

Memorandum

TO: File

FROM: Stephen Grittman

DATE: February 12, 2021

RE: Monticello – Chelsea Common Small Area Study

TASK A – Summary Memorandum

NAC FILE NO: 191.14

Background and Introduction

For Task A of the Chelsea Common Small Area Study (SAS), the proposed deliverable is a summary memorandum that will form the basis of the Project Goals and Vision for the Project Area.

Staff work to date has included conceptualizing large and small components of the project area, and purposes of the project generally. This includes developing an understanding of the context of Chelsea Common in the City's Land Use pattern, its Parks and Open Space System, and its Economic Development planning. In addition, staff has been seeking to understand landowner/stakeholder objectives for uses of privately held property, as well as stakeholder objectives for the Small Area Study process itself.

This memorandum will serve as the deliverable for Task A. It is not intended to be a component of the finished SAS itself but will serve as a resource and foundation for the material in that document.

As a part of Task A, staff led and participated in two separate workshops that included (1) a kick-off meeting with stakeholders, City staff, and some public officials, and (2) a kick-off meeting with public officials, including one session with primarily City Council members and Economic Development Authority members followed up by a joint session with Planning Commission and Park and Recreation Commission members. Each of these meetings was designed to elicit general expectations of the SAS, and give participants an opportunity to verbalize any early concerns or possible impediments to project success.

Comments fell into two broad categories. The first related to specific project opportunities and expectations, while the second related to potential project challenges, and whether the project scope should include additional areas of research. These are each summarized below:

Project Opportunities/Expectations (in no particular order):

- Ability to fit this project on largely undeveloped land makes it realistic, rather than trying to wedge it in to existing patterns or redevelopment.
- Water feature is the key element – make it visually attractive, accessible, useful
- Consider use of water for recreation – fishing, canoeing, paddle boats, kayaks, etc.
- Focus on common public elements between the Chelsea Commons area and the Downtown for consistency in cross-messaging.
- But remember distinctions and what makes each area unique.
- Focus on extensive internal pathway development, as well as connections to external pathway system – consider opportunities for multi-modal access.
- Focus on uniqueness of the Chelsea Commons area – what roles can it play in the city’s open space system, and what roles should it not play, given roles played by other facilities, including Downtown and Bertram Chain of Lakes, as well as others?
- What opportunities might be gained by terminating – or retaining - Dundas Road in terms of internal accessibility, visual impacts, etc.?
- Focus on four seasons of activity and benefit for the Commons – plan for improvements that will provide benefit, or be adaptable, to year-round use.
- Take advantage of, and incorporate in the design, an extensive use of grading and grade changes to emphasize and separate plantings and different use areas.
- Opportunities should include spectrum of users from full community, not just abutting development in the Commons.
- Consider water-based amenities, including fountains and other water movement.
- Consider provision of public improvements up front, in order to demonstrate amenities and benefits to prospective development/tenants.
- How might the development – public and private – serve as a template or model for development in other areas?
- Private development could be benefitted, and must be integrated into city planning efforts to ensure positive outcomes. Do not lose focus on attention to partnership.
- Build in public parking areas, assuming many residents may travel by private automobile to visit the Commons, in addition to those walking or biking to the area.
- Development efforts should take advantage of the opportunity to hide/minimize parking areas, including focus on underground to minimize land cover with parking and asphalt.
- City will have as an objective an effort to make the project as cost-neutral as possible.
- Several example projects were recommended, including projects in Edina, St. Louis Park, Blaine, Arden Hills, St. Anthony.

Project Challenges

- Can the city design for the sustainability of water feature – levels, plantings, etc.
- Will the city be able to plan not just for construction, but long-term operation and maintenance?
- How will be able to avoid eyesore potential for water and edge plantings.
- How can we be confident that there is a market for the uses included in the study, at the densities proposed – assuming these densities and uses will be a factor in cost allocation?
- What is the city's planned phasing of construction, and how might this impact private development interests?
- Over-planning of the Chelsea Commons area beyond its reasonable role, and beyond the ability of the project to serve as a benefit to the immediate land uses.
- What are the likely impacts of traffic generated by the development in the area, and does the city have an understanding of those impacts, required on- or off-site traffic improvements, etc.?
- What will be the environmental challenges posed by the project, and how/when should this be subject to additional study?
- How will the boundaries between private and public spaces be managed and/or integrated into the use and design of the project?
- Will the project planning include attention to lighting, street furniture, street improvements, signage, and other details?
- How will the city make plans for implementation – will there be separate follow-up efforts defining both public and private implementation projects?
- Will the city maintain a flexible approach to site development, or does it expect to define and specify development design details?
- How/when will the city be able to provide information on cost contributions from private development, and how will those contributions be estimated?
- How might changes to Dundas Road, and/or the connections along and across that road, be impacted by utility services?
- How is the plan impacted by recent Comp Plan 2040 development directives, including density, floor area ratios, height, other factors? Might this be an issue, depending on the balance between market reality and private development contributions?
- Challenge will be to plan around what we don't know – environmental, markets, etc.

These comments will be incorporated, to various extent, into concept planning for the project, and/or follow-up study as appropriate. The consultant discussion leading each of these workshops included an introduction to the history/genesis of the project conceptualization, and a brief summary of the working Principles, which are summarized as follows:

Project Principles.

The working Project Principles were developed in background work that led to the current SAS project. These principles have been used as guidelines to date but may be refined as the project moves forward. Those principles are as follows:

- A. Introduce multi-family into current commercial district.
- B. Require adherence to a common pond/amenity with extensive trails and open space to enhance both commercial and residential environment.
- C. Include variety of multi-family product types, including high-density market rate and affordable; senior (incl. assisted and memory); luxury owner-occupied; and mid-density townhouse styles.
- D. Be flexible as to specific boundaries and unit styles as a trade-off for higher standards and amenities.
- E. Require commercial uses fronting along Chelsea Road and Cedar Street, as well as much of School Boulevard.
- F. Consider potential additional commercial along School Blvd to Edmonson.
- G. Enhance Edmonson and Dundas to emphasize parkway/open space amenity areas from surrounding roads.
- H. Incorporate gateway plaza element at corner of Chelsea and Cedar.
- I. Enhanced architectural and building materials standard to uphold high-end objectives.

2040 Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan (Vision) set this out as the baseline for the community:

The Vision Statement for the 2040 Comprehensive Plan is: In 2040 the City of Monticello is an inclusive community focused around sustainable growth while maintaining its small-town character. Monticello is a Mississippi River town known for its schools, parks, biking and walking trails and vibrant downtown. Monticello is an evolving, friendly and safe community that respects the quality of its environment, fosters a sense of belonging and connection, encourages a healthy and active lifestyle and supports innovation to promote a prosperous economy.

The Plan's selected growth scenario includes the following elements:

- New retail uses have been developed on existing vacant sites along the Interstate. A new mixed-used center offering retail, commercial services, healthcare and traditional, new urbanist residential uses has also been developed on the large vacant parcels south of Chelsea Road and north of School Blvd and centered along Dundas Road.

- A focus on a variety of housing styles of mixed densities and affordability, with attention to neighborhood quality and sustainability.
- Expanding trail and pathway connections between major open spaces and activity centers throughout the community.
- Infill development on vacant property within the current service area of the community's utility facilities.
- Specific to the area that is the subject of this study, the Comprehensive Plan guides the area for Commercial Residential Flex, a land use category that envisions a variety of land uses, and is described as follows:
 - The purpose of the Commercial Residential Flex designation is to provide limited locations where commercial and residential uses may be allowed and located in close proximity to each other. Mixed-use buildings are typically not appropriate in this designation although they may be considered at discretion of the City. Rather, the intent is to provide locations where a range of compatible uses can be established close to one another. This is a hybrid designation that allows a range of uses including residential, professional office, personal and professional services, hotels, retail and restaurants, entertainment uses and educational services. The goal is to create an urban mix of uses and provide the opportunity for inventive, flexible development standards characteristic of an urban lifestyle center.
- Densities range in this category from low to high, and an emphasis on commercial retail and hospitality uses is indicated.
- The primary constraint to the SAS study area, in this land use category, is the potential for conflicts between the area and the downtown, which may be seen as competing from some of the same portions of the marketplace. Staff has discussed an awareness of this limitation, and attention needed to distinguish the two areas as both advance in development.

Summary.

At this point, there has not been any major conflicts between the working Project Principles, and the expectations or opportunities expressed by the workshop participants. Questions or challenges related significantly to viability and cost allocation to both private landowners and public taxpayers. These questions will need to be addressed in increasing detail as the project proceeds. One objective of this SAS is to develop a general understanding of likely costs and viability. If positive, additional detailed review will be indicated.

Follow-up tasks include a series of site analysis elements, investigation of other, similar projects in communities around the Twin Cities area, leading to the development of 3 sketch-level concepts. Those concepts will be reviewed for feedback and reaction by community officials and stakeholders, after which a single design option will be selected for additional detail. The project scope has been slightly altered to anticipate design development in two forms creating a "Good" option, and a "Great" option. Both will then be evaluated by engineering staff, with financial implications prepared for each. The City will then be asked to select a final path, with the expectation that either path will be supportable.



Preliminary Sketch Layout

