

March 15, 2012



MEMO TO: Northfield Planning Commission
Michele Merxbauer, Interim Community Development Director

FROM: *Save the Northfield Depot*

RE: Compatibility of STND plans with the Northfield Comprehensive Plan

We are providing the following information for your review of the plans of *Save the Northfield Depot* (STND) to save, restore and move the 1888 depot to city owned property near the east side of the tracks on the Q-Block. Below are brief summaries of evidence that the project is consistent with the vision, principles, goals and strategies found in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan (Vision and Goal statements are abbreviated; see full statements in PC packet Attachment 2 of Item 4a. or in Comprehensive Plan pages as noted).

Vision - Comprehensive Plan (p. 1.6)

“Northfield . . . will reflect its community identity by preserving its historic and environmental character . . .”, p. 1.6.

Northfield is at risk of losing its solitary reminder of Northfield’s once vibrant railroads. Preservation has become urgent and depends on moving the building. Preservation of its context next to the tracks is critical to its integrity.

The building faces local dangers. The depot is in disrepair, and there are additional concerns due to vandalism, and periodic use by homeless and youth.

Land Use Principles - Comprehensive Plan (pp. 4.9 - 4.13)

#1. Enhance small town character.

The restored depot will be one of the historic buildings in the downtown that define Northfield’s historic small town character. Also contributing to the character is its provision of a place for public events and a gathering place close to downtown.

#2. Protect and enhance natural environment in community.

The restoration of the derelict depot with appropriate landscaping will address its current, blighted context.

#3. Preference for infill locations vs. on the edge.

Placing the depot on this long-vacant is an excellent use of this land so close to the tracks – where this historic building belongs but is less desirable for many other uses.

#4. New residential communities will have strong neighborhood qualities. (na)

#5. Use environmentally sensitive and sustainable practices.

Reuse of existing buildings is valued by Northfield citizens as a responsible use of resources. Preservation is a prime sustainability effort and fulfills goals of Northfield’s GreenStep City initiative. Reclaimed materials from current site and demolished freight building will be used in the project.

#6. Preference for mix of uses that are distinctive and contribute to vitality.

The public has expressed a preference for a mix of uses on the site including Visitors

Center, transportation center, commercial component and a place for public events. The plans will also enhance the mix of uses on the block.

#7. Small scale, integrated neighborhood-serving commercial. (na)

#8. Wide range of housing choices. (na)

#9. Protect rural character of community. (na)

#10. Streets that create an attractive public realm and exceptional places for people.

The historical depot in the proposed, highly visible site from adjacent streets would serve as a city core area attraction for visitors, tours, and enhance commerce through tourism as well as an attractive gathering place for citizens for special events and for their transportation needs. Such points of interest can also be a traffic slowing measure.

#11. Provide connectivity of streets to serve neighborhoods.

Providing such an enhancement on that portion of the block of an attractive, restored building creates an aesthetic and connective link, a “hook”(as described in Bill Johnson’s work) between the west side neighborhood and the east side historical downtown and neighborhood. The project also encourages pedestrian and other transportation modes.

#12. Create opportunities to walk and bike throughout community.

Activity created on that area of the block is likely to create increased pedestrian and bike traffic. The plans also include public amenities such as benches, bike racks, bike repair station, way-finding signs, public art, etc.

Objectives and Strategies - Comprehensive Plan (pp. 12.6 – 12.19)

Below are excerpts from the most relevant objectives and strategies in the Comprehensive Plan that are addressed by the *Save the Northfield Depot* proposal.

Community Identity (CI):

CI 2 Strengthen downtown as an historical and cultural center of the community.

CI 2.1 Maintain and enhance existing public spaces and create new public gathering places for social interaction.

CI 3 Preserve historic sites and structures.

CI 3.2 Provide economic incentives and design flexibility to aid in the restoration and long-term economic vitality of historically significant buildings in the Downtown.

CI 4 Encourage a traditional development pattern.

CI 4.3 Ensure new development provides for areas that contribute to the public realm, such as plazas and other public gathering places.

CI 4.6 Encourage architectural styles and scales that contain a relationship to the overall community identity.

CI 6 Continue to host and sponsor local arts and cultural activities and festivals.

CI 6.7 Incorporate public art into the design of existing and public places including community buildings and infrastructure.

Land Use (LU):

LU 1 Protect and enhance the small town character

LU 1.1 Create regulations that yield commercial and office structures that reflect local vernacular.

LU 2 The downtown core is an important aspect of community life.

- LU 2.1 Create new opportunities for businesses by reinvesting in the infrastructure and public spaces in and around the downtown.
- LU 3 Encourage a compact development pattern, and support infill, redevelopment and land intensification.
 - LU 3.1 Create incentives to encourage infill, redevelopment and land intensification.
 - LU 3.2 Work collaboratively to identify structures and sites for redevelopment, intensification or reuse.
- LU 8 Provide locations that facilitate economic development opportunities.
 - LU 8.5 Create architectural and site controls for development on Hwy 19 and Hwy 3, in order to present a high quality image for the character of the city.
- LU 9 Improve transportation choices and efficiency.
 - LU 9.3 Require site design principles that encourage the use of public transit . . . sources of public transit include bus or vanpools from colleges, nearby towns a possible future commuter rail station, taxi service, or the Northfield Transit services.

Transportation (TR):

- TR 1 Effectively manage the transportation needs of a vibrant, growing town an the surrounding areas for residents, businesses and visitors.
 - TR 1.4 Promote multi-modal transportation uses and principles throughout the city.
 - TR 1.6 Enhance and expand public transit services to ensure mobility for all residents and visitors.
- TR3 Balance transportation needs with the Land Use Principles identified in Chapter 4 of this 2008 Comprehensive plan.
 - 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.
- TR 4 Implement the transportation vision through strategic funding, and objective and definitive decision making, with the collaboration of surrounding jurisdictions.
 - TR 4.1 Establish concentrated and consistent support for local and regional political leadership to achieve components of the transportation system vision.

Economic Development (ED):

- ED 1. The city will support existing businesses.
 - ED 1.4 Adopt a regulating policy that accommodates and provides incentives for infill and redevelopment opportunities.
- ED 4 Support the economic vitality of the community through business retention and recruitment an enhancement of tourism opportunities.
 - ED 4.6 Support programming efforts to further tourism in Northfield, e.g., Historic and Festival Programs, Arts and Cultural Programs and Tours.