

# MEMORANDUM

## *Community Development Department*

**DATE:** December 11, 2018

**TO:** Mayor and Northfield City Council

**FROM:** Nate Carlson, Economic Development Coordinator  
Ben Martig, City Administrator  
Members of the Northwest Area Land Use Consultant and Process Advisory Committee

**RE:** Findings of the Committee

Mayor and Council members,

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform the City Council on the findings of the Northwest Area Land Use Consultant and Process Advisory Committee and recommended process for planning of the Northwest Area of Northfield.

The Committee, established by City Council Motion #2018-012, was tasked with providing recommendation on a process forward with consulting services to City Council. Additionally, the Committee was not tasked with defining the land use for the proposed area.

### **Summary of the process to date:**

The timeline of committee meetings and related actions is as follows:

- **February 28, 2018:** Committee members met for the first time; City Staff presented historical information of the Northwest Area.
- **March 12, 2018:** The Committee developed eight questions to guide consultants' consideration of the area and directed staff to develop a Request For Proposal (RFP) for consultants based on the eight questions.
- **April 3, 2018:** The City Council approved these questions in the document titled "Northwest Area Process Advisory Committee Recommendation" on Motion #18-177.
- **May 11, 2018:** The due date for the RFP; two proposals were received.
- **May 21, 2018:** The Committee reviewed and scored the proposals before meeting and agreed the proposals did not align with the intent of the Committee's request and consequently denied both. Having failed to receive acceptable proposals, the

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Committee reconsidered its task and asked staff to schedule a series of several interview meetings with consulting agencies for feedback on the RFP.

- **Between July 25 and August 29, 2018**, the Committee heard from WSB & Associates, Northland Securities, Stantec, MSA Professional Services, Chris Zimmerman of Smart Growth America, and Dena Belzer of Strategic Economics. Much useful information and valuable perspective was shared with the Committee, which is summarized below.

### Summary

The following is a brief summary of the findings by the Committee that have formulated a new direction for the planning of the Northwest Area. Taking into account what we learned from our conversations with consultants, and our own discussions, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

- The 500 acres in northwest area cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall economic development strategies employed by the City; 500 acres represents about 10% of the entire area of the City and must be integrated physically and economically into the community.
- Downtown is one of Northfield's most important assets; development should support and not draw business from downtown.
- Five Hundred acres is more land than is needed for new growth within the foreseeable future. The 2011 Master Plan was considered to be too large and ambitious to be feasible in the current economic and market climate. Since the 2011 Business Park Master Plan included the entire area, any proposed plan would need updated information, e.g. market feasibility; market absorption rates; fiscal analysis & return on investment for the City's estimated capital and maintenance costs for infrastructure including the expected timeline for breakeven on that investment.
- Staff and both appointed and elected decision makers should strive for vertical certainty and general agreement about development policy and process to reduce development uncertainty and risk.

### Recommendations

- **Planning documents** should be reviewed, analyzed and updated:
  - Consider further analysis of citywide land use and infrastructure in order to inform the planning process including official mapping of proposed road and infrastructure corridors.

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- Create and adopt a Future Land Use map.
- Updating plans and policy should also reflect other City priorities such as climate action, equity, and transportation choice.
- **Sustainability:** The fiscal security of Northfield's future with respect to development opportunities and sustainability practices should be at the forefront of planning discussions. Northfield must evaluate the return on public investment for all projects including maintaining and replacing infrastructure improvements.
- **Connecting the entire community** to future development is essential in order to maintain the existing fabric and character of Northfield. The Northfield Hospital will act as a long-term development anchor for the Northwest Area and should spur future development that compliments the thriving downtown and commercial corridor. Care must be taken to ensure that additional development does not result in a disconnected satellite to the City.

### Next Steps

After a thorough review of the findings from the consultant interview process, the Committee has proposed a path forward for planning efforts regarding the Northwest Area.

As an initial action, Committee members agreed that City Development Staff, Northfield Hospital Staff, and St. Olaf College Staff convene to discuss appropriate land uses for the 50 acres of St. Olaf land directly adjacent and west of the Northfield Hospital. A consultant may be necessary to facilitate discussions related to the development of zoning standards. If a consultant is needed, the Committee could facilitate a recruitment of a consultant, but it is premature to seek professional assistance at this time.

City Staff intends to begin these discussions in the near future, and the Committee will no longer meet. City Council and the relevant boards and commissions will be engaged throughout the next steps of the planning process.

The Committee believes that significant information has been collected and that alternative processes exist and should be explored. The Committee fully supports an incremental development approach for the Northwest Area subject to the recommendations listed above rather than a large master-planned development.