th Festival. The survey results include:

- 57% of survey participants felt that a community center should be built depending upon cost.
- 7% surveyed would not be willing to pay for a community center

#### **Blaine City Center Planning Task Force (cont.)**

- 44% felt the center should be located at the current city hall site, 54% felt it should be located at the geographic center of the city.
- Participants felt the five most important features of the community center would be a swimming pool, youth activity center, youth recreational facilities, basketball courts and gymnasiums.

#### **COMMUNITY SURVEYS**

##### Information Questionnaire

An information questionnaire was distributed to all residents of Blaine (Appendix A) as part of a special addition city newsletter. The survey questioned residents about the quality of life, positive and negative aspects of the City and interest in building a community center. Concerning the community center, participants were asked to identify the membership dues they would pay for use of the facility, whether a city hall or police station should be included in the facility, where it should be located, and what amenities are desired. The findings are as follows:



**Blaine City Center Planning Task Force (cont.)**

*Question #1: Are you a resident of Blaine?*

97 % of respondents were residents of Blaine

*Question #2: How would you rate the quality of life in Blaine?*

The greatest percentage of respondents (73%) rated the quality of life in Blaine as "good." 13% rated the quality of life as "fair", 12% replied "excellent".

*Question #3: What do you like most about Blaine?*

*Question #4: How could we make Blaine better?*

*Question #5: Do you believe that the city of Blaine should build a community center?*

45% responded "yes, depending on how much it costs". 23% of respondents replied "no", 17% replied "yes, no matter what", and 15% responded "yes, depending [upon other factors]".

*Question #6: If your response to #5 is 'yes,*

depending on how much it costs,' what would your household be willing to pay per month (through taxes, user fees, membership, etc.) if the facility were equipped as you wish?

32%	\$0-\$10
24%	\$10-\$15
15%	\$0
13%	\$15-\$20
9%	\$20-\$30
4%	\$30-\$40
3%	\$40-\$50

*Question #7: If your response to question #5 is "yes, .." should Blaine build a city center to include (check those that apply):*

51% of participants would include a city hall and 48% percent would include police facilities.

*Question #8: If your response to question #5 was "yes, . . ." where should the city center be located?*

The response was divided as to whether the city center should be located at the present city hall site or in a more central location. 51% of respondents would locate the facility

in the center of Blaine while 49% would locate the center at the current city hall location.

*Question #9: If your response to question #5 is yes, which of the following would be most important to include in a city center?*

Of the many listed facilities and amenities, a swimming pool, youth activity center, youth recreational activities, meeting rooms and a running/walking track were rated as the most important. Other desired amenities included and exercise room, gymnasiums, police station, and city hall.

Telephone Survey

Between July 21 and 30, 1997, Decision Resources Ltd. conducted a random sample residential telephone survey to evaluate the demand and need for a Blaine City Center including community center, police station and city hall. The consultants questioned 400 households. The average interview lasted fifteen minutes. The following conclusions were made from the survey results:

- Residents rank the value of the city services they receive as lower than the



Metropolitan area suburban norm. The rating of the park and recreational facilities was also lower than the norm. Only 49% of respondents felt that their adult recreation needs were met.

- There was a sense that property taxes were palatable, although the amount of services offered for those tax dollars is inadequate.
- There is a perception that parks, recreation and property taxes are connected.
- Almost one-half of the survey participants reported leaving the community to recreate elsewhere. Community centers and better paths and trails were some key reasons for leaving the city.
- A majority of residents supported the construction of recreational facilities. Three facilities attracting at least a two-thirds support include a full-service community center, a teen center and a community swimming pool.
- A favored location for the proposed facilities was not found.
- The effect of the newsletter as a vehicle to inform Blaine residents of the city center issue was mixed. A significant

portion suggested that they did not receive the newsletter. Those who did receive the mailing were very informed.

A statistical summary of the survey found that:

- 80% of those surveyed support a full-service community center including a family leisure pool, gymnasium, walking/running track, racquetball courts, exercise equipment and weight room.
- 78% of those surveyed support a teen center with meeting space, commons area and homework computer center.
- 69% favor a new police facility.
- 53% favor a new city hall.

#### **COMMUNITY CENTER TOURS**

To better understand the elements of a community and city center, the Task Force members toured a number of community centers in other metropolitan areas. The toured facilities included:

- Brooklyn Park (includes a combination city hall and armory)
- Rosemount (includes a combination

#### **Blaine City Center Planning Task Force (cont.)**

armory, theater and recreation center)

- Plymouth (a public/private partnership with Lifetime Fitness)
- Chanhassen (includes a separate city hall and community center as part of an elementary school)
- Maplewood (includes a single unified city hall and community activity center)

In general, the Task Force members felt that the Maplewood Community Center best represented their vision of a city center. Discussion was held concerning the different emphasis of each center such as an armory type center versus a community recreation center. The members were impressed with the activity level found at Maplewood. The members were also skeptical about the public/private partnership center approach in Plymouth. They questioned how well the public is served by such a partnership.

#### **PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE - SEPTEMBER 1997**

A public open house was held on September 25, 1997. Attendees included a state legislator, principal and city staff, but attendance in general was poor. Comments in response to the information presented at the open house was generally supportive of creating a "heart of the city." It reaffirmed



that there is a need for the city to grow with the community. Opinions in regard to the location of a city center were mixed.

**PUBLIC MEETING - DECEMBER 1997**

The Task Force presented its formal recommendations at a public meeting on December 2, 1997.

**CITY COUNCIL MEETING - DECEMBER 1997**

The Task Force presented their recommendations to the City Council.

**TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS**

After gathering information over the previous seven to eight months the Blaine City Center Planning Task Force made the 5 following recommendations:

1. The City should pursue the development of a full service city center consisting of a community/youth center, a new police facility and a new city hall.
2. All facilities should be located on a single site or campus with the buildings in close proximity to each other. A park may be part of the campus. The site may also include a town square or central community focus. The site should be located near the geographic center of Blaine.

The center should be developed with community growth in mind as the population of Blaine may double in the next 25 years. There is not enough land at the existing city hall site for a combined facility.

A site with these attributes would help Blaine achieve its vision of "civic heart" for the community.

3. The city center should have the following attributes:
  - Affordable.** The City should explore all means possible to build and operate the center so that it is affordable to all Blaine residents.
  - Accessible to all ages.** The center should include facilities for youth, families, and seniors.
  - Connected to transit systems.** The center should be connected to trails, public transportation and the automobile.
  - Heart of the City.** The center should be centrally located and developed to provide a new heart for Blaine.

**Blaine City Center Planning Task Force (cont.)**

•**Lots of gymnasiums.**

•**Ample meeting rooms.**

4. The city center should be funded by a blend of property tax revenues and affordable user fees plus donations from businesses. The center should "fit" the unique needs of residents and their ability/willingness to pay. It should not replicate a center in nearby communities.
5. The City should aggressively pursue partnerships as means to make the city center affordable.

**NEWSLETTERS**

Three special Task Force reports were published in the City Newsletter to help keep Blaine residents informed of the progress, findings and opportunities to participate and express opinions. A copy of these special reports can be found in Appendix B.

**Blaine City Center Planning Task Force II**

In February 1998, The Blaine City Center Planning Task Force II was appointed by the City Council. The goal of Task Force II was to develop the first Task Force's recommendations into a proposed building, site, budget, and funding plan. In May 1998, Ankeny Kell Architects were retained by the City to assist the Task Force. The mission of the second Task Force was:

*"To create a civic heart and community identity for the City of Blaine in order to effectively serve the growing needs of all our Citizens."*

**PROCESS & ANALYSIS****USER GROUP MEETINGS - MAY/JULY 1998.**

User group meetings were conducted by Ankeny Kell Architects to further define the necessary program elements of the proposed city center. The architects worked with various groups to develop the needed components of each space. Groups interviewed included youth, seniors and city staff. Based on this information a preliminary program was developed. This preliminary program was later adjusted to align the estimated project cost with the proposed budget plan.

See Program, page 11, for detailed program.

**Site Analysis - July/August 1998.**

Given the preliminary program, the architects investigated site options. They explored renovating or completely rebuilding the existing city hall site, they also explored the possibilities for a "generic" site. They considered the facility as a stand alone campus, and compared this to the facility as part of an integrated development that included retail, commercial, and housing components. The integrated option assumed that the city's project could be developed in conjunction with private development.

See Site, page 14, for further site analysis.

**Public Open house - August 1998.**

A public open house was held on August 19, 1998. The task force presented all the options they had considered, and solicited public response. They presented the needs the project addressed, the various options for siting the project with attendant pros, cons and project costs, the possibilities for partnerships, the components of the community center, and the general location of the project. The open house was well attended. Public opinion again reaffirmed the need for new community facilities and the desire to address these issues.

See Appendix F, for copies of boards.

**Budget and Funding Plan - August/September 1998.**

The budget for the proposed city center has been set at \$21 million. It is recommended that the funds for this project come from existing city resources, revenues generated by the facilities, and \$12 million in general obligation bonds to be approved by the citizens of Blaine. The requested G.O. Bonds would result in an increased property tax assessments of about \$4.50/month for a home valued at \$100,000.

The preliminary building program was modified to keep the estimated project costs within budget.

**Recommendation to City Council - September 1998.**

After reviewing the options and considering the public response, the Task Force voted to recommend that the City pursue development of a new city center that includes a full service community center, new police station, and new city hall, on a centrally located site.

The City Council unanimously accepted the recommendation of the Task force, and moved to put a referendum before the citizens of Blaine calling for their approval to





**Blaine City Center Planning Task Force II (cont.)**

issue general obligation bonds to help pay for the development and construction of this project.

**Public Information - September to November 1998.**

The Task Force and City are currently engaged in informing the public about the issues around the proposed city center. Volunteers are in the process of informing people at school open houses, community meetings, and neighborhood meetings. Information is being distributed through fliers, the city newsletter, and a video the City has prepared. The goal is to allow the citizens of Blaine to make an informed decision in the November elections.