

Short-Term Actions (1-5 Years)

TIF Feasibility Study and Special Legislation

Tax increment financing (TIF) is one of the most important tools to finance large redevelopment projects like this in Minnesota. Using TIF, municipalities typically divert future property tax revenue increases from a defined area or district toward an economic development project or public improvement project in the community. TIF subsidies are not appropriated directly from a city's budget, but the city incurs loss through foregone tax revenue. The cities of Minnetonka and Edina have both used TIF funding to build public-private partnerships, spur private investment and support physical improvements that enhance the districts surrounding Ridgedale and Southdale Malls.

Northtown District Transportation Study

The Northtown Mall District Vision Plan recommends a bold new mix of uses and a comprehensive network of streets, trails, and pedestrian facilities. It will be important as an early step to further refine the exact sequence and detail of elements for the transportation network proposed. Any improvements should be made with an eye towards the final vision,

but it will also be important to understand what development levels will trigger specific transportation improvements.

The Vision Plan recommends transformational change along CR 10, incorporating roundabouts at key intersections, narrowing the roadway, adding urban curb and gutter treatments, stormwater management treatment areas, and fronting the roadway with development. The plan also recommends improvements along SH 47, University Avenue and changes to the local roadway network.

It is important that the Northtown District Transportation Study includes agency partners from Anoka County, MnDOT and Metro Transit to ensure all stakeholder needs and requirements are addressed and to align support for proposed future roadway improvements.

MnDOT Highway 47 – Planning and Environmental Linkages Study

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is developing a future vision for the 10-mile stretch of Highway 47 (University Ave.) and Highway 65 (Central Ave.) that extends from where they intersect in Northeast Minneapolis northward through Columbia Heights, Hilltop,

FIGURE 54: EXISTING VS PROPOSED LAND USES

Existing Land Use

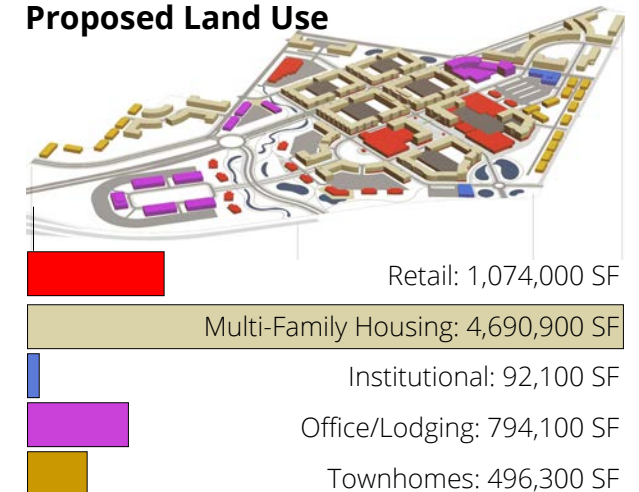


Total SF: 1,928,800 SF

Property Value: \$107,535,600

Annual Tax Generation: \$2,817,051

Proposed Land Use



Total SF: 7,147,400 SF

Property Value: \$1,193,616,000

Annual Tax Generation: \$31,448,560

and Fridley to County Highway 10 in Blaine and Spring Lake Park.

The safety of all who use these roads is a growing concern. There are more accidents than average on segments of Hwy 47 and Hwy 65, and accidents that involve pedestrians and bicyclists are far more likely to result in death or serious injuries. As a result, MnDOT has been engaging the communities along Hwy 47 and Hwy 65 in a new study to better understand the needs of the different users of these roads, and what kinds of future improvements will help make conditions safer for all.

Through discussions with MnDOT representatives during this planning study, it was communicated that pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements are being planned along SH 47 through the study area, particularly at the 85th Avenue and SH 47 intersection. The city should continue to stay abreast of these improvements and coordinate/partner with MnDOT to confirm the improvements support goals of the Vision Plan.

FIGURE 55: NORTHTOWN DISTRICT VISION PLAN - PHASE 1





Environmental Assessment Worksheet and Environmental Impact Statement (AUAR)

The City of Blaine may use an AUAR to review anticipated impacts of the future residential and commercial development and associated infrastructure in the Northtown Mall District. Once an AUAR is complete, specific development proposals that are consistent with the development assumptions, and comply with the conditions of the mitigation plan, are exempt from EAW and EIS requirements. An AUAR update would be required every five years until all the development in the area has been approved.

Explore New Taxes and Sources for Funding Redevelopment

A variety of potential financing tools exist that would help to spur redevelopment. The city should work with a public finance consultant and local chamber of commerce to explore the most effective tools which would support improvements within the district. A local option sales tax has proven effective for other communities to fund large projects but can be viewed negatively from business/property owners. The chamber of commerce could be an important ally in achieving this for the good of the district. Other options include EDA (Economic Development Authority) and HRA (Housing

Redevelopment Authority) Levy's. These options will require additional discussion with each committee and your public finance consultant.

A more strategic sales tax approach could be the implementation of a lodging tax for economic development. This is a new idea under consideration in several cities. The Northtown Mall District Vision Plan creates a bold redevelopment plan intended to draw to visitors, workers and residents to this district. A successful Northtown Mall District will create new opportunities for hospitality in this district and the use of a lodging tax could be a more strategic approach to creating funds for economic development in the area.

Change Zoning to Mixed-Use

Existing zoning in the study area is predominantly defined as regional or community commercial. The city should act to change the zoning in the district to allow a greater mix of land uses, including residential, commercial, and civic. Under the current city zoning code, the zoning district that would allow a greater mix and density is the Development Flex (DF) District. The Development Flex District (formerly known as the Residential Flex District) is intended to provide greater flexibility in land use planning, maximize the choice of housing types and styles, and supports a combination of uses, including residential, commercial and civic.

Create City Implementation Team

One of the key roles for city staff is to advance conversations with developers and property owners towards successful redevelopment agreements. Many of the public finance tools mentioned above will become important tools for discussion with stakeholders to navigate project concepts into concrete redevelopment plans. This will take significant city staff time and a concerted effort to help move private investment forward. A visible and defined city Implementation team is an important step to seeing this plan from vision to reality.



Create a Special Service District

The district could benefit from improved landscaping, wayfinding, and maintenance in the district. One way for the City of Blaine to provide an increased level of service in the district is to create a Special Service District. The enhanced feel and look of the district coupled with incremental redevelopment will help to signify to the tens of thousands of people who drive by or to the Northtown Mall District every day that the area is alive and well, and headed toward a bright future.





Conduct a Springbrook Creek Improvement Study

Ditch 17/Springbrook Creek Improvement Study

Partner with the Coon Creek Watershed District, property owners, and stakeholders to conduct a study to make improvements to Ditch 17. This includes restoring the creek, daylighting more sections, restoring a water meander through the study area, stabilizing streambanks, and establishing wetlands and ponds to better manage stormwater. This will transform the existing ditch into an amenity for the district.

Establish Development Goals for EDA Properties and Issue RFP's

Based on an approved Vision Plan for the Northtown Mall District, city leaders should establish development goals for the properties owned by the Economic Development Authority (EDA) and issue Requests for Proposals to redevelop each site to support the overall goals of the Vision Plan.

Partner with Mall Owner to Transform Mall to Lifestyle Center

Mall ownership has communicated a desire to initiate change in the district, with plans to demolish portions of the mall, extend 85th Avenue through the existing Northtown Mall to CR 10, redevelop 3 of the existing anchors, build multi-family housing with ground level retail along 85th Avenue (Main Street), and build a centralized parking structure to support the proposed redevelopment. These improvements would be part of Phase 1 for the mall transformation from a shopping mall to a lifestyle center.

The mall owner will need to partner with the City of Blaine to help fund many of the improvements being contemplated. Public infrastructure improvements coupled with private development costs will require creative financing solutions. This is an opportunity to catalyze change in the district and success will depend on the ability of the city and mall ownership to forge a partnership in support of the overall goals of the Vision Plan.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Network Improvements

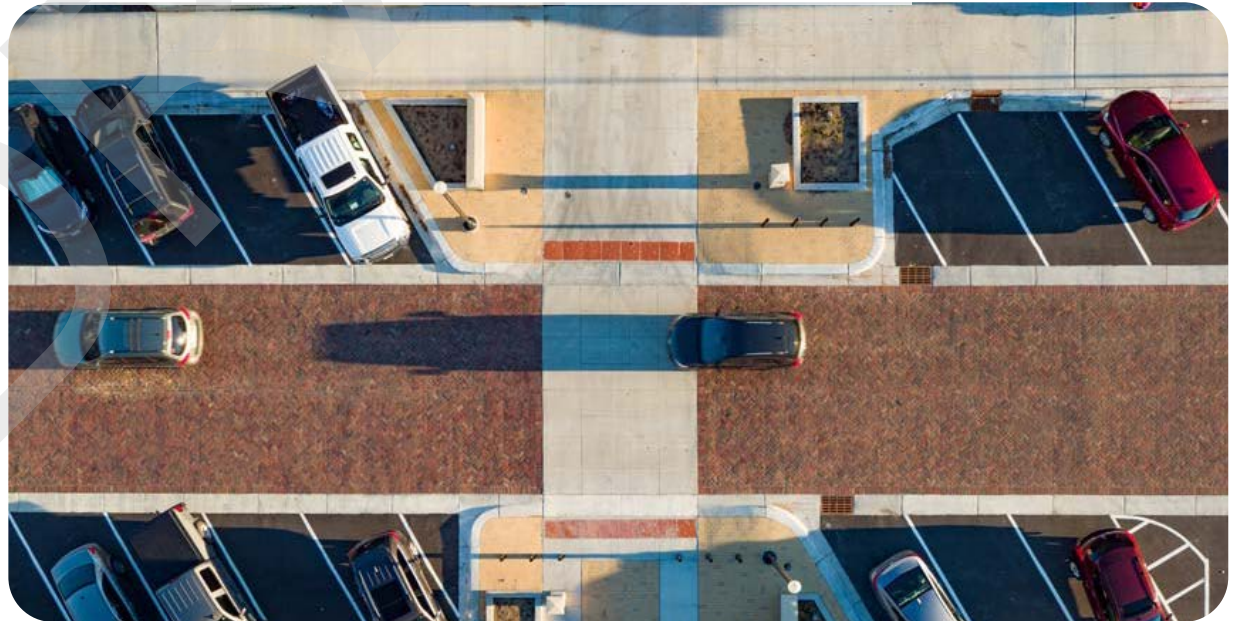
One way to begin making dramatic improvements to the district is to plan for, design, fund, and implement improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle network in the district. The city should begin by conducting a Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation Study for the district that inventories existing conditions and provides a master plan with costs and phasing strategies provided. Improvements should begin with upgraded pedestrian crossings and a sidewalk/trail system integrated into the existing mall properties consistent with the Vision Plan.



Pedestrian and bicycle network improvements

Establish Shared Parking District

Many of the mall's existing perimeter surface parking lots are currently underutilized. This is land that could be redeveloped for other uses. Shared parking can reduce the amount of land needed for parking, creating opportunities for redevelopment, more space for pedestrian circulation, or more open space and landscaping. The city should work with mall ownership and other property owners in the district to better understand parking needs and opportunities to share parking. Establishing a policy to allow a shared parking will provide property owners the flexibility to rethink and right-size parking supplies.



Establish a shared parking district