

# City of Hopkins and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District

## DEVELOPMENT VISION FOR 325 BLAKE ROAD

### **Purpose**

This document memorializes the shared vision between the City of Hopkins (City) and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) for the redevelopment of 325 Blake Road. It is intended to provide a shared understanding of the guiding principles for redevelopment, parameters of development, and approvals and financing by the City, MCWD, the community and potential development partners.

The MCWD and the City seek highly creative, water-focused development proposals for this unique redevelopment opportunity. Proposals should include sustainable development characteristics with the Minnehaha Creek as the central feature of the development and a special emphasis on multiple connections to amenities including the future Blake Road LRT Station. Inclusive community engagement will also be important to ensure this new neighborhood blends seamlessly into the broader Hopkins community.

### **Property Description**

The 325 Blake Road site is owned by the MCWD and consists of a 16.84 acre parcel located at the southeast quadrant of the Blake Road North (CSAH 20) and Lake Street Northeast intersection; less than ¼-mile from both State Highway 7 to the north and Excelsior Boulevard (CSAH 3) to the south, and within 1 mile of Highway 169. The property is bounded by approximately 1100 feet of Minnehaha Creek, 1100 feet of Blake Road and 1200 feet of the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail and future METRO Green Line Extension.

### **Guiding principles for redevelopment**

**Creative design approach.** Recognizing that the size and location of this property make it a unique development opportunity within a fully urbanized area, pursue a creative approach to design that is thoughtful of the environment, the social relationships between residents and the larger community, and brings something vibrant and new.

**Transit Oriented Development.** Embrace elements of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) based on its proximity to the Blake Road LRT Station, the adjacent Green Line Extension, and connections to trail systems. Consider recreational and commercial amenities within the vicinity of the Site. TOD densities, parking ratios and shared

parking within the Site are encouraged, as well as other transit-supportive uses such as jobs and neighborhood-serving retail.

**Water-focused approach.** Feature Minnehaha Creek, the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, and storm water management elements as central to the identity and orientation of the Site.

**Sustainability.** Incorporate sustainable development components, such as construction materials and techniques, water and energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste management, and educational elements.

**Open design.** Provide open design that establishes inviting views of Minnehaha Creek and allows for public access into the Site so that Minnehaha Creek becomes a community amenity. The design should permit easy access to and throughout the Site by pedestrians and bicyclists, while maintaining safety for all residents and users of the property.

**Connections.** Enhance physical and visual connections along and across Blake Road and to the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail, Blake Road LRT Station and Cottageville Park. Buildings should have minimal setbacks from Blake Road and an active first floor to enhance the pedestrian experience. The southwest corner of the Site is a key location due to its proximity to the Blake Road LRT Station, and development should embrace the prominence of this portion of the Site when looking at design and land use.

**Inclusion.** The site is located in a very economically and culturally diverse neighborhood with a significant number of naturally-occurring affordable housing units. It is the goal to embrace that diversity and develop the site in a way that is equitable, seeks to honor and preserve the existing community and does not aim to gentrify the neighborhood.

**Housing mix.** Consider a variety of housing types, including ownership and rental for people at a mix of income levels and household sizes. All efforts should be made to mix the affordable units with the market rate units. If financial barriers prevent that, site design should encourage interaction between buildings via shared common areas and amenity spaces throughout the Site. Because the majority of Hopkins housing units today are rental, the City is very interested in homeownership opportunities, especially for low and moderate income households.

**Community Engagement.** The City and MCWD are interested in engaging with the community early and in a way that is meaningful and helps to inform the site plan. It is the expectation that developing the engagement plan, with the development team (City, MCWD & Developer), will be a priority.

## **Development Parameters**

### **Access**

The primary access point for the Site shall extend from the existing signalized intersection of Blake Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NE. Access from Lake Street will be dependent upon a traffic study to be paid for by the Developer. Any traffic study will be subject to review by both the City and Hennepin County, as Blake Road is under County jurisdiction.

### **Road Infrastructure**

The City is interested in exploring concepts that have no or limited roads designed for cars but have strong pedestrian/bike connections through the Site. A precedent is Thornton Place, Seattle, WA.

If the Developer determines that access by automobiles is necessary to achieve the redevelopment goals, the roadways will be constructed by the Developer. If they are designed to City public street specifications, constructed in dedicated public right-of-way, and meet a clear public purpose, the maintenance of the roads from curb to curb will be taken on by the City.

### **Utilities**

Utilities are stubbed in with the intent to serve the Site. Water service extends into the Site from the intersection of Blake Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NE. To provide reliability and adequate flow, the water main must be looped through the Site and connect to the main in Lake Street NE right-of-way. There is a water service line into the Site that needed to remain active during the Blake Road construction and was reconnected. This line will need to be removed if it will no longer serve a building or hydrant.

A deep sanitary sewer manhole was placed in the northwest corner of the Site during the reconstruction of Blake Road with the intent to serve the Site. There are two other sanitary sewer services that were reconnected during adjacent reconstruction and will need to be removed if they will no longer serve a building.

The Developer will be required to pay for all on site utility connections and removal or relocation of any existing water lines or sanitary sewer services.

## **Storm Water**

MCWD will design and construct a regional storm water management facility that treats storm water from approximately 270 acres surrounding the Site. This facility will clean and control the rate of storm water that would otherwise flow untreated directly into Minnehaha Creek. Open space amenities and a trail network connecting the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail and Cottageville Park will be interwoven with the storm water features. The Developer will remain responsible for meeting storm water regulations for the portion of the Site devoted to the future development. However, it is expected that the Developer and MCWD will work closely together to design an innovative, aesthetically pleasing, and integrated approach to management of all storm water, trail, and open space elements throughout the Site.

## **Land Use**

The City is open to a range of development types on the Site if they are transit-supportive in nature. Included is housing, neighborhood-serving retail, and/or office uses.

## **Housing Density**

The City and the Metropolitan Council's expectations for residential density on the Site is 75-150+ units per acre of buildable land.

## **Parking**

TOD parking ratios and shared parking between uses are encouraged and expected. Parking that can be used by visitors to the Minnehaha Creek Greenway and Cottageville Park is desirable. Parking should be located underground and behind the buildings and not along Blake Road.

The City is open and flexible on parking requirements as long as the proposed development doesn't impact surrounding neighborhoods. The appropriate parking ratios will be determined through a parking and traffic study, paid for by the Developer. For planning purposes, the Developer should propose a parking ratio based on past experience and TOD best practices.

## **Sustainability**

325 Blake Road is a very unique site, adjacent to both a future LRT station and bordered by Minnehaha Creek. It provides an opportunity to demonstrate environmentally-sensitive design as an example for other development to follow. The City and MCWD desire a development that utilizes sustainable design and materials, water and energy efficiency and education.

## **Housing Affordability**

The City desires the Developer(s) to include 10-15% of the units as affordable and have them integrated with market rate units rather than as a standalone affordable development. If a mix of affordable and market rate units cannot be achieved, the site design should provide places for residents to come together and amenities that are shared between developments. If funding sources or Developer interest calls for a higher percentage of affordable units, the City is open to discussing that with the Developer.

### **Public Art**

PLACES is an effort to bring public art to the Green Line Extension. The City believes there is an opportunity to use the PLACES initiative to inform both public art on the Site, as well as the overall development. The City is interested in working with artist(s), the community and the Developer to determine the long-term goals for public art, either through PLACES or independent of that process.

## **Approvals & Financing**

### **Zoning**

The Site is currently zoned Industrial but is guided in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan as Activity Center which calls for a moderate to high density mix of uses that support the public investment of transit.

The City acknowledges that existing zoning districts may not have the flexibility needed for development on a site that is so unique, including its irregular shape, the plans for regional storm water treatment, and the opportunity to achieve remarkable views and changes in grade. As a result, the City will consider using a Planned Unit Development (PUD) approach to better achieve the redevelopment goals.

### **Environmental Review**

It is likely that the size and scope of this project will require environmental review under Minnesota Statute 4410 and City Code Part III, Chapter 100, Article II – Environmental Review Program. The City of Hopkins will serve as the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for any environmental review. Any environmental review shall be paid for by the Developer.

### **Park Dedication Fee**

The City is open to discussions about the fee as the development is shaped and the overall development plan is known.

### **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**

The City acknowledges that goals for the development may result in a financial gap in the project's pro forma. The City is willing to consider the establishment of a TIF district to make the project financially feasible and maximize the community benefits of the development.

Blight findings were documented for the cold storage facility that would allow for a TIF Redevelopment District to be established. However, because the building was demolished late 2018, a redevelopment district would need to be established by the end of 2021.

The City will rely on the Ehlers, the City's financial consultant, to advise on the appropriate level of public assistance based on a detailed TIF analysis of the Developer's pro forma for the proposed development.

### **Strategy for Partnerships with Other Agencies**

The location of this site in proximity to LRT, combined with the innovative approach to storm water management, dedication to community engagement and goals of an integrated and inclusive community, make this redevelopment an excellent candidate for grant funds through the Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County.

Throughout the concept development stage, the development team will look for opportunities to maximize funds from other agencies through creative design, exemplifying TOD principles and innovative problem-solving.