



**DATE:** July 21, 2016  
**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Planning Commission  
**REGARDING:** Return of Meadows Park parcel

Minnesota statutes state no publicly owned interest in real property within the municipality shall be acquired or disposed of, nor shall any capital improvement be authorized by the municipality without first obtaining input from its Planning Commission. As per Minnesota Statute 462.356, subd. 2, the Planning Commission has assessed whether the return of 4.6 acres of public land from the Meadows Park acquisition is in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan for Northfield as adopted on November 17, 2008.

The Planning Commission discussed this matter on July 21, 2016, utilizing the vision statement and goals identified in the Comprehensive Plan.

### **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ANALYSIS:**

A pre-plat for the subject property called Fargaze Meadows was developed in 2002 that envisioned both parcels almost entirely developed as residential, and the *Northfield Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan* developed in 2008 envisioned the majority of Outlot D and a small portion of Outlot C to become open space greenway. The parcels are within the city annexed area and are currently zoned N2-B, which is a residential zone. This change to the future status of the land should be taken into consideration in the analysis of the project's conformance to the Comp Plan.

#### **A. The project adheres to the vision statement in the Comprehensive Plan.**

##### **Vision Statement**

Northfield values its unique heritage as a mill and college town, and will reflect its community identity by *preserving its historic and environmental character, and enhancing its quality of place* through a progressive and sustainable development pattern.

#### **B. The project appears to align with the inherent reasoning and purpose behind relevant goals in the Plan. (Please note that not all goals will be relevant to all projects).**

## COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Goal: Decisions influencing Northfield's future land development will reflect the city's history and natural and built environments, and enhance social capital.

The Community Identity Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan contains 10 key findings, several of which are pertinent to the development of Meadows Park. It identifies a divergent development pattern that has gotten away from the grid system, inconsistent community gateways, the need for functional public spaces, a lack of public art, and places a high value on education.

The return of the 4.6 acres in question can address these key issues by meeting the following Northfield Comprehensive Plan Community Identity Goals:

CI 4.1 Guide new development to be compatible with, and/or expand on the existing grid network.

*The Meadows Park Master Plan demonstrates an attempt to expand the existing grid network by extending Abbey Road and Ford Parkway for future connection with Hall Avenue. However, north-south gaps will remain as Erie Drive will now end at the park.*

CI 4.4 Require new neighborhoods to create neighborhood scaled streets, with street trees and sidewalks.

*The former Fargaze Meadows plan contained a detailed plan with neighborhood scaled streets. Care should be taken to ensure the park does not compromise connectivity.*

## LAND USE

Goal: An efficient use of land resources that emphasizes strategic development, redevelopment, and land intensification, preserves environmentally significant areas and agricultural resources, preserves a strong and vibrant downtown, preserves of a sense of place, and promotes sustainable planning practices.

The Key Findings of the Land Use Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan center on the availability and appropriateness of land for future development. The resulting land use principles focus on the quality, pattern, character and organization of development and recognize that the City can take action that induces or dampens, maintains or changes future development patterns. Dedication of a large park can certainly change the future development pattern for better or worse. The Land Use Principles pertinent to the return of the Meadows Park land are as follows:

Land Use Principle #1 - The small town character will be enhanced.

Northfield's built environment is defined by a distinct land use pattern and architectural character that includes a mix of traditional residential neighborhoods...

- b. Future areas for growth and development will reflect the essential elements of "Old Northfield" with respect to the form and pattern of development.
- c. New development, redevelopment, and land intensification will be sensitive to pedestrians in terms of scale and walkability.

*The Meadows Park Master Plan enhances Northfield's small town character. The large park has been broken up into smaller sub-areas with different programming to mimic the old town land use pattern. An attempt has been made to maximize street connectivity and walkability through street and trail extensions.*

Land Use Principle #3 - The preference for accommodating future growth is in infill locations, then redevelopment/ land intensification opportunities, and then on the edge of existing developed areas.

- a. Priority areas for future development will be identified for all three areas (infill, redevelopment/intensification and greenfield). It should not be implied that infill and redevelopment/intensification capacity must be consumed prior to support for any greenfield development.
- b. When infill, redevelopment, or land intensification occurs it will be done with great care so as not to compromise the quality of life for existing residents as a result of inappropriate building placement or size, unreasonable traffic impact or other identifiable negative consequences.
- c. When new development occurs at the edge of the community through annexations, it will be done with great care. This can be done by creating well-defined residential neighborhoods, a green edge and well-designed places for commerce, so as not to compromise the rural landscape or the small town character.

*The Fargaze Meadows area is included in the calculations for available developable land shown on Map 4.2 of the Comp Plan, with exclusion of the Environmentally Constrained area of the intermittent stream. It is also shown as in the Pipeline for residential development on Map 4.1 Existing Land Use. Update this section to include current available lots. Removing 40 acres of land from the Pipeline drops the percentage of developable land within the city from 6.3% to 5.3%, notwithstanding other development which has occurred since 2008. The inventory of vacant residential land was updated in 2016 and revealed only 84 buildable single-family lots in the city. This represents only 1% of the 6,887 housing units counted in Census 2010. There are no new annexations or subdivisions underway that will absorb the loss of the planned Fargaze Meadows housing stock. The return of the 4.6 acres will provide for*

*the development of 18 single family housing units. This will help offset the loss of planned housing from the Fargaze development.*

Land Use Principle #8 - A wider range of housing choices will be encouraged - in the community as well as in neighborhoods.

- a. New residential development will offer a variety of housing types and prices, including affordable and workforce housing.
- b. Housing diversity will be integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood.

*Allowing for residential development on Abbey Road and along the future Ford Parkway will encourage additional housing choice in Northfield.*

Land Use Principle #11 - Places will be better connected, in part to improve the function of the street network and also to better serve neighborhoods.

Streets that are disconnected limit the flow of traffic in the community by forcing traffic onto major and minor arterials, which can create traffic congestion. Encouraging an interconnected street pattern will create more travel options for residents to arrive at destinations, thereby decreasing travel time/distance, reducing congestion and improving wayfinding.

- a. The street pattern will be improved to keep local traffic off major arterials, and high-speed through traffic off local streets.
- b. A better connected grid or modified grid street system is the preferred network for future development and redevelopment.

*The Meadows Park Master Plan demonstrates an attempt to expand the existing grid network by extending Abbey Road and Ford Parkway for future connection with Hall Avenue. The park is also proposed with three access points that will disperse traffic from overly impacting existing neighborhoods.*

Land Use Principle #12 - Opportunities will be created to walk and bike throughout the community.

- a. The design of local streets will encourage pedestrian and bicycle movement through features such as sidewalks, bikeways, narrower street widths, and high quality planter and buffer strips to protect the pedestrian.
- b. Sidewalks, walking trails and bikeways will be connected to public parks and other destinations, including shopping and entertainment areas.

*The Meadows Park Master Plan creates numerous opportunities for walking and bicycling. There is a looped internal sidewalk and trail network that connects with the existing trail system.*

In addition to the Land Use Principles, the Land Use chapter also provides specific strategies to achieve the Principles. The return of the 4.6 acres meets the following Land Use strategies:

LU 3.1 Create incentives to encourage infill, redevelopment and land intensification.

LU 4.4 Create regulations that require high-quality pedestrian streets with sidewalks, street trees, and adequate lighting, where appropriate.

LU 4.5 Create regulations that allow for or require a mix of housing types within new and existing neighborhoods that are also compatible with development patterns in these neighborhoods.

LU 4.7 Encourage connections among neighborhoods via roads, sidewalks and multi-use paths.

LU 9.2 Expand the multi-use path system to connect neighborhoods, districts and corridors.

LU 9.4 Improve walking and biking travel patterns through improving connections to the Northfield trail system, improved street crossings and foot-bridges.

#### SEWER AND WATER RESOURCES

Goal: Provide potable water, wastewater collection and treatment, and surface water control to the community in an environmentally sensitive, financially equitable and fiscally-responsible manner.

This Chapter provides the guidance for development of the City's sewer and water infrastructure. While development of a park does not consume much sewer capacity, it can impact the water system by increasing demand due to irrigation of turf and landscaping. More importantly, it can interfere with the orderly construction of the infrastructure systems. The future expansion of the system is addressed in this chapter. It reflects the amount of planning already done to ensure adequate resource delivery to the planned development for this area. Care should be taken to ensure that gaps are not created in the infrastructure system.

SW 1.3 For orderly expansion of public services, new developments will be located in areas contiguous to existing development within the city limits.

*The orderly expansion of public services was planned for during the design of Fargaze Meadows. Streets and infrastructure are stubbed in on Abbey Road, Erie Drive and Brogan Drive. Design of the park should not preclude the future planned connections of streets and public infrastructure.*

## TRANSPORTATION

Goal: Facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services within and through the city on a safe, convenient, coordinated and fiscally responsible network of routes using a variety of transportation modes.

Future Transportation System: The supporting future road network has been developed to accommodate potential long-term growth in the Urban Expansion Area (beyond the Priority Growth Area), as discussed in Chapter 4, Land Use. The future roadway classification system is shown on Map 7.4. A balanced set system of minor arterials, and major and minor collectors, is needed to provide acceptable motorized and non-motorized mobility and access to developing areas, as well as to enable the principal and minor arterials to serve longer, regional travel. It is not anticipated that all of the proposed roadways will be constructed by 2030, but these roadways should be constructed as development occurs.

TR 1.7 - Require local street and trail connectivity between adjacent residential neighborhoods and other land uses for newly developing areas.

*Preliminary designs for Meadows Park show new street and trail connections between adjacent residential neighborhoods.*

TR 2.3 - Provide adequate roadway and intersection capacity to accommodate anticipated growth of the community and resulting forecasted traffic volumes.

*Future roadway sections should be designed to accommodate anticipated future growth.*

TR 2.4 - Establish a pedestrian walkway system connecting residential, educational, commercial/retail, employment and recreational destinations throughout the city.

*The Meadows Park Master Plan shows connections to the existing trail system.*

TR 3.1 - Establish a transportation system vision to provide the necessary transportation network to support the density and type of existing and future land uses.

*Shifting the planned Ford Parkway alignment to the south of the park provides the required east-west collector connection in a manner that facilitates anticipated residential density, does not bisect the park, and prevents the City from having to build the road.*

TR 3.3 - Balance the transportation system needs with the potential impacts and affects upon the natural features of the community.

*Shifting the planned Ford Parkway alignment to the south of the park mitigates potential impacts to the park from the roadway and preserves the natural features of the drainage ways and trails.*

TR 3.5 - Encourage interconnected development patterns to create more convenient travel options for residents, foster a sense of neighborhood and maintain acceptable traffic volume levels.

*The preliminary park designs demonstrate an attempt to expand interconnectivity by extending Abbey Road and Ford Parkway for future connection with Hall Avenue. The park is also proposed with three access points that will disperse traffic from overly impacting any one neighborhood street.*

TR 4.4 - Plan for and preserve opportunities for necessary transportation system improvements.

*The preliminary park designs reflect sensitivity to the Comprehensive Plan by planning for and preserving opportunities for necessary transportation system improvements by extending Abbey Road and Ford Parkway.*

## PARKS AND RECREATION

Goal: Promote a high quality of life in Northfield by providing a balanced and sustainable system of parks, natural open spaces, athletic facilities and trails consistent with the historic sense of place in the community.

PR 2.1 Enhance the quality of life within the city by providing adequate parkland and natural areas to fulfill the present and future needs of residents.

*Currently 26% of the area in the corporate limits of Northfield is parks or open space. There are 0.071 acres of parkland per person or 3,093 square feet per person. These numbers are high when compared across the nation, but also a source of pride for the City. It is safe to say there is adequate parkland for existing and future needs with or without the addition of Meadows Park. A Trust For Public Lands report on park land across the USA is attached to this staff report for reference.*

PR 2.2 Use the parks, natural areas and interconnecting trail corridors as a major factor in shaping development.

*The interconnecting network of trail corridors has been considered in the development of Meadows Park.*

PR 2.4 Encourage sequential growth within the city in harmony with the natural environment.

*The Meadows Park Master Plan shows a balance between maintaining the sequential growth of the city and being in harmony with the natural environment.*

PR 3.1 Provide a trail system that emphasizes harmony with the natural environment.

*Planned trails and trail connections are in harmony with the natural environment.*

#### COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The purpose of the Community Facilities Chapter is to identify current community facilities in Northfield as to plan for their future renovation or expansion. It is not applicable to the park project.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of the Economic Development Chapter is to identify the objectives and strategies for the success of economic development in Northfield. Development of Meadows Park will have limited impact on economic development. There could be some economic boost from additional tourists, meeting goal:

ED 4.6 Support programming efforts to further tourism in Northfield, e.g., Historic and Festival Programs, Art and Cultural Programs and Tours.

#### HOUSING

Goal: Provide housing opportunities for all people who live and work in Northfield. A variety of housing options, including rental housing, should be available as first-time homebuyers have families, become empty nesters, become elderly and eventually need assisted living services. Green technology, environmental considerations and strong neighborhood qualities should be combined to provide a safe, secure and pleasing living environment.

Chapter 11 of the Comprehensive Plan focuses on Housing, and provides an analysis of existing conditions to provide a framework for future housing in Northfield. As the



housing market has changed drastically since the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, further up to date analysis of the housing market is provided here, in line with the following Comp Plan strategy.

HS 1.5 As determined necessary, conduct a city-wide housing analysis to identify current housing types, densities, values, vacancy rates and locations for use as a guide to future housing development and as a measure of affordable housing.

*The Fargaze Meadows area is included in the calculations for available developable land shown on Map 4.2 of the Comp Plan, with exclusion of the Environmentally Constrained area of the intermittent stream. It is also shown as in the Pipeline for residential development on Map 4.1 Existing Land Use. Removing 40 acres of land from the Pipeline drops the percentage of developable land within the city from 6.3% to 5.3%, notwithstanding other development which has occurred since 2008. The inventory of vacant residential land was updated in 2016 and revealed only 84 buildable single-family lots in the city. This represents only 1% of the 6,887 housing units counted in Census 2010. There are no new annexations or subdivisions planned or in process that will absorb the loss of the planned Fargaze Meadows housing stock.*

The park plan indicates an area in the top north-east portion of the plan to be developed as housing. This housing area includes an extension of Abbey Road to connect with Hall Avenue, and would incorporate nine residential units on each side of the street, for a total of 18 additional residential units.

Preliminary estimates of the space indicate that up to 18 parcels are available, at lot sizes averaging 80 feet by 130 feet. Utilizing area comparables, the developed lots would average \$300,000. At an estimated annual property tax of \$5,000 per unit, Abbey Road, once developed, would provide more than \$90,000 in annual tax revenue.

Whereas it is a legal option of the City to develop affordable housing in the Meadows area, it is staff's recommendation that the highest and best housing use for the Meadows area is market rate housing, to be developed by a private developer. Northfield is home to several reputable private developers who have a long history of providing quality developments in and around Northfield. There is no gap in the private development market which would only be served by the City acting as a market rate housing developer.

The HRA reviewed the Meadows Park project at their meeting on Monday, April 13, 2015, and approved HRA Resolution 2015-03, supporting the City Council's direction to convert 4.6 acres back to housing, to be developed by the private market.

HS 1.3 Establish development regulations that provide for a greater degree of connection between neighborhoods through efficient street design and use of pedestrian trails and sidewalks.

HS 1.7 The preference for new residential development should be for infill, then redevelopment/land intensification, and then greenfields within the city limits, and then within the Priority Growth Area.

HS 3.3 Encourage developments with a mix of housing price ranges and incomes. Options should be considered for both owner-occupied and renter-occupied units.

*The extension of Abbey Road minimizes infrastructure and community services necessary for new development because it is an existing road with stubbed utilities. It also creates a positive traffic impact with the connection to Hall Avenue, allowing for through-traffic flow to ease congestion in other areas of the neighborhood. Additionally, the extension of Abbey Road to Hall Avenue embraces and expands the grid pattern development desired by the Comprehensive Plan.*

*The sidewalks on both sides of the street encourage pedestrian access and the park bordering the south side of the housing development creates a green edge between residential development and park land.*

### **C. Conservation and Development Map**

The parcel is located in the “Pipeline” area of the Conservation and Development Map, located in Chapter 4 of the Comprehensive Plan. These are vacant lands that have been approved for preliminary plat by the City, but have not yet been final platted.

Based on this comprehensive review, it is the opinion of the Planning Commission that the return of 4.6 acres of land from the Meadows Park acquisition is in accordance and compliance with the vision, goals and land use principles identified in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan for Northfield.

Respectfully yours,

Richard J. Schulte  
Chairman, Northfield Planning Commission

Commissioners:  
David DeLong  
Joe Gasior  
Jay Jasnoch  
Michael Skunes  
Kate Stuart