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# A Visionary PLACE<sup>®</sup> for Edina

from public works to community process to implementation plan

PLACE's Letter of Interest in the GrandView Phase I Redevelopment, August 11, 2014

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Dear Mr. Neuendorf, Councilmembers, and Edina Residents:

PLACE is a nonprofit and 501(c)(3) based in Minneapolis, with offices in Ventura and London. Acting upon invitations from cities, redevelopment authorities, academic institutions, foundations, and other nonprofits, we create places that foster a sustainable, just, and inspiring world, one community at a time.

When the GrandView Phase I Redevelopment call for interest came to PLACE's attention, it appeared that this private-public partnership was not suited for nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits are excluded by virtue of a financial model in which a capitalized developer is expected to pay out-of-pocket costs and to staff the initial planning activities over an extended period of time, in pursuit of development rights. Charities like PLACE lack the at-risk capital needed to back such endeavors. Donors and sponsor organizations make gifts for specific rather than speculative outcomes, and fundraising for the completion of a specific visionary PLACE® occurs on a timeline that is not "competitive." Having had exploratory conversations this week with Community Development staff, we have decided to respond to the call in a manner befitting our capabilities, in the hopes that the City will be persuaded to also consider an alternative process.



Rather than describing a specific vision or plan for a site, PLACE always begins with a vigorous community participation process, allowing the vision to emerge. The City of Edina has already begun such a process in pursuit of public benefit ideals. PLACE would take the process much further. In our last large development project, we held 142 public meetings, and were able to exceed the ambitious goals articulated by the community through active listening, incorporating rather than ignoring dissent, broadening the expertise of the project team, and persisting until the vision coalesced. Most cities and for-profit developers are not structured to have the capacity for such an in-depth participation process. But with an even more intense process, the dynamic tensions among the priorities of the Development Framework, the resident survey, and the Community Facilities Inventory can be harnessed to produce a plan that rises to the next level of excellence.

We think of ourselves as a "make tank:" an organization that researches, creates and builds new models for communities that address the 360 degrees of modern life in one location. We strive to make each PLACE® project reflect the highest community ideals by creating beautiful, healthy, and inspiring surroundings, lifting people out of poverty, empowering community participation, and providing equal opportunity, all while generating economic return, renewable energy, and jobs.

Our aim is to change the way communities are made, and to dramatically improve the way we live, work, commute, create and interrelate, as well as the way we impact our cities and our Earth.

An example of these ideals becoming reality in a project that we developed and own is a community in Ventura, California called WĀV (Working Artists Ventura). PLACE worked directly with the City of Ventura to create WĀV, which is a mixed-income, urban housing development infused with art. Over 100 artists live and work in affordable apartments. There are solar-powered, market rate condominiums on site, in addition to apartments reserved for people transitioning out of homelessness, to address specific requests from the community.

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WĀV has a free community theater/gallery, retail space for local creative businesses (currently, Jai Rhythm—a yoga studio, and Connect Ventura—a coworking space), and LEED Silver Certification for the entire complex.

Most importantly, WĀV was created by empowering the local community to take part in the process over the course of 142 public meetings. What was previously a vacant, contaminated lot in the middle of downtown Ventura is now a thriving cultural landmark that generates jobs, creates positive economic impact, and anchors a city which was previously shedding its economy-energizing Creative Class.

WĀV is a shining example of what can be done when government, the community, and the public and private sectors collaborate to work for the public benefit. With a modest investment of \$1.5 million from the City of Ventura, PLACE was able to assemble \$67 million in total project financing in 2008, during the worst economic recession in a generation. The result is the WĀV project: the first sustainable arts community in the world.

PLACE is excited about collaborating with the City and residents of Edina to redevelop the former Public Works site because although Edina has an abundance of community facilities already, many residents are expressing concerns and desires for the development that have at their core a perception of lack of connectivity among people, places, and program elements that already exist. As a restorative developer, PLACE specializes in finding and repairing the broken connections, and also in discovering new links to make a community stronger.

The community input thus far has brought great creativity to bear on the planning process, and it would be tempting to end that process too early. PLACE will focus on discovering and understanding the interests that manifest in statements of position or apathy. When concerns and new ideas are raised, PLACE encourages brainstorming at the gathering, and then prior to the next meeting, does the heavy lifting necessary to refine the ideas to be presented. Meanwhile, surveys and awareness campaigns will broaden participation to those who cannot attend meetings. A number of iterations will be needed to arrive at the vision that captures the imagination of almost everyone participating in the process.

As the vision emerges, PLACE will seek a broader team with the particular expertise needed for the likely program elements. For example, enhanced mobility is already a goal—not merely transit-oriented-development but a concept of a truly smooth flow of people among activities and locations, with reconnection as the guiding principle. And this site could potentially benefit from the PLACE GreenPark model for parking.

One of the lessons PLACE sees repeated in the community process is that what can initially seem like an overwhelming, impossible, utopian “wish-list” is actually the very scale of vision necessary to solve the problems posed by a smaller vision. Because of that experience, we not only tolerate the iterative process of enlargement and refinement, but embrace it. Focusing too quickly on the efficiency of meetings or the planning process can rob it of its ability to find the right scale.

We will also strive to understand what overall ecosystem of for-profit, non-profit, and subsidized activities will be sustainable, not only in terms of long-term economics but in terms of fostering good neighbor relationships.

PLACE creates Implementation Plans for complex developments as though PLACE will face the tasks of compiling the financing, leading the design and construction teams, and stewarding the development for its entire future. In some instances, PLACE will indeed become the developer and anchor-owner, as in the WĀV, and we apply the same standards to all our Implementation Plans. This perspective subtly shifts the focus of design and construction to take into account not only the first-costs of development but the lifetime costs of operating and maintaining the community’s vision.

We look forward to the opportunity to participate in bringing your vision to reality.



Chris Velasco  
Executive Director

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## The Core Team

### Primary Contact Person:

Chris Velasco, Executive Director  
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### Chris Velasco

Chris is President and Executive Director of PLACE. He cofounded the organization in 2005 to bring together the arts, environmental stewardship, and social justice. Prior to starting PLACE, Chris served as Vice President of Artspace Projects, Inc., where he helped grow the organization as head of new projects.

Chris has been actively engaged in the creation of leading-edge communities for 20 years. He has worked in over two hundred cities, and has been a leader in the creation of over \$1 billion in new facilities. An innovator in the area of housing cooperatives, Chris worked to develop some of the nation's early leasehold housing cooperatives for artists. His projects have won numerous awards from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Institute of Architects and more.



Chris is a frequent keynote speaker in the areas of sustainable communities, the arts, live/work communities, ethical development, community and economic revitalization and the environment. He is a member of the Affordable Housing Design Leadership Institute, and a 2009 Fellow of the Stanford University Center for Social Innovation.

### Elizabeth Bowling

A PLACE co-founder, Member of the Board of Directors, and core team member, Elizabeth helps shape PLACE visions and actions. Every core team member participates in all aspects of PLACE's work: running the organization, innovating new practices, engaging in the intensive community process, and stewarding projects through every phase. This team member hat-exchange maximizes PLACE's institutional knowledge and expands team member expertise. In addition, each core team member takes on responsibilities within a developed career expertise.

An attorney (JD) with a master's degree (MA) in public policy, Elizabeth coordinates our extended team of professionals across the nation; integrates our legal entities, financing tools, and funding sources; and co-leads our research and development efforts, particularly in the areas of best organizational practices, development of social capital, and resource optimization.



Elizabeth has helped implement many PLACE "firsts," among them, our first supportive housing program flourishing within a mixed-income, mixed-use urban village, our first study of happiness differences between PLACE residents and members of the surrounding community, our first car-sharing program, and our first program linking community members to affordable health care independent of employment.

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## Peter Sieve

For eleven years, Peter has worked in cities all over the US to help develop innovative, mixed-use projects. Peter contributes to every aspect of project planning, funding, and design, focusing on grant writing, community engagement, and market surveys.

Peter's proficiency with information technology ensures that PLACE builds community in cutting-edge modalities, including the newest social networking platforms, while preserving the human touch in all our communications. He helps to design community outreach that meets PLACE's multicultural and multigenerational needs.

Prior to joining PLACE, Peter was Manager of Consulting & New Projects for Artspace Projects, Inc. He is also a professional musician, and tours the country extensively.



## Nick Goodenough

Nick has a diverse background in visual arts, journalism and digital technology. While attending the Brooks Institute of Photography for visual journalism he was introduced to PLACE and their "Working Artists Ventura" (WĀV) sustainable live/work artist project. Inspired by their vision he threw himself into community process, developing communication tools to help the public stay informed and integrated in the creative process.

Nick now lives at WĀV, where he explores firsthand ideas to empower people's creativity, their mutual cooperation, and ability to live in harmony with nature. Recent projects include experiments in developing an international conversation through PLACE's Ten Thousand Hands program, and a robust public dialogue through PLACE's online discussions. Nick shares his interests in automation, urban farming, storytelling, open-source economy, experimental communities and restorative architecture to a following of nearly half a million through social media platforms.



## Alice Hiniker

Alice recently graduated with a Master of Architecture from the University of Minnesota, having completed her Bachelor of Science in Architecture at the University of Michigan in 2009. She became a LEED AP BD+C in 2009 and volunteered at Greenbuild in 2009 and 2010. Alice believes that while sustainability must be encouraged for all new and existing buildings, it is equally important to develop buildings that are healthy, beautiful and affordable as well.



## The PLACE Board of Directors *(officers are italicized)*

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## Three Unique PLACE Experiences

*Three examples of experiences with the one or more of the following attributes: civic/community uses, mixture of public and private uses, public/private partnerships, multi-modal transportation elements, environmental sustainability or innovative project financing*

### Example One: Curley School, Ajo, Arizona

The PLACE Team served as development consultant to the Curley School historic preservation and adaptive reuse project in Ajo, Arizona. Ajo is a very small town located in the Sonoran Desert. Chris Velasco was asked to lead a community process to explore the reuse of Ajo's beautiful spanish mission school which had been closed for many years and had a troubled history.



The project sponsor was an innovative nonprofit called the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA). Chris was instrumental in coordinating work among organizations representing the three nations that formed ISDA, the US, Mexico and the Tohono O'odam Nation, to create a tri-national artisan community in the old school. Chris worked to coordinate the design of the adaptive reuse into thirty live/work suites for artisans, identifying a host of financing sources, including historic preservation tax credits, and identifying a program for the public amenities.

The former library on the second floor of the main building is used as a public meeting/gathering place. The former auditorium serves as a venue for art exhibitions, conferences, dances, and yoga classes; its raised indoor-outdoor stage hosts concerts, live theater and dance performances. The elegant former school cafeteria is now the Community Learning Center with a 10-station computer lab. Other buildings house classroom space for art workshops. (<http://phansonart.com/curley-school-artisan-housing/>).

This example represents a mix of civic/community uses, innovative financing, and public/private partnerships.

### Example Two: The Rose, Minneapolis, Minnesota



PLACE was hired by Aeon to be lead development consultant and sustainability champion for the The Rose, 120 new homes to be built just south of downtown, with a mix of affordable and market-rate homes. Aeon's goal was nothing short of building the most environmentally advanced affordable housing community in the nation. <http://www.aeonmn.org/news/newsitem.aspx?newsid=1403&newsitemid=8339>

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PLACE was involved in all aspects of the development, with special focus on assembling a team capable of leading-edge design and engineering, and balancing the needs of a practical budget with the aspirations of ultra-high efficiency.

The project is arguably the most efficient affordable community in the country, with energy use designed to be 76% lower than a conventional building. In addition, solar thermal collectors will provide all the domestic hot water, and a community garden will provide urban green space and access to nutritious fruits and vegetables. The Rose has become a national model, providing data and reports to a national Learning Lab using the project as an exemplar of sustainable design.

This example represents leadership in environmental sustainability.

### **Example Three: The WĀV (Working Artists Ventura)**

PLACE's WĀV Community in Ventura, California took an abandoned brownfield and transformed it into the world's first sustainable artist community.

At the request of the City of Ventura, PLACE facilitated a community-driven development process to create the WĀV. PLACE held 142 public meetings that involved stakeholders and the general public in all aspects of the development process. Neighbors wanted a catalytic public project that would bring an attraction to the City's West Side, generating foot traffic and tax base, and providing an exciting destination for young and old alike.



PLACE anchored the project with live/work suites for people across the income spectrum. The spaces are outfitted with roll-up doors that allow the public to wander in and meet the photographer, the potter, the scientist, the playwright, the musician, the inventor, the furniture maker, and the technologist to see one-of-a-kind creative businesses. An amphitheater provides outdoor seating for events, and a ninety-nine-seat white box theater provides free performance/exhibit/meeting space to the entire community. Clad in solar collectors, the community generates more energy than it uses on a sunny day.

The PLACE Team created a new bus stop on location to add to the train stop and three other local and regional bus lines within a few blocks. WĀV emphasizes walkability and alternatives to the automobile. Because many people live and work on site, car ownership at WĀV is far lower than the regional average, reducing traffic and parking impacts.

PLACE was able to leverage a small public investment of \$1.5 million in affordable housing funds into \$67 million in total project financing from a variety of tax credits, philanthropy and other innovative sources.

This example represents leadership in civic/community uses, mixture of public and private uses, public/private partnerships, multi-modal transportation elements, environmental sustainability and innovative project financing

- A video that encapsulates what PLACE does. <https://vimeo.com/37772643>
- Links to example press for PLACE. <http://welcometoplace.com/about/press>
- References for PLACE's Technical Assistance services. <http://welcometoplace.com/projects/technical-assistance-services>

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## Two Projects Shaped with Extensive Public Input

*Two examples of projects shaped with extensive public input.*

### **Working Artists Ventura (WĀV), Ventura, California**

Having already discussed at length the WĀV and the 142 public meetings and private/public partnerships that made it possible, we will limit comment here to providing links to online resources about that project. PLACE is the Managing General Partner of WĀV and will be its permanent steward.

Project details and links available on our website. <http://welcometoplace.com/projects/wav>

A sampling of the artists who live and work at WĀV. [http://wavartists.com/Wav\\_artists.html](http://wavartists.com/Wav_artists.html)

A listing of exhibits and events that have occurred in the theater/gallery free of charge to either the sponsor artist/organization or the audience. <http://wavartists.com/events.html>

Commercial tenant Jai Rhythm. <http://www.jairhythm.com>, <http://www.jairhythm.com/ventura-studio/>

Commercial tenant Connect Ventura. <http://connectventura.com>

International Downtown Association one-page on WĀV.

<https://www.ida-downtown.org/eweb/docs/2010%20Awards%20Docs/Economic%20&%20Business%20Development/Downtown%20Ventura%20Partners.%20Working%20Artists%20Ventura.pdf>

Urban Land Institute - LA hosted a day of tours and talks featuring WĀV, <http://www.formmag.net/monitor/2010/8/17/the-wav-working-artists-ventura-sept-10-event-uli-la.html>

Los Angeles Times Article, <http://www.latimes.com/home/la-hm-wav-apartments-photos-photogallery.html>

Chris Velasco received the 2009 Ventura Mayor's Arts Award for WĀV. <http://www.ventanamonthly.com/article.php?id=447&IssueNum=45>

A 2012 article about the intensive public process, the completion of WĀV during the recession, and its growing pains and triumphs. [http://www.vcreporter.com/cms/story/detail/riding\\_the\\_storm\\_out/9506/](http://www.vcreporter.com/cms/story/detail/riding_the_storm_out/9506/)

### **Performing Arts Space Development Plan, Philadelphia, PA**

The PLACE Team was engaged through the William Penn Foundation to create a development plan for up to six public performing arts venues in Philadelphia. PLACE launched the project with a public meeting attended by over 750 people.

The process was an iterative one, involving large-scale surveys of nearly twenty-thousand potential end users throughout the Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore and Washington regions to identify needs. Financial models were continuously refined to find “the sweet spot” between community and market needs, financial feasibility and real estate realities.

PLACE's end product was a feasible plan for the development of over \$100 million in performing arts space on three sites in Philadelphia. Included in the plan were 1) demonstrated market demand, 2) acquisition plans for three, feasible sites, 3) detailed financial pro forma outlining a development budget and long-term operating model, 4) assembly of a qualified, mixed-use development team, and 5) preliminary approvals for the project.

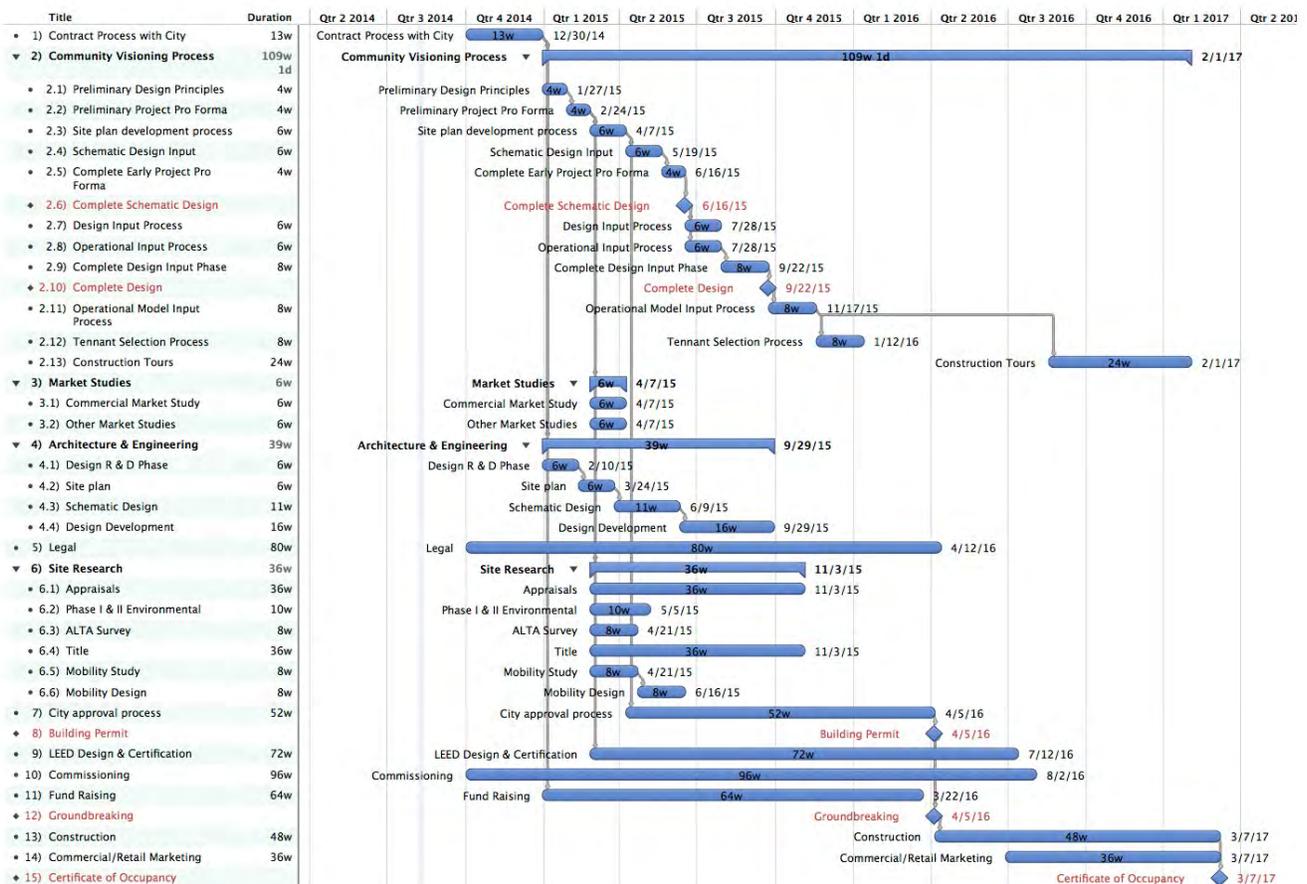
The resulting development plan was presented to the William Penn Foundation, and is under consideration.

## Work Plan

*Preliminary work plan that outlines the critical elements and milestones anticipated when working with the City to advance from "vision" to "reality"*

The attached Gantt chart shows PLACE's preliminary estimates for timeline and milestones and interdependencies for the project based on our experience. The chart is not intended as an exhaustive scope of work and timeline, but rather, represents the general work flow of the project.

Although some of the studies mentioned in the chart have been done (for example, Phase I Environmental), we have allowed time for necessary updating.





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August 11, 2014

Bill Neuendorf  
Economic Development Manager  
City of Edina  
4801 West 50th Street  
Edina, MN 55424

Dear Bill:

PLACE is pleased to include our response to your request for interest on the Phase I Redevelopment process for the GrandView site. We have thrown our hat in the ring, albeit in the eleventh hour after discussing the City's willingness to consider a nonprofit developer.

The PLACE Team is very interested in this opportunity, especially because of the excellent process you have undertaken so far. PLACE is a nonprofit community-driven development partner for cities, and your process is a perfect fit for our approach.

We did not make specific suggestions at this time for the site, although we hope our track record will indicate the sort of components that we find offer the greatest community benefit for the smallest public investment; art centers, public live/work store fronts, commercial/retail space for creative businesses, multi-purpose venues, all demonstrating profound environmental design. Our process seeks to collaborate with community members to find that sweet spot between public benefit and financial feasibility. PLACE projects are both environmentally and economically sustainable.

One thing that will probably not come across is my own love for the City of Edina. I grew up in Edina, and my mother still lives there. I have always admired the people of Edina for investing in education, quality of life and creating a sense of place that makes people feel they are home. I hope to get the chance to contribute to the city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Velasco".

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