

# Program Statement

## for

# Civic Center Campus

## City of Minnetonka

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**Date:** March 18, 2003

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**Overview:** The following program statement is a consolidation of the thoughts and perspectives from various stakeholder groups and citizens that have been interviewed during the process. The comments are organized under major categories or themes.

**Past Studies:** There have been several studies in the mid-1980's and early-1990's that considered a variety of recreation-based facilities for the campus site. The relevant aspects of those studies will be incorporated into this plan.

## Program Statement

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### Overall Vision:

- ▶ In general, there was a consistent perspective that the Civic Center Campus serves a number of purposes:
  - **Civic** – where citizens come together to serve the community and participate in the public process. This is where the “governance and business of the community” takes place.
  - **Social** – where citizens come together as a community to socialize at community events. The campus is a place for community celebrations.
  - **Recreational** – where citizens come to participate in a variety of recreational activities.
- ▶ Of the three, civic purposes was consistently ranked the highest.
- ▶ Utilitarian uses were also cited as a purpose of the site, although not be part of the vision statement per se.
- ▶ The campus is at the geographical center of the city, which adds to its significance.
- ▶ The campus is the defacto “town center” without the retail.
- ▶ Balancing utilitarian and operational uses with civic, institutional and recreation uses was also a significant issue. The majority of participants felt that some utilitarian uses are appropriate. However, the general consensus was that these should be minimized and kept as visually unobtrusive as possible.
- ▶ A stronger connection to Minnehaha Creek is desired, as well as a stronger connection between the south and north half of the site.

### Civic Facilities – Public Service Related :

- ▶ The campus includes a number of facilities that serve the civic needs of the community. These include:
  - **City Hall** – Council Chambers, Boards and Commissions Room, administrative offices, and various meeting rooms that support public functions.
  - **Community Center** – Banquet Room, meeting rooms, senior center offices that support senior and community activities and events.
  - **Police Station** – administrative offices and support services for public safety.
  - **Fire Station** – administrative offices, fire and emergency services station, and support services for fire and emergency services.
- ▶ Civic facilities are the cornerstone of the campus area.
- ▶ The functional capacity and general characteristics of these facilities are considered adequate for the foreseeable future.

- ▶ Potential improvements related to the **Police and Fire Stations** include:
  - Redesigning the parking lot on the south side of the Fire Station to increase security of police cars and emergency vehicles. A total of 9 to 12 secure spaces are needed. The design for this area also must take into consideration universal access from City Hall to the Fire and Police Station. The aesthetic character of any improvement is also important, given its visibility.
  - Providing additional garage space for public vehicles and equipment for police and fire. A total of around 35 vehicle spaces are needed. Currently, these vehicles are parked in the City Hall parking lot, which takes away from public parking in this lot. (Given the expense of these assets, a garage is considered the most secure approach by police and fire chiefs.)

#### **Civic Facilities – Operational Related:**

- ▶ Although not unanimous, locating some operational facilities on the civic campus is considered to be reasonable, as long as they are kept as unobtrusive as possible. Operational facilities include:
  - Communications tower, with the site nearest the Fire Station preferred. The site behind the ice arena was thought to be too close to the neighborhood and in the sight line looking south down Williston Road and across the campus area.
  - Well system (old and new) was considered reasonable, as long as any associated buildings (including the water treatment plant) were located on the periphery and visually unobtrusive. Watermains should be buried where they would not interfere with other site development. Periodic access to the well site also needs to be considered, including heavy drilling trucks.
- ▶ The recycling center is temporary, with the exception of special drop-off days in June and September and hazardous waste in May. Provisions should be made to accommodate these activities.

#### **Non-Public Utilitarian Uses:**

- ▶ The notion that the campus should be used for “highest and best” uses was a common perspective with respect to utilitarian functions.
- ▶ The lack of space in the park system suggested to many that the open areas that remain should be preserved for public recreational or civic uses, rather than large scale utilitarian uses – especially non-public functions.
- ▶ The Excel substation was most frequently cited as being an excessive non-public function for this site. Considered by most to be too “ugly” for the Civic Center Campus. An alternate opinion was that the City should be open to using its own property for this type of use.

#### **Recreational Facilities – Indoor:**

- ▶ The Civic Center Campus includes two indoor ice arenas.
- ▶ Rink A is the larger facility and was upgraded in 1997, with a roof replacement.
- ▶ Rink B is a smaller facility that is scheduled for upgrades in summer of 2003 to make it a year-round facility.
- ▶ There is general consensus that preserving space for development of future recreational facilities is prudent. There are three primary reasons for this:
  - 1) Indoor recreational facilities fit within the vision for the campus as a community gathering place for civic, social, and recreational purposes.
  - 2) The campus is centrally located within the city.
  - 3) There are very few other publically-owned sites within the city that would be suitable for this type of facility.
- ▶ Although no specific type of recreational facility is defined under the master plan, the site could accommodate one that is up to 70,000 to 80,000 square feet. A foot print of 80,000 to 100,000 square feet is conceivable. However, this would include impacts to natural areas, especially mature trees.
- ▶ For reference, the following provides an overview of the square footage of a variety of indoor recreation facilities:
  - Williston Center comparable facility – 61,700 square feet.
  - Larger-scale community/recreation center – 80,000 to 100,000 square feet.
  - Indoor multipurpose athletic field (i.e., Plymouth model) – 94,000 square feet.
  - Aquatic facility (as previously proposed in the mid-1980's) – 30,000 to 60,000 square feet.

**Recreational Facilities – Outdoor:**

- ▶ The existing **neighborhood park** consists of a play structure (good condition), hard court for basketball (adequate condition) and a small ballfield (poor condition). It is in a very isolated location.
- ▶ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the play structure is used regularly, but not heavily.
- ▶ The ballfield and hard court more rarely. Observation suggests that most people drive to the neighborhood park, rather than walk from the surrounding neighborhood.
- ▶ With the expansion of the water treatment facility and well house, the neighborhood park will have to be relocated.
- ▶ The value of the park in this location is open for debate, with some questioning its value. Possible options include:
  - Removal from the campus
  - Relocate, in some form, to another area of the campus site
  - Do a joint venture with the church to provide a play area
- ▶ The existing **canoe launch** is thought to be a viable recreational feature. The launch is routinely used, even though it is not very visible. A defined parking area is needed. General improvements are needed to this facility. Perhaps including a picnic area.
- ▶ The **horse arena** is not routinely used by Minnetonka residents. It is used by an outside group around 12 times a summer on the weekend for events. The majority of participants do not feel that the horse arena is the highest and best use of the site.
- ▶ Replacing the horse arena with an **open green space** suitable for soccer and other sport uses was brought up – at least as an interim use – especially given how limited open space is in the city.
- ▶ The idea of an **amphitheater** was brought up, with mixed opinion on need. If located on the site, it should be simple in design and not “overdone”. A joint venture with the church should be considered. Sized for 300 to 500 people.
- ▶ The idea of a **skate board park** also surfaced – with mixed opinion on appropriateness.

**Trails and Trailhead:**

- ▶ The parking lots are routinely used as a trailhead for bicyclists in the summer. Access to restrooms would be the most pressing issue, along with an information kiosk.
- ▶ The Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Plan (Post Plan) calls for establishing a cross-country ski loop that encompasses the Civic Center Campus, Jidana Park, and the Grays Bay Dam. The campus would be an ideal location for a trailhead – which is loosely defined at this point.
- ▶ A loop trail through the campus site was seen as desirable to link facilities together, connect to existing trails (bridge over creek) and proposed trails (Jidana Park), and provide a stand-alone recreational feature. This could include wetlands to the east.

**Campus Area Circulation – Vehicular:**

- ▶ Vehicular circulation and parking for City Hall entrance and ice arenas need evaluation – efficiency, clarity, safety, etc. Lacks “sense of entrance.”
- ▶ Parking lots by City Hall and ice arenas are utilitarian and a bit confusing. Safety is an issue with vehicles coming and going from too many directions. The total number of parking spaces in the current lots is adequate for current levels of use, especially if public vehicles are parked in a garage.
- ▶ “Salvage” the design ideas that do work with respect to the existing lots.
- ▶ The access to Rink B and the parking lot are utilitarian. Coming up the hill heading south from this lot is particularly of concern given speeds and sight lines.
- ▶ Too many public vehicles are parked in the City Hall lot – making it hard to find a spot for citizens during busier times. (Refer to garage idea previously stated.)
- ▶ The parking lot for the City Council and Community Center is adequate. Drop off area seems to work well, although not heavily used. Biggest issues with this lot is that the trees and vegetation need to be managed.
- ▶ Lack of green space in and around the parking lots takes away from the character of the area. Need to consider a “green spine” that helps define spaces and add greenery.
- ▶ Improvements to the entrance sequence from Minnetonka Boulevard into the City Hall/arena parking area should be considered – signage, intersection alignments, etc.
- ▶ The “front door” to the Community Center, City Hall, and arenas need be to clearly identified.

- ▶ The access drive to the Fire/Police Stations should remain separate from the main entrance road to the campus. An emergency vehicle warning system to alert vehicles on Minnetonka Boulevard should be investigated. A mast-style arm over the traffic lanes may be accepted by the County. Left turn lane should also be considered as well.
- ▶ The drop off area for recycling collection on a couple of days per year needs to be considered in the traffic pattern. Traffic can get heavy during peak drop-off times.
- ▶ The access to Timber Hills and the church needs to be considered in the plan (short and long term perspective)..

#### **Campus Circulation – Pedestrian:**

- ▶ Pedestrian-ways from parking lots not well established – many people park in walkways.
- ▶ Walkways throughout the campus need to be evaluated for ease of use, safety, and connections.
- ▶ A more clear and safe walkway connection from City Hall to the ice arenas needs to be created – although foot traffic between these two facilities is not expected to be very heavy.
- ▶ Walkways need to be better designed in parking lots to avoid being slippery.
- ▶ Universal accessibility of the walks needs to be assured.
- ▶ Connections to the larger trail system need to be enhanced. None really exist at this point.

#### **Community Events/Social Gatherings:**

- ▶ The campus remains a desirable location for community events.
- ▶ Current events include Summer Festival, Annual Open House, and Fireworks.
- ▶ Holding other events — such as a Farmers Market and Music-in-the-Park — should not be precluded.
- ▶ Design of campus area should accommodate these as secondary uses – which means not designing the site specifically for these annual events.
- ▶ Adding more shade and improving the aesthetic character of the area would be the most important improvements for these events. Hot asphalt with little vegetation makes the vendor areas very hot. (Vendors prefer the asphalt for set up and accessibility, but more use of green space should also be considered.)
- ▶ Need to try to spread out activities to more of the site. There is a “jammed in” feeling now.
- ▶ The use of grass areas (church property and city-property near Minnetonka Boulevard) should continue to be used for event parking. Currently, this provides approximately 400 spaces. Developing permanent parking for these annual events is considered both unfeasible and undesirable. If the parking on the church property became unavailable, off-site alternates (such as a shuttle service) would be used.
- ▶ Fire truck rides during Open House causes some confusion. Circulation plan should take this into consideration to the degree possible.

#### **Aesthetic/Character Issues:**

- ▶ The aesthetics of the campus area north of City Hall is utilitarian. Aesthetics should be consistent with the “quality comes naturally” theme – meaning a balance between natural and ornamental landscapes.
- ▶ Maximizing the perception of green space and larger landscape should be a design objective – while still meeting the functional needs of the site.
- ▶ The vegetation associated with the parking lot nearest the City Council/Community Center entrance should be managed and “tidied up.” No wholesale changes are thought needed, but drive lanes and sight lines are getting obscured.
- ▶ There is a mixed opinion of the character of the main entrance at Minnetonka Boulevard. Some feel that it is too “natural” looking. Others fee that it is appropriate. Balancing these ideas is needed.
- ▶ General signage and monumentation improvements are needed – starting at Minnetonka Boulevard. Information and direction needs to be more clearly stated. Also need a flagpole.
- ▶ A “human scale” and pleasant setting is desired, without going overboard.
- ▶ Viewsheds should be considered -- especially trying to tie the south and north half of the campus together into a cohesive whole. This includes a stronger tie to Minnehaha Creek.

#### **Natural Resource Stewardship:**

- ▶ A stewardship program should be established for the campus site.
- ▶ Providing interpretive information along trails should be considered.
- ▶ Applying city ordinances should be factored into the design. Examples include providing a buffer around the south pond, encroachment into the wetland along the creek (primarily the ballfield), and managing stormwater runoff from roads and parking areas.

**Church Property:** Notes from discussion with Dr. Dedeker, current Director.

- ▶ Master plan is currently in place for this property.
- ▶ Senior housing is likely to be next development focus -- within the next one to five years.
- ▶ Continued collaboration with the City is envisioned — such as parking for events.
- ▶ Open to the idea of shared use of play area — assuming liability issues can be addressed.
- ▶ Possible shared use of a future amphitheater is open for discussion. 200 -300 people envisioned.

**Neighborhood Perspective:** Neighborhood meeting was held on February 19, 2003.

- ▶ Population of housing surrounding the campus tends to be older, many without children.
- ▶ Maintaining open space was most important value – especially along the creek and horse arena area. Using the area for soccer practice and those types of uses was considered reasonable.
- ▶ Concern about neighborhood access was common. Currently confusing, with numerous vehicles going through neighborhood after missing a turn into the campus. Especially the case with canoeists. Better signage with clear directional information is considered needed.
- ▶ Design of roads and parking lots is of concern – especially cars coming and going from ice arena parking lot. Thought to be dangerous at times, especially for handicap people and walkers on sidewalk adjacent to the road.
- ▶ Idea of relocating the road to the neighborhood west of the church was raised.
- ▶ Building new recreational facilities, such as a pool, was thought to be reasonable by some, although the majority would prefer open space.
- ▶ Protection of the creek corridor and natural amenities of the site are very important. Eagles are known to be nesting in the area. Concern was also raised about the stewardship program along Minnetonka Boulevard, with some suggesting that tree cutting was haphazard.
- ▶ Virtually everyone was against the Excel substation being on this sight. Thought to be ugly and inappropriate.
- ▶ Recreational use was typically walking the area (often with dogs) and observing nature. Providing more picnic areas and benches was thought needed.
- ▶ Canoeing the creek was also a common use of the area.
- ▶ Concern about snowmobiles on the creek was expressed – with some racing through the area a few times each winter.
- ▶ Smell of sewage along the creek was a concern that could be looked into.
- ▶ No strong opinion about the horse arena one way or the other. Loud speakers and manure smell are minor issues to some. Preserving this area as open space seemed to be a better use to many.
- ▶ Playground mostly used by those who drive to it. Other neighborhood features not used very much.
- ▶ More trails through the area would be great – but don't overdo. Trail connection to Jidana was not an issue to those in attendance. The cross-country ski trail idea was well received.
- ▶ Goose droppings continue to be a problem.

**Senior Needs:**

- ▶ Williston heavily used by seniors – especially the pool (warm water and ramp) and tennis courts. The low key, informal character of the place was considered a plus. Being affordable was also a plus.
- ▶ Providing more activities for seniors on the civic center campus was seen as positive and allow a higher level of coordination and convenience with the Community Center.
- ▶ Aging population in the city will result in continued growth of senior population, which in turn places new demands on facilities.
- ▶ Seniors today are much more interested in a cross-section of activities – ranging from health and physical fitness to new forms of recreation and educational pursuits. Bird watching, biking, line dancing, yoga, and weight training continue to grow.
- ▶ Seniors do not use facilities like the Lindbergh Center and Arts Center very much. No need to duplicate those facilities. Also, seniors do not use the ice rinks very much.
- ▶ A looped trail for walking with benches and overlooks would serve senior needs. Making sure that there are numerous benches is important, since sitting and observing is often as important as walking.
- ▶ Close parking to any facility is a necessity.