

Community Commons – Animated Infrastructure

Report of the Community Needs and Public Realm Working Group

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As the Community Needs/Public Realm Working Group, we have been tasked with determining what the community wants and needs in Edina and how the public realm fits in to those wants and needs. We first looked at the relevant data to identify what the community needs and then we did our specified homework assignment to gauge how well Edina is doing in meeting the identified needs. For our first task, assessing community needs, we ask and answer a series of questions with the relevant data including a national Gallup survey, the 2006 Edina Parks and Recreation Survey, the 2000 and 2010 Census data for Edina, a 2010 League of Women Voters Study and data from the May 2011 Community Conversation and 2011 Steering Committee Visioning Exercise. Several of us also took a field trip to a roundtable in Minneapolis on Creative Place-making.

Identifying Community Wants and Needs

First we looked at the national data that answers the question “What attaches people to their communities?” A 2008 study by Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation surveyed 43,000 people in 26 communities over 3 years to answer the question. The study found three main qualities that attach people to place: social offerings, such as entertainment venues and places to meet, openness (how welcoming a place is) and the area’s aesthetics.

We then asked the question: What attaches people to Edina?

Where do they go for social interaction?

Where do they go to make new social connections?

Where do they go to find/fit into a network?

Where do new members of the community connect with others?

Where do they go for the arts or to have an art experience?

Where do they go for fitness and recreation?

Where do they go to dine (breakfast, fine dining, cafes, ethnic, drinking establishments)?

Where do teens go?

One obvious answer to this question is that Edina residents make social connections through the schools. People move and stay here based upon Edina School’s reputation.

This part of the population is well served (and we all pay for it in terms of the school

district levy), the infrastructure is centered mostly on athletics and there are other activities such as theater and music related to the secondary schools with auditoriums: South View, Valley View and the High School (the Edina Performing Art Center).

But we also know from the census data that 70% of our population do not have school-aged children. We also know that 33% of Edina residents live alone. The social needs of those households are, by and large, not being met by the school district. So we pose the questions again taking the schools out of the equation.

What are our underserved populations and how are their needs currently being met?

Empty nesters - Population aged from approximately 45 to 65 plus. Where are the needs of this group being met?

Social interaction & new social connections & networking

Community Education classes

Golf

Private clubs and churches

Art Experience

Art Center- a very small percentage with 323 members from Edina

No gallery scene or performing arts offerings to speak of, very limited public art

Residents new to the community

There is really no public place for them to go that would allow them to get information about Edina and its various “offerings”.

Fitness and recreation

The fitness aspect is fairly well covered by a multitude of private offerings and the parks cover recreation aspects well in the summer. In the winter, people resort to walking at the malls or depending on the severity of the winter, the trails at Bredesen.

Dining

There has been a lot of development in the last couple of years in the Edina dining scene. 50th and France has become somewhat of a dining destination, but there is a narrow band of offerings and few restaurants on the west side of Edina.

There are virtually no places where this demographic can meet in an unstructured environment to meet social, recreational and cultural needs. Further evidence of this is presented by the simple fact that this very group had a lot of trouble finding meeting space for their discussions.

Edina fits very well with the suburban concept of a “bedroom community” and not so

much with that of a lively, active, participatory city community with a rich social and cultural life.

Teens - Where are the needs of this group being met?

Social interactions

- Sports/other extra curricular programming
- Malls
- Parks (in good weather)
- Perkins – after school

Art

- Mainly in the schools
- A few painting and pottery programs at the art center; Performing arts are also a school related function.

Fitness and recreation

- Parks in the summer

For those teens not involved in extracurricular activities through their schools, there is a dearth of places to go, especially in inclement weather. We ask teens to engage in healthy behaviors yet provide them few places to do so. Even for those teens enrolled in Edina's after school programs, there are very limited recreational and cultural spaces. Edina's teen summer and after school program leaders often have to take their kids to surrounding suburbs to find the amenities that kids enjoy.

Parents of young children-Where are the needs of this group being met?

- Malls
- Edinburgh
- Early Childhood Family Education

For parents new to Edina finding resources, social connection and support can be surprisingly difficult.

What do residents want?

Edina residents crave social interaction yet have limited opportunities for such.

In 2006 the Parks and Recreation Department conducted a survey of Edina residents asking about their parks and recreation needs/wants. Unfortunately, those survey questions only tangentially address non-physical activity preferences. But the same question asked in 7 different ways yields the same results: Edina residents want and support walking and biking trails (89% support) and an indoor exercise and fitness facility (75% support.)

The results of the May 2011 Community Conversation in which 25 members of the community participated in a focus group sponsored by our working group yielded a similar conclusion.

In its February 2010 report "Private Access to and Use of Public Facilities in Edina" the Edina League of Women Voters supports an Edina Community Center that meets the needs and interests of all age groups. This is predicated on the study's findings that there are not enough facilities and not a good way for non-athletic teams and adults to use the present facilities.

What happens when a City does not have the amenities expected by an educated 21st century populace?

Residents often take their dollars outside the city. Ultimately they may leave the city for cities that offer more to do. In the white paper "Creative Placemaking" the authors Ann Markusen and Ann Gadwa say, "Creative place-making generates economic returns in multiple ways. Art and cultural investments help a locality capture a higher share of local expenditures from income. Instead of traveling elsewhere for entertainment and culture, or going to a big-box retailer or mall for shopping fun, residents spend more on local talent and venues, money that re-circulates at a higher rate in the local economy. By using vacant and underutilized land, buildings and infrastructure, investments in creativity increase their contribution to the public good and private sector productivity." The white paper sites examples in Cleveland, Phoenix, Seattle, Chicago and Portland of how investments in the arts have been economically and socially transformative.

The data from the 2010 census readily confirm that residents in a certain demographic group chose to take their dollars outside of Edina. While it is just one of 16 communities in MN to gain school aged children, Edina lost significantly in the 35 to 49 age group and 65 to 84 age group. It is also interesting to note that the 50 to 64 age group grew significantly. This trend could prove detrimental to property values, as the diminishing 35 to 49 age group is typically in the prime of their earning potential.

The under 18 population in Edina grew from 20% in 1990 to 21.5% in 2000 to 26% in 2008, pointing out the need to address their wants and desires.

How do surrounding communities address these issues?

Every one of our neighboring communities has some centralized place for the community to gather and interact. Below are excerpts from their descriptions:

Bloomington

Bloomington Center for the Arts occupies the north end of Bloomington Civic Plaza. The center is the focal point for the performing and visual arts for thousands of people in Bloomington and the surrounding communities.

The facility is fully used by the eight member organizations of the Bloomington Fine Arts Council, City and community functions as well as private theater, rehearsal space and classroom rental.

Minnetonka

The Minnetonka Community Center provides meeting and banquet facilities for groups up to 250 people. In addition, city business is conducted at the Community Center through the operation of Minnetonka Senior Services, City Council meetings and Planning Commission meetings.

The Minnetonka Community Center is operated by the City of Minnetonka. The Community Center serves as the location of the City's Senior Citizen Program and is also available for general community use. The facility contains several meeting, conference, and craft room areas and two "special use" areas—the Council Chambers and the Dining/Community Room.

The City Council recognizes the desirability of having the Community Center used as much as possible by residents and community groups.

One of the special features in this building is the banquet room, a combination of the Community Room and Dining Room. When combined this room can accommodate as many as 250 persons and comes equipped with tables, chairs, podium, public address system, dance floor and a commercial kitchen. The dining room and community room can be used as individual rooms since they are separated by a moveable partition wall. These areas are ideal for a variety of functions including large meetings, anniversary parties, family reunions, company parties, conferences, and wedding receptions.

The Williston Center-Minnetonka's City owned and run recreational facility, includes tennis courts, fitness rooms, a pool, a gym with batting cages, a whirlpool and sauna.

Minneapolis

Neighborhood Focus Recreation centers are grouped by location into Community Service Areas (CSA) so program and service resources can be shared among neighboring centers to best meet the park and recreation needs of the community. An activity or amenity absent from one recreation center will likely be found at another location nearby. While each CSA is unique, all are alike in their focus on delivering high quality programs and services.

Hopkins

The Arts Center builds community through the arts by fostering creative expression and providing artistic and educational opportunities for people of all ages.

Events each year include theater performances, concerts, films, exhibitions, lectures and classes. The Arts Center hosts performances and exhibitions ranging from international visual arts shows to local theater and musical performances.

The HCA is located in downtown Hopkins, within walking distance of several restaurants, antique and other shops and a movie theater complex. Parking is free.

The Depot, an old rail station on Excelsior Blvd serves as a teen center for Hopkins teens. It houses a coffee shop, run by teens, and offers a safe place for teens to hang out, interact, and listen to the occasional musical performance.

St. Louis Park

The St. Louis Park Rec Center, 3700 Monterey Drive, features an outdoor aquatic park, two indoor ice arena—used by both St. Louis Park and Benilde St. Margaret’s boys and girls High School hockey teams—and meeting and banquet facilities.

Homework Assignment: How do our current facilities line up with identified community needs?

Detail conditions for the old public works site: size & boundary, building, environmental, etc.; how is it being used today and any future considerations:

This is technically a land-use question and one for which our group needed to go City staff to answer. We created a list of questions, which we sent to Cary Teague on September 8, 2011. We have attached the list of questions with staff’s responses as Attachment A.

Further information from Mitzi Wickland (Mwicklund@ci.edina.mn.us, 952-826-0424), Edina Assessing Tech, is listed below:

“Attached is the field card for the “old” Public Works site. The field card lists the majority of the information you are requesting regarding age, square footage & building condition. There is not a sketch of the building. The property’s 2011 Value as an exempt property (not taxable) is \$ 2,805,400. The best way to obtain a copy of the plat of the property is to link to the map on the Hennepin County Property Information page and view the aerial photograph of the property. You may print the image from your home computer. <http://gis.co.hennepin.mn.us/HCPROPERTYMap/Locator.aspx> .

Questions regarding the condition/composition of the ground, if there has been a ground study, etc. should be directed to Mr. Tom Jenson Edina Fire Marshall, TJenson@ci.edina.mn.us, who may have information regarding removal of underground tanks, sand, salt and gravel. He may be able provide contact information for the MN Pollution Control Agency: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/>, the agency oversees permits for clean up in the event of ground contaminants. Mr. Wayne Houle Director of Engineering and Public Works, WHoule@ci.edina.mn.us , may be able to answer other questions due to his intimate knowledge of the building before the move to the new site. Rental questions should be directed to Finance Director Mr. John Wallin, JWallin@ci.edina.mn.us. His department would know of property lease arrangements”.

More detailed information about the facility assessment (who, what, when, where, etc.) and Summary of the sports dome project, feasibility, details, locations, cost, etc.

On August 3, 2011, the Edina City Council authorized a Public Facilities Inventory and Feasibility Study of an Indoor Athletic Facility to be coordinated by a working group of the Edina Park Board. An excerpt from the meeting minutes (Section VIII.B.) follows:

The Council agreed with the need to provide clear directive relating to the type of study to be undertaken. Mr. Neal explained the budget of \$20,000 was intended to support a broad-view independent analysis that included an assessment of current facilities, age, size and use of those facilities, whether uses should be shifted to a different facility, and evaluation of an indoor athletic facility concept including financial feasibility. He did not anticipate that the analysis would address the Centennial Lakes and Edinborough trust funds. The Council discussed whether publicly accessible pools should be included in the facilities analysis. It was noted the public had identified unmet needs of an indoor athletic facility as well as a community center, and the School District had indicated it would need more space for its own functions due to rising enrollment, so less space would be available for community programming.

The Park Board is working on a comprehensive study to be completed in December of 2011. We know that there will be changes in Edina's facilities. Those changes will be based on information that comes from The Facilities Inventory, an Indoor Athletic Facilities Study, the Edinborough Study and a proposed Art Center Study all of which are to be completed in or around December 2011.

Overview and update to the Edinborough facility-

Consultants have been hired to undertake a study of the Edinborough facility to be completed at the latest January 2012. This study is independent of the Facilities Inventory. The consultants are yet to be hired for this study. The scope of the study is to include studying alternative uses for the gym and swimming facilities as well as the indoor gardens located there. A copy of the RFP is attached as Attachment B.

Review of City CIP for any other implications and initiatives-

This excerpt is from Councilmember Josh Sprague Edina411 Report of the September, 2011 Work Session and City Council Meeting:

“We have ended up with a 1.8% preliminary levy increase for 2012. The other significant decision made at our budget work session was the planned use of last year's general fund surplus. Since 2007, we have had a policy of transferring a portion of our surpluses into the Construction Fund to help fund our 5 year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). This year, we plan on doing a combination of buying down long-term debt (which will save us long term about \$1,000,000 in interest payments, and will also help us reduce our debt service levy and reach that 1.8% maximum levy increase), transferring monies to the Construction Fund, and funding a complete re-codification of our city ordinances.”

The budget calls for \$700K to be allocated to the Construction Fund and \$100K to be allocated to the City Re-codification project. The budget assumes no revenue and minimal expenses (grass cutting) associated with the Old Public Works site.

Conclusion

For Edina to evolve from a suburban style bedroom community to a vibrant, lively

community embraced by all demographic groups of residents a number of unmet needs from public recreation spaces to arts opportunities to places for teens must be addressed (These needs are well documented in the 2006 Parks and Recreation Survey, the 2011 Community Conversation and the 2011 Steering Committee Visioning Exercise).

Similar to the surrounding communities Edina needs a public facility that accommodates those uses year-round. Not just a park, not just a plaza, not just window-dressing for private redevelopment.

According to Fred Kent, Founder of Project for Public Spaces: “[Landscape Urbanism] represents a limited set of skills and solutions that greatly narrow the potential functions of public spaces or civic institutions”. It is our responsibility to look for a solution that will meet the community’s needs, as they exist today. That solution will bring Edina into the 21st century and allow us to compete with surrounding communities not only to attract engaged, creative and industrious citizens, but to keep them.

What Edina needs is a Community Commons.

In the words of the Project for Public Spaces: “Great public spaces are where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges take place, friends run into each other, and cultures mix. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions – libraries, field houses, neighborhood schools – where we interact with each other and government. When the spaces work well, they serve as a stage for our public lives.”

We are also recommending that we look at the focus groups closely in order to determine the needs of our various populations. To that end, we recommend the following focus groups that have not been previously mentioned: Empty nesters, teens, parents with young children and parents with school aged children. We ask that the Steering Committee schedule a meeting the week of September 26 to determine who to invite to the focus groups.