

To: Jake Reilly
City of Northfield
Project/File: Northfield Comprehensive Plan

From: Erin Perdu
Minneapolis
Date: November 9, 2023

Reference: Engagement, Schedule and Scope Revisions

During our regular check-in on 11/1, you relayed some concerns from the Planning Commission about the level of engagement we have achieved thus far and the project schedule. We understand that they may wish to slow down the process to allow more engagement opportunities. As we are wrapping up the Discovery phase, it is an opportune time to evaluate our engagement process to date.

Our goal with the recommendations is to make sure we are engaging with the right people (the “who”), we are communicating with stakeholders and decision-makers appropriately (“how”) and that we allow appropriate time for that communication (“when”). This is all aligned with our Engagement and Communications Plan and the identified targeted audiences.

This memo provides an update on where we are in the process, who (and how many) we have engaged, and some recommendations for schedule and budget adjustments.

Update:

We have completed our community workshop (10/28), which was the last scheduled event of the Discovery Phase of the planning process. The Community Profile is complete and ready to share/post, and the StoryMap is also ready to post. We have also provided the Equity Policy Framework Methodology, the final deliverable of the Discovery Phase. Our original project schedule showed the Discovery Phase ending in September, putting us two months behind.

Our Engagement and Communications Plan aligns the engagement activities with particular milestones. For example, the Discovery engagement was geared towards getting very general input to inform the draft community vision, guiding values, and decision-making framework. We feel it is important to maintain this alignment; thus, if additional engagement is added, the schedule for the milestones it is related to should be extended.

The goals for engagement (copied below) were established in conjunction with the Equity Policy Framework methodology:

“The overarching goal of the public engagement efforts for the City of Northfield is to build meaningful relationships in the community while gathering stakeholder and public input, respond to comments and concerns; understand the problems that need to be solved; and keep decision-makers and other stakeholders informed throughout the process.

- *Goal 1: Equitably engage a diversity of stakeholders.*
- *Goal 2: Provide the greatest amount of access to a diversity of stakeholders with a particular focus on the Latinx, disability, youth, and blue worker population in Northfield.”*

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To date, NEOO has conducted the following engagement events:

- Four pop up events reaching a total of over 250 individuals. Using a map of Northfield, the NEOO team gave participants stickers (in the shapes of gems) to identify the “gems” of Northfield. Participants were also given dollar sign stickers to understand areas of the city where more investment is desired. Participants were also given a postcard with a QR code where they can find more information about the survey. Pop ups were coordinated with the city’s input and are listed below.
 1. August 17, 2023: Third Thursdays in Downtown
 2. August 30th, 2023: Northfield Dog Swim at the Northfield Pool
 3. September 15th, 2023: Carleton Student Fair, the Bald Sport
 4. September 16th, 2023: Hispanic Heritage Festival, Central Park
- Four key informant interviews with stakeholders:
 1. September 28, 2023: Jennifer Barrientos, Health Communities Initiative
 2. October 6, 2023: Jane Bartho, Northfield Chamber of Commerce
 3. October 15, 2023: Amy Cernava and Nate Foley, Post
 4. October 11, 2023: Pam Fickenscher and Jonathan Davis, St John’s Church

Note: We have tried to reach out to Mar at Neighbors United but have not heard back. Jasmine continues to work on finding a date with Age Friendly Northfield (they prefer to meet in person).

- One kick-off meeting on October 23, 2023. NEOO planned and facilitated the kick off meeting for the Comp Plan on October 28, 2023. A World Cafe style activity provided an opportunity to provide input into different topics covered in the Comp Plan such as Housing, Parks and Recreation, Transportation, Economic Development, and Sustainability. Around 66 people attended the event and shared a community meal.
- One survey opened on August 17th, close date to be determined. To date, 241 individuals have taken the survey. The survey is structured around basic demographic information, as well as components that will be addressed in the Comp Plan (housing, transportation, economic development).

The NEOO team has reached over 300 individuals in person and 241 via the online survey in the Discovery Phase.

Key Themes

- The **small town feel** of Northfield is both **a gem and a challenge**. In our key informant interviews, some noted that Northfield can be a difficult place to find community.
- **Affordable housing is needed** for a range of demographics including new families and the elderly. In our interviews, NEOO learned that the requirements for affordable housing can be a barrier for individuals with an (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). These are residents without a social security number. Creating more workforce housing and more energy efficient housing were mentioned at the kick off meeting.
- Those with more **mobility** options, i.e., access to a personal vehicle, did not express much concern with the ability to get around. However, those who **rely on transit or wheels described**

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inconsistent transit schedules. The buses are confusing, and it can be hard to reach common destinations. Additionally, commute times can be long up to 1.5 hours. **Highway 19 and Highway 3 were repeatedly named as dividing the community.**

- **Parks and trails** are heavily used in Northfield and are also seen as a gem. Community members did comment on the need for **more benches and amenities** (such as playgrounds, pickleball, a hockey/ice rink, and a climbing wall) near the river and potentially a new ice skating/hockey facility. Some residents also were not aware of some of the amenities currently in Northfield such as the pool and Central Park.
- **Year-round recreation and community gathering spaces**, that are accessible, and free and/or affordable especially for youth were consistently mentioned.
- **Most daily needs can be met** by respondents in the survey at the Menards, Target, Cub, and the Dollar Store, however **time to travel to these services can vary depending on where you live.** For example, affordable housing is far from amenities such as the grocery store. We heard in key informant interviews that the downtown area does not feel like it is intended to serve local resident needs. Rental car services, more diverse restaurants, and better access to groceries were also mentioned. Additionally, in the survey and in the kick-off meeting participants mentioned the **desire for more industrial uses** in Northfield.
- **Invest** in attracting additional **medical-specifically dental and mental health services.** Our key informant interviews revealed that dental practices in Northfield do not accept a wide variety of insurance, and those without insurance cannot access services at all. This results in residents either not accessing services or traveling long distances to seek dental care. Additionally, there are very few mental health providers (including Psychiatrists) in town, many have very long wait lists so primary care physicians cannot refer patients to someone local.

Necessary Changes

Engagement Events

The community event, pop-ups, targeted interviews, and online survey have provided us ample input to develop a draft Vision, Guiding Values, and Decision-Making Framework. Our recommendation is to add additional engagement opportunities to the Vision phase (when we will have something for people to react to) which comes next and extend the timeline of that phase accordingly. Engagement during this phase will be focused on testing the draft vision and ensuring that it matches the values of the community.

Given the budget for expenses, the NEOO team has conducted key informant outreach by Zoom. To build trust with the community over this year-long process, we are requesting more resources to travel to Northfield and reach audiences that have been unable to participate to date. This will allow for much more meaningful conversations that build trust for future interactions in this project and beyond. We will coordinate our engagement efforts with Bruce Jacobsen and Bob Close to leverage their trusted relationships in the community.

For the next phase of the project, NEOO is recommending working more intentionally with the:

1. Latinx Community and new refugee communities who have made Northfield their home (this could result in 2-4 focus groups to reach different age groups and be organized by overarching topic areas).

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2. Youth, in particular Northfield Union of Youth and the Youth on Boards members (from both city, district, and nonprofit boards)
3. Laura Baker Services Association (disabled population)
4. Residents who live in the North/Northwest area of Northfield have been mentioned throughout as lacking investment (parks, lack of retail, food desert, lack of connection to the rest of Northfield)
5. Post workers, industrial shift workers and commuters

Further, we recommend working with the Northfield Communications team to push the Spanish survey and holding a few focus groups in coordination with Jennifer Barrientos at the Healthy Communities Initiative. We proposed in-person focus groups Northfield Union of Youth, Laura Baker Services, and pop ups in the North/Northwest area (to reach residents) and at the Kwik Trip (to reach Post workers).

The proposed scope revision includes:

- More targeted focus groups (NEOO) with the populations described above that have not participated to date.
- More pop-up events coordinated with Northfield Communications staff. The pop-up events that NEOO staff attended in the summer were great, but we can get more participation from residents, workers, and visitors if Northfield Communication staff can promote pop-up events in advance. Our budget recommendations including more work from the consultant team in getting the word out about these events.
- Optional: More time in person in Northfield (NEOO), in particular to help with flyering, door-knocking, and canvassing. This will aide in getting the word out about engagement opportunities more broadly than can be done with City communications and social media, particularly for those that speak English as a second language.

Planning Commission and Steering Committee

There is clearly need for more information flow between the project management team and the Planning Commission (and soon, the Steering Committee). Stantec and NEOO are willing and able to facilitate that communication. To that end, our revised scope proposes monthly written reports to the Commission and additional two in-person meetings with the Steering Committee. We have also budgeted extra time for Stantec to meet regularly with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Steering Committee.

Schedule

A revised project schedule is attached. The schedule was developed with the understanding that the city wishes to keep the end date of the project as December 2024. This requires that some phases will need to overlap, as the early Discovery and Vision phases will be extended. More specifically, I am recommending:

- An extension of the Discovery phase to accommodate the actual completion of deliverables for that phase (November 2023).

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- An extension of the Vision phase through March 2024 to accommodate the additional engagement above.
- The Analysis phase will begin in January and run concurrently with the Vision phase. Analysis will end in April 2024
- The Plan phase has been extended to allow for more time to vet implementation actions for the plan with both the Steering Committee and Planning Commission. We understand that this is one of the most important parts of the planning process, to ensure that the Plan provides specific guidance to the city to reach the desired vision.
- The Adoption phase is condensed from 4 to 3 months. Because we will be meeting more regularly with the Steering Committee and sharing draft materials to both the Steering Committee and Planning Commission along the way, we believe that 3 months is adequate for review by the public, Planning Commission and City Council.

Budget

Attached is a budget table with costs associated with the consulting team performing the additional tasks outlined in this memo and accommodating the extended timeline of the project. Please consider the budget table a menu of options that the City can choose from based on your priorities and staff capacity.

We appreciate the opportunity to update the scope and schedule to meet the needs of the city.

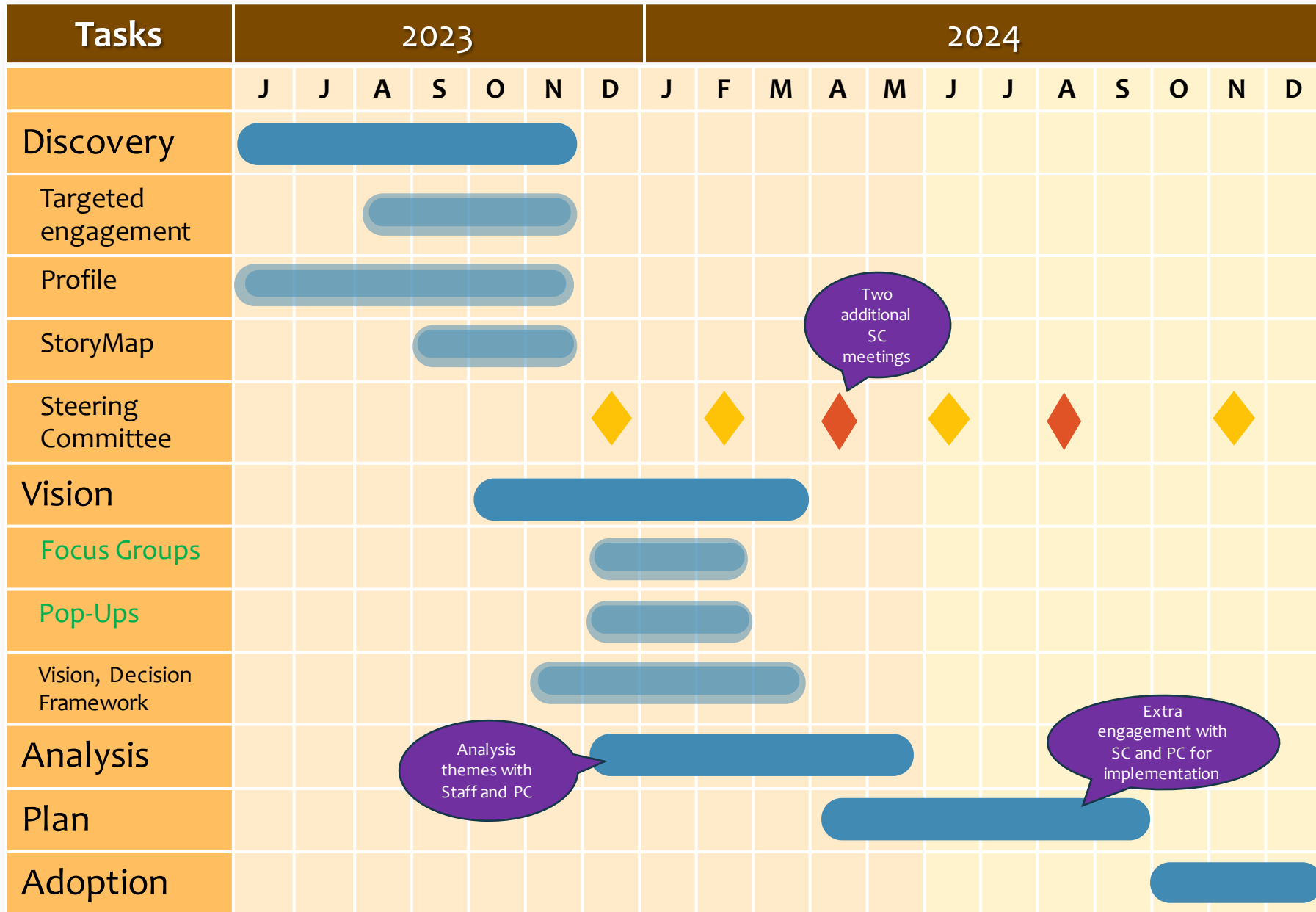
Respectfully,

STANTEC CONSULTING SERVICES INC.



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Attachment: Proposed schedule, budget





FEE ESTIMATE - Northfield Comprehensive Plan
