

CITY OF BLAINE  
ANOKA COUNTY, MINNESOTA  
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP  
Monday, November 15, 2021

6:00PM  
Council Chambers  
10801 Town Square Drive

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sanders at 6:00PM.

**ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Tim Sanders, Councilmembers Julie Jeppson, Chris Massoglia, Richard Paul, Jess Robertson, and Jason Smith.

**ABSENT:** Councilmember Wes Hovland.

Quorum Present.

**ALSO PRESENT:** City Manager Michelle Wolfe; Community Development Director Erik Thorvig; Public Works Director Jon Haukaas; Deputy Police Chief Dan Szykulski; Finance Director Joe Huss; City Engineer Dan Schluender; City Attorney Chris Nelson; Communications Manager Ben Hayle; Director of Administration Cassandra Tabor; Deputy Human Resources Director Sheri Chesness; Community Development Specialist Ruth Tucker; Deputy Finance Director Ali Bong; Community Development Specialist Elizabeth Showalter; and City Clerk Catherine Sorensen.

3.1 Northtown Mall Redevelopment and Revitalization Plan Charette Review.

Community Development Director Thorvig stated on October 26 - 28, 2021, a design charette was completed for the Northtown Mall Redevelopment and Revitalization Master Plan. The three-day process involved staff, consultant and stakeholder collaboration to generate various short, mid and long-range redevelopment concept plans for the area. Presentations were made on Wednesday and Thursday afternoon for all groups involved. Various representatives from adjacent cities and landowners were present. He explained representatives from Damon Farber had a presentation for the council on the findings from the design charette.

Jeff McMenimen commented on the general themes that resulted from the preliminary concepts which include improvements to the existing traffic infrastructure, introducing

bike/pedestrian connections, enhancing stormwater and utilizing Springbrook Creek as an amenity for future development, introduction of greenspace, and softening transitions between existing residential neighborhoods and new development. He reported there was a demand for market rate residential housing in this area, along with a growing need for medical office and hybrid office work space.

Mr. McMenimen discussed how he worked to engage with the mall owner, individuals at World Fest and with residents at the design charette. He reported on Thursday, December 9, from 6:00PM to 8:00PM there would be a public open house at the Mary Ann Young Center to present the preliminary concept plans and receive feedback from the public. It was noted refining of plans will occur as a result of the feedback with revised concepts being presented to the city council at a workshop in early 2022. He explained the public was thankful the council was completing this study and wanted to see more community gathering/greenspace in the Northtown area.

Tom Whitock commented further on the preliminary concepts, noting how the creek would be integrated and described how Genzler has been involved in reinventing mall areas. He discussed how a partnership would be needed between the city and the mall owner in order to institute incremental changes in Northtown area.

Councilmember Robertson supported the infrastructure being improved, especially when it comes to the area becoming more pedestrian friendly. She questioned if the MNDOT and the county had bought into this concept. Mr. Whitock reported he held a joint meeting with MNDOT, Metro Transit and the county to discuss the preliminary plans. He indicated the next step would be to take the findings from the charette to these organizations.

Councilmember Massoglia asked if the consultants had numbers from the Burnsville Center. Mr. Whitock noted the Burnsville Mall declared bankruptcy and was under new ownership. He commented further on the sale and improvements that have been made to the Burnsville Center since 2019. The improvements that were occurring at Ridgedale Mall were also discussed.

Councilmember Paul inquired what projects would be completed first in order to get this area moving in the right direction. Mr. Whitock stated he would need to further engage with stakeholders and the city council prior to making this determination. He wanted to better understand what improvements could be made that would catalyze change.

Mr. Thorvig stated it would be difficult for developers to be the first in the door when it comes to redevelopment in this area, but after investments are made, the long-term vision would have a better chance at being successful.

Councilmember Smith asked what the council could do to make Springbrook Park more of an amenity. Mr. Whitock stated it would be important for the city to have a plan for the future that has community buy in. He reported this would assist the city with pursuing grant opportunities. It was noted he would be circling back with the watershed district to see how they can partner with the city on this project.

Mayor Sanders thanked the consultants for the thorough presentation and stated he looked forward to attending the public open house at MAYC on December 9.

### 3.2 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue Redevelopment Study Introduction.

Mr. Thorvig stated the 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Radisson Road industrial area has been identified in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan as a priority redevelopment area. It has also been identified as one of the four priority areas by the city council through the visioning process that occurred in early 2021, and is also identified in the "Growth Management" portion of the city's strategic plan. Based on direction from the city council, the city will embark on a visioning/design process for this area to assist in future marketing and development efforts. The industrial area consists of older industrial buildings that have either become antiquated due to their age or have excessive outdoor storage which is not consistent with the vision for the area. The EDA has been active in purchasing property over the last five years and continues to discuss further acquisitions as property becomes available. The National Sports Center (NSC) and Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) are also key property owners in this area.

Mr. Thorvig explained general discussions by the city council identify this as a potential "city core" where the city should encourage walkable, entertainment type of uses that take advantage of the NSC and be an amenity to Blaine residents and visitors. Staff is suggesting a planning/design process that includes key stakeholders (city staff, boards/commissions, city council, property owners, NSC and MAC) to establish the vision for this area both visually and descriptively. An important aspect is an architect assisting in creating the visual plan for the area. The general process would be staff led, however the purpose of the request for proposals (RFP) is to select an architect to assist in creating the visual plan. The plan will also include the vacant land on Town Square Drive in front of city hall. An RFP was advertised in September seeking written proposals from qualified architects to assist the Community Development Department in preparation of a master plan for the 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue Redevelopment Area. Sperides Reiners Architects (SRA) was selected as the architect to assist with the project.

Mr. Thorvig reported there will be a series of meetings to create a master plan to assist the city in marketing the area for redevelopment. The first meeting on November 15 will focus on information and idea gathering for the consultant to better understand the ideas and vision for the area. Staff reviewed a list of questions that the council should consider.

Jonah Ritter, architect with SRA, introduced his team member and stated he was hoping to have this workshop serve as a listening session. He wanted to learn more from the council on how they envision the 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue redevelopment area going forward. The assets in the area were described and it was noted these amenities can be used to assist in creating an entertainment district for the city of Blaine. Basic diagraming of the area was reviewed with the council.

Terry Benard, landscape architect, discussed the motivating factors that were spurring redevelopment and stated the National Sports Center was a great amenity for the community to have. He stated it would be critical to draw all of the uses around 105<sup>th</sup> Avenue together.

Mike Lamb, Michael Lamb Consulting, explained he had a number of questions that he would like the council to respond to. He questioned why this project should be done and why should it be done now.

Councilmember Smith reported the city of Blaine had a lot of visitors for sports and it would benefit the city to keep people in the community after they attend an event at the NSC.

Councilmember Jeppson indicated the council was hearing from its residents, parcels of land have been purchased and the time was now to redevelop this area. She supported this area having a sporting theme. She explained visitors were looking for places to go and places to stay.

Councilmember Robertson commented for the first time in a long time the city had a council that was hyper focused on development. She noted she has lived in Blaine for over 20 years and she did not like playing second fiddle to Roseville and Maple Grove. She wanted the residents to have more places to eat and stay.

Mayor Sanders stated today was the next best day for this project. He believed this project was important because the residents deserve it and the visitors want it. He noted other areas in the country were copying what the NSC has and surrounding amenities would be important in order to continue to attract events to the NSC. He wanted to see the city taking on a new perception.

Councilmember Paul commented he believed the city needed expansion near the NSC to accommodate the number of visitors the city received. He appreciated the assistance and expertise the consultants would provide the city.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated these types of projects take time and now was the time to start. He appreciated how staff and the mayor have been interested in redeveloping this area.

Mr. Lamb questioned where the council sees the heart of Blaine.

Councilmember Massoglia stated from 105<sup>th</sup> to 109<sup>th</sup> around Highway 65 in the NSC area was the heart of the community.

Councilmember Paul indicated he saw the center of Blaine to be from 125<sup>th</sup> to 99<sup>th</sup>, including the mall area because this was the center of businesses.

Mayor Sanders stated he believed the area surrounding 109<sup>th</sup> Avenue to be the heart of Blaine.

Councilmember Robertson commented she did not believe that Blaine had a center because Highway 65 divided the city in half. She discussed where she lived and noted she was more inclined to use Lexington Avenue and Highway 35 versus Highway 65.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she agreed with Councilmember Robertson to some degree. She indicated the city was divided and anticipated when most people were asked about Blaine, they thought only about the NSC and TPC.

Councilmember Smith anticipated the heart of the city was the area surrounding the NSC.

Mr. Lamb requested the council discuss a local place that might be a good example or reference for what the future of Blaine should be.

Councilmember Smith indicated White Bear Lake was a good example because there were many areas to gather and while you may go to the city for one thing, you inherently stumble upon other things.

Councilmember Jeppson stated the eating area (Malcolm Yards) with a sustainability component was a good example to her because it was community oriented. She reported this was a destination spot.

Councilmember Robertson indicated she loved White Bear Lake because it was walkable. She discussed how walkable Walt Disney was and stated she would like to have walkability considered through the city's new plan, even if this included a pedestrian bridge over 105<sup>th</sup>.

Mayor Sanders commented he loved downtown Wayzata. He noted he also loved the entertainment district in north Dallas because you can spend hours of time there. He reported Legacy West was another area that was very well designed that included food halls and retail.

Councilmember Paul stated he appreciated Rosedale because it included a lot of shopping.

Councilmember Massoglia indicated he liked the Wayzata and Excelsior areas as well. He appreciated the walkability of these communities. He reported the connectivity from the NSC to the new development areas would be critical for Blaine and its residents/visitors.

Mr. Lamb asked what activity or use would make this district memorable.

Councilmember Massoglia recommended the area had to be walkable and connected from one side of 105<sup>th</sup> to the other side of 109<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Councilmember Paul stated adding more sports activities would attract more people to the area.

Mayor Sanders indicated the walkability issue would be important. He then discussed the unique outdoor amenities that were included in Centennial Lakes and Maple Grove.

Councilmember Robertson commented she would like to see the area family friendly and walkable during the day and suggested an adult atmosphere be considered for the evenings. She supported the area having an outdoor skating rink but wanted to see a unique spin put on the amenity to make it original to Blaine.

Councilmember Jeppson stated she wanted to see non-chain food options along with some sustainability component that draws people to the area.

Councilmember Smith indicated it would be nice to have restaurants that could support larger groups and teams.

Mr. Lamb questioned what the barriers to success would be.

Councilmember Smith stated finding private partners to invest in the vision would be a challenge.

Councilmember Jeppson commented a large barrier may be the industrial area to the north.

Councilmember Robertson was concerned the perception of Anoka County and the city of Blaine were the biggest challenges. She indicated it was easy to go to Maple Grove or Roseville and this perception had to change.

Mayor Sanders stated having the right partnerships in place would make this project come to life. He commented finding partners that buy into and improve the vision would be a big barrier for the city.

Councilmember Paul explained opening the city up for collaborative efforts with other entities would be a barrier.

Councilmember Massoglia stated aligning the city's vision with the NSC would be a challenge. However, he believed this would be necessary in order to make this area a success. He was of the opinion the area to the east of Radisson Road should be incorporated into the redevelopment area.

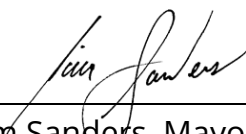
Mr. Lamb asked for last comments or thoughts from the council.

Mayor Sanders stated his last comment was that he would like to see this area as experiential, whether this was food, the amenities or the ability to hang out. He wanted the area to be an experience.

Mr. Lamb requested the council take the remainder of the questions home and provide him with responses in the coming week.

Mr. Thorvig reported the SRA consultants would be coming back to the December 13 workshop meeting where two hours have been allotted for further discussion.

The Workshop was adjourned at 7:24PM.

  
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Tim Sanders, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
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Catherine Sorensen, CMC, City Clerk  
*Submitted by Minute Maker Secretarial*