

Wooddale Station Redevelopment Framework St. Louis Park, Minnesota

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May 5th, 2011

Special thanks to:
Lee Munnich and Kris Nelson
Gary Morrison, Julie Grove, and the City of St. Louis Park
Hubert H. Humphrey School: Spring 2011 Capstone Project

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Executive Summary

The West Lake Street area, containing portions of both the Lennox and Sorenson neighborhoods, will soon be affected by the Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT) line, a billion-dollar transportation investment funded by a five-county sales tax, Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Council, the State of Minnesota, and the United States Department of Transportation. This area, just north and west of the planned station at Wooddale Avenue, may not have the widespread recognition of the West End or Excelsior & Grand, but perhaps unexpectedly, this historic part of St. Louis Park has often been visitors' gateway into the city.

The existing conditions of the area have been analyzed including economic development, transportation, identity, and environmental qualities. It was determined that there is a strong base for redevelopment of the area that is backed by solid structures and an invested community. Although the buildings may need some updating, the commercial properties in this area host a multitude of small, mostly independent businesses. The uses are varied and create a traditional neighborhood feel that contributes to the "small town in the big

city" character of the area. However, being small businesses, many of them do not have enough capital to make substantial improvements or expansions to buildings. There is an opportunity to attract more local businesses to the area and retain a main street feel in the original downtown of St. Louis Park, while still broadening the tax base and creating the jobs that will make the area (and the Southwest Light Rail line) sustainable and thriving in the long term.

Beyond the commercial buildings, the school, sports fields and the community center give the area a campus and youth-oriented feel. These institutions could provide the area with a clear, anchoring identity in the future. The West Lake Street area could be a hub for recreation, sporting events and school functions that occur year-round, rather than a handful of times a year.

Based on the analysis of existing conditions, interviews with multiple stakeholders, and in-depth research about the history of St. Louis Park and a complete literature review, an identity was created for the area – Heart of the Park.

The Heart of the Park is where the seed of St. Louis Park was planted over a century ago, and soon, it will be the city's nexus of locally-grown entrepreneurship; convenient and clean transportation; energy efficiency and environmental stewardship; and community pride in a shared history.

The Heart of the Park combines the essence of ecology, the heart of history, and the ethos of education. Everything within sight is green - from the synthetic turf of the community recreation fields, to the lush plantings and tree canopy lining the sidewalks, to the solar panels and high efficiency design of the high school campus and neighborhood businesses. Historic markers identify the original streetcar route, oldest buildings, and memorable stories of decades past. Artwork made by Park's students dots the landscape and monuments highlight these young people's educational and extracurricular accomplishments. Old buildings impress with their classic architecture and well-maintained facades, and new construction means new opportunities for businesses looking to capitalize on the area's central location and accessibility.

It will take time, energy, and money to transform the Wooddale Station and West Lake Street area into the Heart of the Park, the vibrant, innovative, light rail-oriented place. An Action Plan, which provides a menu of policy changes, capital improvements, and financial opportunities that will all play a part in reimagining the West Lake Street area so that the community can take full advantage of a Wooddale Light Rail station. The Heart of the Park plan utilizes phased development. The first phase represents “opening day” of the Southwest LRT line (currently scheduled to be in 2017). The second phase refers to the 20 years that will follow; this is the time when the most exciting changes will likely occur, as residents, businesses, and visitors to the area enjoy the perks of rail transit and the accompanying livability improvements to the area.

Opening day is a natural checkpoint for this economic development plan: LRT will already be impacting local real estate markets, and the community should already be prepared to steer new investment and redevelopment in a direction that benefits both existing stakeholders and newcomers. The second phase--the 20-Year Plan--looks far

enough out into the future to see the whole set of transformations that should come with investment in an LRT station. A shorter time frame sets unrealistic expectations for the rate of change in the community, while looking any further into the future would ignore the relationship between light rail and economic development in the community.

A Toolkit was created to equip government, local institutions, and residents and businesses with the tools they need to preserve the character and history of their community, while embracing the high quality growth and change that will accompany the Southwest Light Rail Transit line. Transportation and street life; economic development; environment; and history, identity, and wayfinding comprise the four subject areas of the Toolkit. Not all the items in the Toolkit must be utilized as the area undergoes transformations; multiple combinations of these tools can be used to help create the Heart of the Park as envisioned here.

Overall, the framework provided in this document creates opportunities for redevelopment. The two-phase development plan lays the groundwork for the future,

while the Toolkit provides an array of methods to achieve the vision of the Heart of the Park. The document was intentionally developed to act as a reference guide – a moving vehicle with which the city can begin true transformative planning processes and public engagement. The flexibility of fitting together tools was deliberate and the hope is that this document will not collect dust on the shelves of city hall but be used to transform West Lake Street into the Heart of St. Louis Park.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, streetcars traversed West Lake Street in St. Louis Park, connecting the village with its booming neighbor to the east, Minneapolis, and to its pastoral suburban neighbors to the west. Now, over one hundred years later, rail transit will soon return to this area in the form of the Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT) line, a billion dollar transportation investment funded by a five-county sales tax, Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Council, the State of Minnesota, and the United States Department of Transportation. Connecting with the Hiawatha and Central LRT lines in downtown Minneapolis, the Southwest line will serve the cities of Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie. One of the planned stations (Wooddale Station) will be located immediately south of the intersection of Highway 7 and Wooddale Avenue. Planners currently anticipate the line to open in 2017.

The area just north and west of the planned station at Wooddale Avenue may not have the widespread recognition of the West End or Excelsior & Grand, but perhaps unexpectedly, this historic part of St. Louis Park

has often been visitors' gateway into the city. They come to watch football games; to patronize one of West Lake Street's businesses; or maybe just to fill up their gas tank or buy a burger. Whatever the reason, this part of St. Louis Park--in fact the city's historic downtown--has remained integral to the city's vitality and image.

Of course, the individuals who live, work, and spend time in this corner of St. Louis Park know what makes it so great: it is a community with a small town feel, but with all those perks of being at the core of a bustling urban region. This is a place where homes remain relatively affordable, and where entrepreneurs can make a go of it. It is also where the city of St. Louis Park truly began over a century ago. To this day, West Lake Street and the surrounding area retains a mix of retail, commerce, and housing that is characteristic of resilient traditional neighborhoods.

This document provides local stakeholders with one possible scenario for growth as the Southwest LRT gradually transforms from an idea into a reality. Major transportation investments--especially

"Sometime in about 1902, the company built an extension of the [streetcar] to Hopkins, which was a bustling little village at that time. The line was built down Lake Street across the marsh and into Hopkins but not across the railroad tracks. Hopkins thus received its first streetcar line to the city and the increased use of the service no doubt caused many more trolleys to pass through St. Louis Park. Within a couple of years the Minneapolis and St. Paul Suburban Company line built an extension through Hopkins connecting to Lake Minnetonka."

- Norman F. Thomas, St. Louis Park: A Story of a Village, Chapter 8

LRT lines--require and inspire change in the places they serve. For a transit line to succeed, it needs riders: the area around stations must be relatively densely settled. Jobs and schools also attract riders. The perks of clean, efficient, frequent transit services like an LRT line also generates private sector interest in redevelopment. This will almost assuredly be the case in the West Lake Street study area (the scope of this document), which is shown in Figure 1.

This plan begins by examining the existing conditions of the study area. It then provides a written and visual snapshot from a hypothetical future, after LRT has been in service for twenty years and both public and private investments have gradually transformed the study area. This vision for the future describes the “Heart of the Park,” paying close attention to economic development, transportation, the environment, and local identity. In order to make that future a reality--and fully take advantage of the opportunities of the Southwest LRT line--the final portion of the document contains the Action Plan. Both the public and private sector use the action plan that provides recommendations for capital improvements,

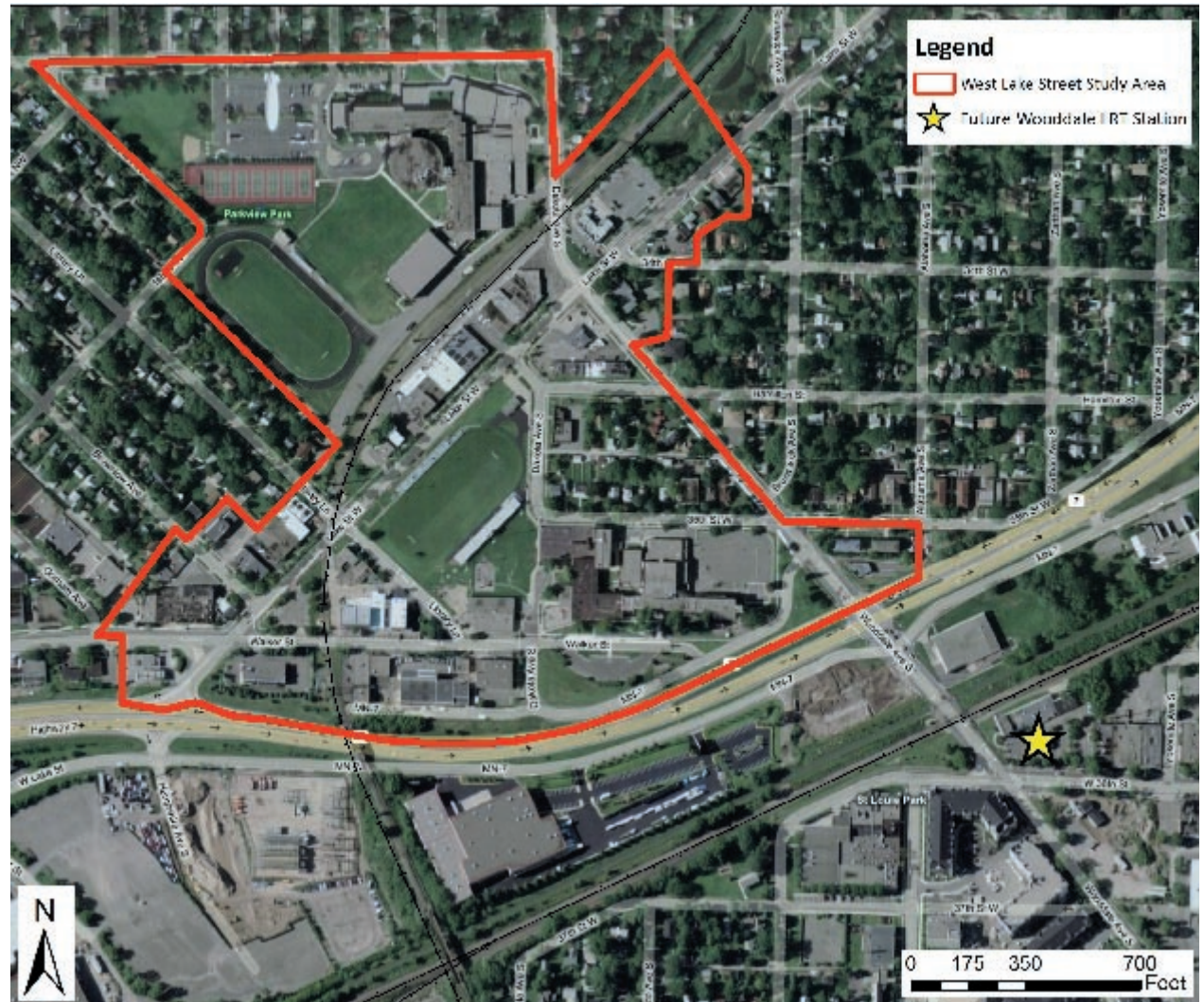


Figure 1: Map of Study Area



Figure 2: Hennepin County’s Proposed Wooddale Transit Plaza



Figure 3: Lake Street

policies, design standards, and fiscal tools. This last section has been subdivided into a narrative discussing major investments and changes, and a toolkit, which functions as a “menu” for change in the study area. The toolkit can act as a working document, and includes a matrix for readers to quickly find action items or resources of interest.

Each part of this plan has been prepared based on a great deal of research. This process included months of interviews with elected officials, public sector staff, neighborhood residents, local business owners, and experts in the transit-oriented development (TOD) field. A list of stakeholders interviewed and a summary of their comments are included in Appendix 1. A literature review uncovered best practices and case studies from across the region, country, and world. These articles and reports came from a number of different disciplines and perspectives and dealt with topics ranging from TOD and urban design, to community branding and historical preservation.

While rooted in careful research and meaningful conversations with the community, this plan serves as the beginning of

a longer conversation about how to make the most of the Southwest LRT line and its stop at Wooddale Avenue. As the project nears completion in the coming years, the community must work together and define specific objectives and standards for the growth and redevelopment that comes with transformative events like the opening of a rapid transit line. It is the authors’ hope that this body of work will inform, and indeed inspire those discussions.

2. Analysis of Existing Conditions

This analysis is organized into four main areas of interest: economic development, transportation, environment, and identity. The intent of the analysis is to provide baseline data that informs the vision and final Action Plan for the West Lake Street study area. Preparation of this analysis involved site visits, stakeholder interviews, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data analysis. A Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis also informed this work (and has been included in Appendix 2).

Land Use	
Commercial	34 properties <i>4 – schools</i> <i>2 – non profit/community associations</i>
Industrial	9 properties
Residential	23 properties <i>6 apartment buildings</i> <i>1 condo building</i> <i>15 single family residences</i> <i>1 double-bungalow</i>
Vacant	8 properties <i>(some of which are used for surface parking)</i>

Table 1: Existing Land Uses



Figure 4: Existing Businesses on Lake Street

study area. Immediately outside the identified study area, land uses mostly shift to single family residential homes. To the south is Highway 7; across the new Wooddale bridge is the location of the future Wooddale LRT station. Table 1 and Figure 5 provide further details about the land uses in the study area.

Compared to properties in the city as a whole, the properties in the West Lake Street study area tend to be older, have a lower estimated market value (EMV), and are of slightly lower density. Each of these characteristics has its strengths and drawbacks.

A. Economic Development

Existing Land Use

The West Lake Street study area has an organic and eclectic mix of land uses. Within the study area, 23 properties have residential uses, while 43 fall into the commercial, industrial, or educational categories. Commercial uses include everything from athletic apparel (catering to high school athletes), to skin therapy and yoga, to a “doggy daycare.” St. Louis Park High School, its football field, and the Central Community Center take up the largest portion of land in the

The age of the structures in the area--the oldest being the Walker Building (built in 1892), with only four buildings constructed since 1965--certainly presents challenges, but also provides opportunities. Retrofitting older buildings may raise conflicts with city zoning (which is currently “general commercial” for all but the residential properties), building codes (older buildings are likely not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, parking requirements, or safety measures like sprinkler systems), and structural issues. The Action Plan (included later in this report) offers strategies and

resources that can help property owners and tenants overcome these obstacles. Of course, older buildings often have unique characteristics or aesthetics that are worth preserving. Historic preservation extends beyond a single building: it helps preserve the character and heritage of a community, and is often a marketable asset for both business and residential districts. The Action Plan provides funding tools for retrofitting and reusing these older properties.

Currently, the age and floor plans of many area commercial buildings create an opportunity for start-up businesses that cannot afford the rent of newer developments, be they retailers (West End or Excelsior & Grand) or vendors oriented to other businesses (such as wholesalers). Lower EMVs translate into lower acquisition costs; these savings are passed on to business owners in the form of lower rents. The area acts as an ad-hoc business incubator. Supporting these businesses through loans for maintenance or retrofits, and eventually providing incentives for full-scale redevelopment, are efforts that the City of St. Louis Park and the communities surrounding the West Lake Street study area will have to consider.

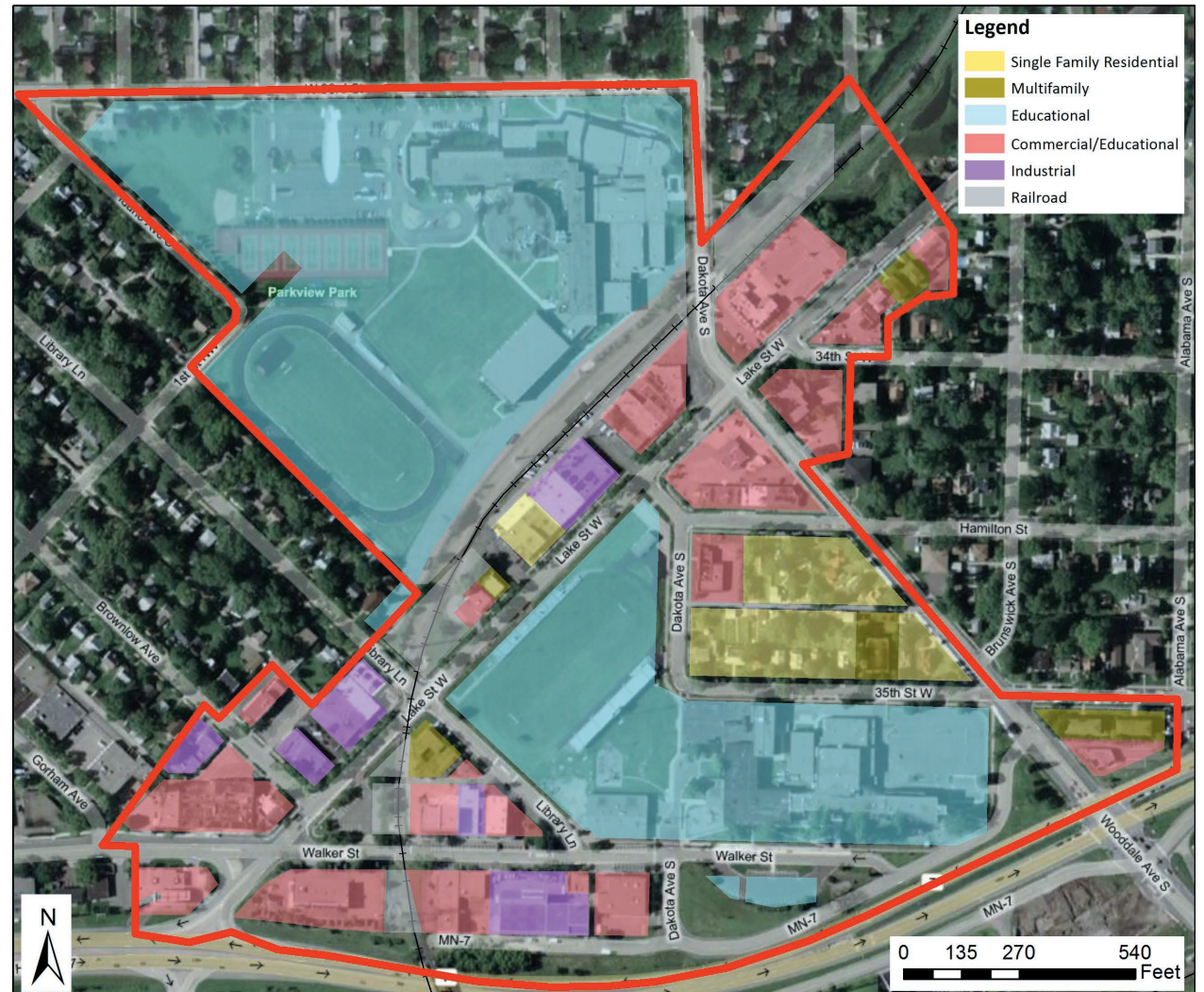


Figure 5: Map of Land Uses in the Study Area

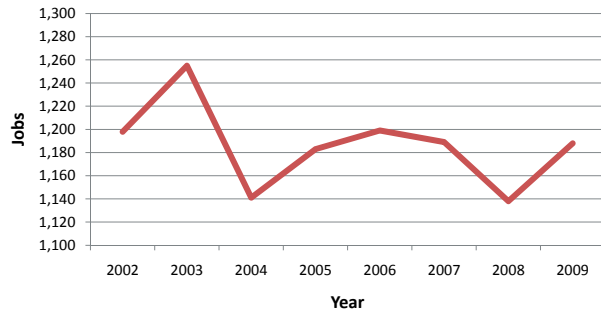


Table 2: Employment in the Study Area



Figure 6: SLP High School



Figure 7: Low Density Residential Surrounding Study Area

However, even with little in the way of special attention from the public sector, the study area has weathered the recent economic downturn remarkably well. There has only been one non-residential foreclosure within the study area since January 2005. That building has already been acquired by a local property owner and is in its final stages of renovation and leasing. Few properties are vacant or stay vacant for long. In addition to low vacancy, employment in the study area is strong. As seen in Table 2, the number of jobs increased between 2008 and 2009. The largest employer is the school district, but there were also an additional 240 jobs provided by businesses in the study area as of 2009.

Density in the study area is low but contextually appropriate in the present day. Commercial, retail, office, and industrial buildings are one to two stories high. Besides the few apartment buildings, most of the surrounding area is single family residential at one or two stories. The existing density is not typical of Transit Oriented Development, which promotes increased density near

transit stations. Redevelopment of properties within the study area will likely happen as the Southwest LRT attracts investors.

Property owners and investors interested in renovating or redeveloping land in the study area will need to exercise some caution. St. Louis Park property owners have had problems with contaminated or polluted land (sarcastically referred to as “buried treasure” in the real estate field) due to historical industrial uses. While environmental remediation can be expensive, the Action Plan provides a broad set of county, state and federal funding resources.

The high school football field is another parcel with latent potential. The current football field sits across West Lake Street from the high school, separated by freight rail tracks and a number of businesses. While the field has fresh grass and new stadium lights, it lacks adequate facilities and concessions. The singular use (football games) leaves the space highly underutilized most of the time. The Action Plan highlights opportunities for improvements and reprogramming at the site.

B. Transportation

Sidewalks and Bike Trails

As a suburban community, the West Lake Street area has an impressive network of existing sidewalks and access to a regional bike trail. Sidewalks line both sides of almost every street in the community. Residents appreciate the benefits of the neighborhood's walkability: in interviews, many said they felt safe walking during both the day and night, and also enjoyed easy, quick access to local shops and services. The Cedar Lake bike trail runs alongside the proposed Southwest LRT alignment, connecting bike commuters and recreational bicyclists with the Minneapolis chain of lakes, downtown Minneapolis, and, to the west, Hopkins and the southwestern suburbs. The community does lack local bike lanes, which would provide beneficial connections not only to the Cedar Lake Trail but to other areas of St. Louis Park, and the new LRT station.

The new Wooddale Avenue bridge across Highway 7 was designed to improve one of the worst intersections for pedestrians in the city. While the new bridge

has bike lanes, they are very narrow and cross the path of many vehicle turn lanes. There are not any other bike lanes on the other streets in the study area, though traffic volumes tend to be light on most area streets. The Wooddale bridge does have sidewalks but they are not particularly wide or aesthetically pleasing; vehicular circulation is clearly the priority function of the bridge at this point. Still, neighborhood residents and business owners remain excited about the new bridge and its provision of improved connections across Highway 7.

The freight rail tracks cutting through the study area have long been a safety concern for both pedestrians and bicyclists. There are crossing arms where the tracks bisect Dakota Avenue, but not at the West Lake Street and Library Lane intersection, or where the tracks cross Walker Avenue.

Public Transit

There are two Metro Transit bus routes that access the study area: 615 and 688. These routes operate with limited frequency, with the latter serving rush hour commuters to downtown Minneapolis exclusively.

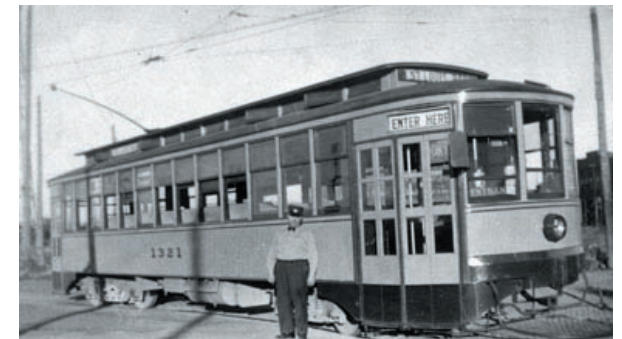


Figure 8: Historic Transit in SLP



Figure 9: Metro Transit Bus

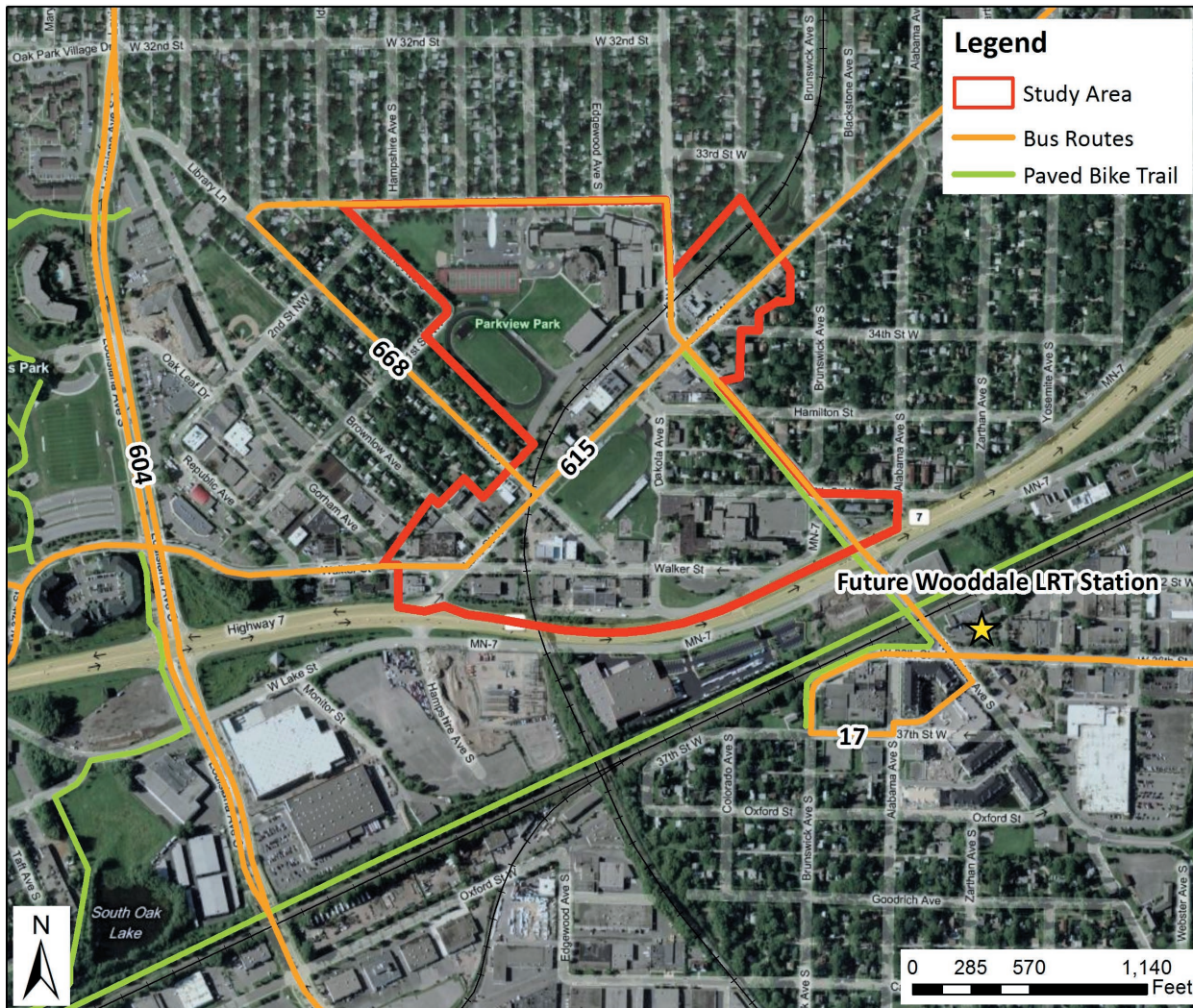


Figure 10: Transportation Map of Station Area

Both routes do cross paths with multiple other bus routes, which allows for transfers. Once the LRT is operating, public transit will likely become a popular way of getting to and from the study area. Typically, bus routes are re-routed to connect with the LRT to provide greater access to more destinations. This could be an opportunity for the study area to have more transportation options, but much will depend on the feeder service provided by Metro Transit. The paved bike paths and bus routes in the station area can be seen in Figure 10.

Highway 7

While Highway 7 acts as a major artery in and out of the study area, it is also a significant physical barrier. A study conducted in 2009 examined the effects of the Hiawatha LRT on residential property values. It showed that the average single family home within half a mile of LRT stations increased in value by about \$5,000 and the average multi-family housing unit increased in value by \$15,000.[i] Since most of the study area is within one half mile of the station area, these benefits could be seen by the residential properties in the area--but unfortunately, this study also found that these benefits

were not seen in areas that were cut off from the LRT by large scale industrial development along the east side of Hiawatha Avenue. This development was seen as a physical barrier to the LRT; Highway 7 could act similarly as a barrier, potentially cutting off the net benefits of the LRT to the study area. This effect may be mitigated through wayfinding and capital improvements on local streets, detailed in the Action Plan.

And while Highway 7 may disrupt the street grid, but it does not visually divide the community to the same extent as the concrete silos of Hiawatha Avenue. The new Wooddale bridge has already dramatically improved the comfort and ease of access between the site of the future LRT station and the study area.

C. Environment

The West Lake Street study area has the potential to become less car oriented through the provision of light rail, bus circulation, enhanced walkability, and the development of local bike lanes. Increasingly attractive multimodal activities will make use of the car unnecessary

and less desirable. Reduced car use not only has great public health benefits related to increased physical activity, but it has a significant impact on local air and water quality, and longer-range climate change mitigation.

The area's historic buildings also present an opportunity for property owners to practice environmental stewardship. Repurposing aged buildings, or at least reusing materials, reduces consumption of new materials and resources required for new construction. Many area building owners are already aware of energy efficiency resources and are already investing in energy efficient HVAC systems, storm windows, and low-energy lighting. The City of St. Louis Park has shown a strong interest in renewable energy, including solar energy for businesses along West Lake Street and in the surrounding area. Public and private collaboration on preservation and expansion of existing structures, and implementation of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures could have an immense positive impact on the environment both locally and globally.

Higher residential and commercial densities and a continued mix of land

“Improving transit, bicycling, and walking is less expensive than adding highway lanes and building parking ramps. A study prepared for the Minnesota Department of Transportation estimated that it would require a 70% expansion of the highway system in the Twin Cities region to make it “free flowing” by 2020.”
-Transit for Livable Communities 2004



Figure 11: Historic Buildings on Walker Street

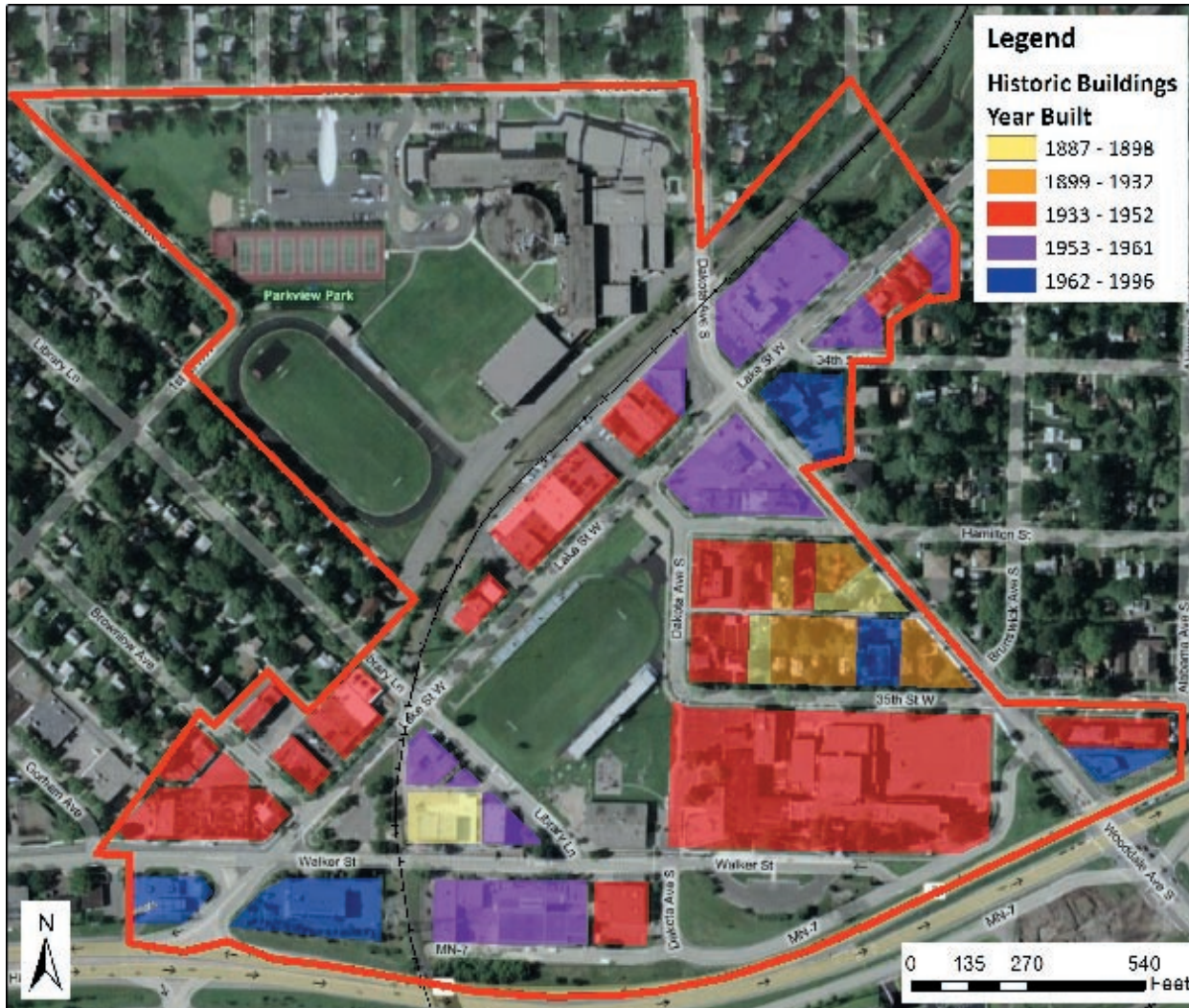


Figure 12: Year Built of Historic Buildings in the Study Area

uses are also environmentally responsible trends that will be seen in the study area. Higher densities reduce the per-person cost of infrastructure, particularly when compared with new development on the fringe of the region. The mixing of land uses means people can live closer to their jobs and to the services they need; they may opt to walk, bike, or at least drive a shorter distance in their daily activities.

D. Identity

The West Lake Street study area lacks a singular identity but contains many attributes with the potential to create a unified focus for the area. Specifically, the historic, educational, and mixed use characteristics of the area stand out as key foci.

As the historic downtown of St. Louis Park, the location of the original streetcar line from Minneapolis, and the locale of the city's oldest buildings, the West Lake Street study area is a unique asset in the center of St. Louis Park. As seen in Figure 12, there are buildings in the study area that were built in the 1890s. Even though some of the buildings may not warrant saving, it will be

important to maintain the historic character of this original downtown. The St. Louis Park Historical Society has a repository of great information that could be used to tap into the history and draw out a clear, communicable identity that the neighborhood can be proud to claim as its own.

The study area not only contains St. Louis Park High School, to which students commute from as far as North Minneapolis, but it also hosts a Spanish-immersion school in the historic Central Community Center. The high caliber education provided at these institutions is an asset to the community. The school, in combination with the City and other partners, also has an opportunity to update the sports facilities in the area. The upgrades could take many forms, such as a turf and/or domed field. If the sports fields were upgraded it could generate additional users and income for the community. The Vision and Action Plan sections highlight one potential future for these recreational spaces.

One of the greatest strengths of this area is that it has a unique, small town, main street character that many in the

community appreciate and hope to preserve. As mentioned previously, the area has an impressive mix of uses that has grown organically over time (and has proven hard to perfect in new developments).

Public and private amenities that benefit all the area's stakeholders will help spur growth that is community-conscious and context sensitive. Wayfinding is a key way to connect people with these amenities, whether it is the school or the planned light rail station itself. Currently there is little in the way of distinct signage that steers visitors to key destinations, regardless of whether they are driving, bicycling, or on foot. The best way to enhance wayfinding is to improve signage in the entire study area, but especially on the new bridge across Highway 7, as it connects two spaces that are otherwise physically and visually separated by a highway. Improved signage in the area could help the local businesses so people know what retail or services are available on the other side of the bridge. This will be essential in drawing Light Rail riders from the station to local businesses and institutions. Additionally, unique markers planted throughout the study area could provide

"For each passenger mile traveled public transit uses half the fuel and produces 5-50% of the harmful emissions of private autos."

-Transit for Livable Communities 2004



Figure 13: Historic Photo of Gas Station at Lake Street and Walker Street



Figure 14: SLP High School now Central Community Center



Figure 15: Walkable Commercial District



Figure 16: Community with Horizontal Mix of Uses

historic and educational context that promote the identity and positive characteristics of the area. The Vision and Action Plan describe these ideas in greater detail.

E. Summary

Although the buildings may need some updating, the commercial properties in this area host a multitude of small, mostly independent businesses. The uses are varied and create a traditional neighborhood feel that contributes to the “small town in the big city” character of the area. However, being small businesses, many of them do not have enough capital to make substantial improvements or expansions to buildings. There is an opportunity to attract more local businesses to the area and retain a main street feel in the original downtown of St. Louis Park, while still broadening the tax base and creating the jobs that will make the area (and the Southwest Light Rail line) sustainable and thriving in the long term.

Beyond the commercial buildings, the school, sports fields and the community center give the area a campus and youth-oriented feel. These institutions could

provide the area with a clear, anchoring identity in the future. The West Lake Street area could be a hub for recreation, sporting events and school functions that occur year-round, rather than a handful of times a year.

The remainder of this plan provides a vision for the future and a means to get there. The following sections create a unified concept for the study area, accompanied by a host of tools and actions that would convert that concept from drawings and words to bricks and mortar. Included are resources for enhancing economic development of local businesses and properties; providing and improving multimodal transportation infrastructure; reducing energy consumption and enhancing environmental attributes; and establishing a unique identity for the area centered on its history, its traditional neighborhood character, and the ease of mobility.

3. Vision

A. The Story: *Heart of the Park*

Rhonda and her teenage daughter Samantha don't always see eye to eye on curfew, or what radio station to play while preparing dinner. One thing they do share is a commute every weekday morning. From their home in the Sumner-Glenwood neighborhood in Minneapolis, Rhonda and Samantha both head out the door at 7:12 A.M. on the dot and walk together to the Royalston Light Rail station. From there, it's just ten minutes or so until the recorded announcement calls out their stop: Wooddale.

Rhonda and Samantha get off the train together, too, though they soon part ways. Rhonda works at the corporate offices of a regional food distributor, while Samantha attends St. Louis Park High School. As they get off the train, they wave to John, one of the parents who is active on the PTA with Rhonda. John lives a few blocks north of the station, and often sees the two as he catches the train to his work in Eden Prairie. Across the platform, bleary-eyed commuters await the next train to downtown Minneapolis, sipping on coffee

from the small café next to the platform.

After crossing the Wooddale Avenue bridge together, Rhonda and Samantha's paths diverge, with Rhonda heading down a wide sidewalk on the south side of Walker Street, and Samantha continuing up Wooddale to the high school. On this unusually warm spring morning, they are grateful for the shade provided by the quickly-maturing linden trees and the almost-blossoming lilacs. A few minutes early for school, Samantha stops to read a small display placed along the boulevard; apparently, this street was once named Schoolhouse Road. While less than enthusiastic about going to class on such a beautiful day, Samantha can't help but smile at the thought of a student making this same walk a century ago.

Rhonda, Samantha, John, along with all the people they see on their daily journeys, are members of many communities: ones of common interest, of shared faith, and of cultural history. Some overlap. Others don't. But one of the things they certainly share is their role as members of the Heart of the Park: a vibrant, growing, sustainable place, and a place that they all know and love.



Figure 17: Rhonda Riding LRT



Figure 18: Heart of the Park Welcome Sign

B. The Concept: *The Heart of the Park*

The Heart of the Park is where the seed of St. Louis Park was planted over a century ago, and soon, it will be the city's nexus of locally-grown entrepreneurship; convenient and clean transportation; energy efficiency and environmental stewardship; and community pride in a shared history.

The Heart of the Park combines the essence of ecology, the heart of history, and the ethos of education. Everything within sight is green -- from the synthetic turf of the community recreation fields, to the lush plantings and tree canopy lining the sidewalks, to the solar panels and high efficiency design of the high school campus and neighborhood businesses. Historic markers identify the original streetcar route, oldest buildings, and memorable stories of decades past. Artwork made by Park's students dots the landscape and monuments highlight these young people's educational and extracurricular accomplishments. Old buildings impress with their classic architecture and well-maintained facades, and new construction means new opportunities

for businesses looking to capitalize on the area's central location and accessibility.

The Heart of the Park wasn't built in a day; it needed a spark, a catalyst. And that was Wooddale Station on the Southwest Light Rail line.

C. Origins of the Concept

The concept for the West Lake Street area – the historic downtown of St. Louis Park that includes the high school, Central Community Center and mixed businesses – referred to here as “the Heart of the Park,” grows out of Vision St. Louis Park. Vision St. Louis Park is a “community-wide strategic plan aimed at creating a community so special that people will make a conscious choice to make St. Louis Park their lifelong home.” Vision St. Louis Park was created with community input into eight specific areas: arts & culture, diversity, community events, environment, transportation, gathering places, sidewalks & trails, and housing. The West Lake Street area concept addresses St. Louis Park's priorities and hopes for five of those eight areas outlined in the Vision: arts & culture, environment, transportation,



Figure 19: Tree-Lined Street



Figure 20: Entrance to SLP High School

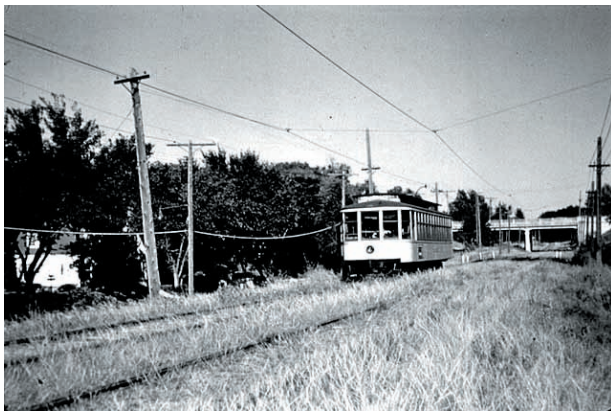


Figure 21: Historic Transit in SLP



Figure 21: Possible Recreation Opportunity

gathering places, and sidewalks & trails. It does so by capitalizing on a number of distinctive opportunities inherent in the West Lake Street area. These relate to its history, the environment, recreation, transportation, and economic development.

History

As noted in the previous section, the Heart of the Park is St. Louis Park's historic downtown. Between 1892 and 1938, the original St. Louis Park streetcar line ran down West Lake Street.^[i] The development of the Light Rail Station adjacent to the site of the original streetcar provides an opportunity to connect the past with the present. The oldest buildings in the city, the Walker and Hamilton buildings, still stand facing each other on Walker Street. Improving these and other facades will bring vitality back to underutilized buildings and improve the aesthetics of the street. Educational kiosks, historical markers, monuments and locally-made public art will infuse the area with its rich history.

Environment

The environment is reflected in Heart of the Park's "green campus" concept. St. Louis Park High School will have opportunities in coming years to invest in new and remodeled buildings designed to maximize energy efficiency. On-site clean power generation is another possibility envisioned for the future -- for example, through the use of solar panels and other zero- or low-emission technologies. Local businesses that incorporate principles and technologies emphasizing energy efficiency and clean power generation will see a return on investment both economically and ecologically. Increased recreational space in the area, and the addition of more street trees, planters, and native landscaping, will improve the community's livability and reflect St. Louis Park's desire to respect and appreciate the environment.

Recreation

Community recreation facilities and gathering places are a key focus of the Heart of the Park concept. Improvements will include public plazas, greater public access to park space, and a redesigned

community center. A domed and turfed field on the high school campus will allow year-round programming that students and neighbors alike can enjoy. These investments will provide a variety of new gathering places for the community and city as a whole.

Transportation

Transportation and sidewalks & trails will inevitably receive a great deal of attention with the construction of the Wooddale Light Rail Station. The facility will act as a catalyst for improvements in non-motorized transportation. The Heart of the Park concept includes complete streets designed with bicyclists, pedestrians and automobiles equally in mind. Connecting Dakota Avenue south to Walker Street will improve accessibility between the LRT station, the community center, and local businesses and residents.

Economic Development

Increasingly dense commercial/office redevelopment between Walker Street and Highway 7 will expand the city's tax base and create even more jobs in the Heart of the Park, while the traditional neighborhood

area northeast along West Lake Street will continue to cater to small, independent businesses. The Central Community Center could be partially repurposed into housing or offices, particularly at the eastern end of the property, closest to Wooddale Avenue.

Conclusion: A Livable Community

The Heart of the Park is where the past meets the present; where the traditional neighborhood fuses with new, environmentally-sensitive technology and investments. The school, a traditional centering point for community and identity, anchors the area and ceaselessly generates vitality and innovation. Residents, visitors, and workers stroll the pedestrian-friendly streetscapes at the heart of St. Louis Park as they make their way to jobs, shops, and the Wooddale LRT station.

“Transit investment in the Twin Cities region is only 65% of regions similar in size.”
-Transit for Livable Communities 2004

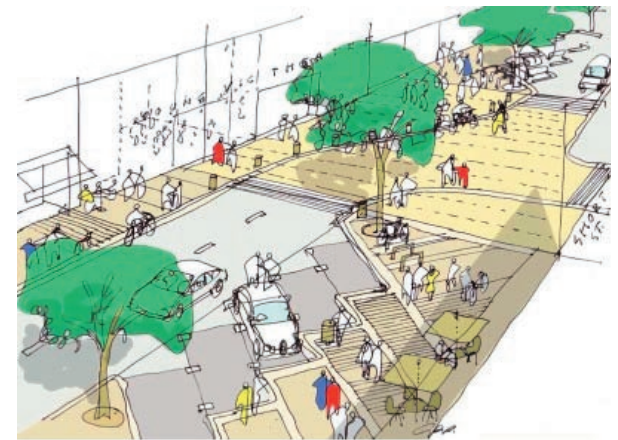


Figure 23: Possible Future for the Heart of the Park



Figure 24: Possible Future for the Heart of the Park

4. Action Plan

It will take time, energy, and money to transform the Wooddale Station and West Lake Street area into the Heart of the Park, the vibrant, innovative, light rail-oriented place described in this report. This section, the Action Plan, provides a menu of policy changes, capital improvements, and financial opportunities that will all play a part in reimagining the West Lake Street area so that the community can take full advantage of a Wooddale Light Rail station. Government, local institutions, and residents and businesses may find useful resources in the Toolkit, which makes up the bulk of this Action Plan. As its name implies, the Toolkit is intended to equip local stakeholders with the tools they need to preserve the character and history of their community, while embracing the high quality growth and change that will accompany the Southwest Light Rail Transit line.

The Action Plan is divided into three parts. The first is a holistic description of this plan's recommendations for the study area; it is a broad overview of the actions that are needed to make this plan's vision come to life.

The second section is the Toolkit, a detailed matrix of those changes and potential resources that, when carefully applied, will make the Wooddale LRT station a success for St. Louis Park and the region alike. The third section expands upon the Toolkit, providing detailed explanations of each Toolkit item, along with selected case studies and links to additional resources.

A. Action Plan Overview

This section of the Wooddale Station Redevelopment Plan discusses the long-term opportunities for change in the study area. Of course, redevelopment and investment will not happen all at once. This plan proposes two transformative phases. The Toolkit, which begins on page 29, provides the actions and resources essential to steering both phases of change in the community.

The first phase represents "opening day" of the Southwest LRT line (currently scheduled to be in 2017). The second phase refers to the 20 years that will follow; this is the time when the most exciting changes will likely occur, as residents, businesses, and visitors to the area enjoy the

"Urban thinkers have called the current period of recession and uncertainty 'the great reset'; a time when the economy and lifestyles will adjust to new conditions, and when cities and suburbs will succeed or fail depending on how they respond."

-Transit for Livable Communities 2010



Figure 25: Stakeholders Engaged in a Planning Process

benefits of rail transit and the accompanying livability improvements to the area. Opening day is a natural checkpoint for this economic development plan: LRT will already be impacting local real estate markets, and the community should already be prepared to steer new investment and redevelopment in a direction that benefits both existing stakeholders and newcomers. The second phase -- the 20-Year Plan -- looks far enough out into the future to see the whole set of transformations that should come with investment in an LRT station. A shorter time frame sets unrealistic expectations for the rate of change in the community, while looking any further into the future would ignore the relationship between light rail and economic development in the community.

Opening Day

The plan for opening day has been divided into two geographic focus areas, Focus Area 1 and Focus Area 2, highlighted in Figure 26.

Focus Area 1 includes the properties along West Lake Street from Wooddale Avenue to Library Lane. The area is currently characterized by one- and two-story buildings

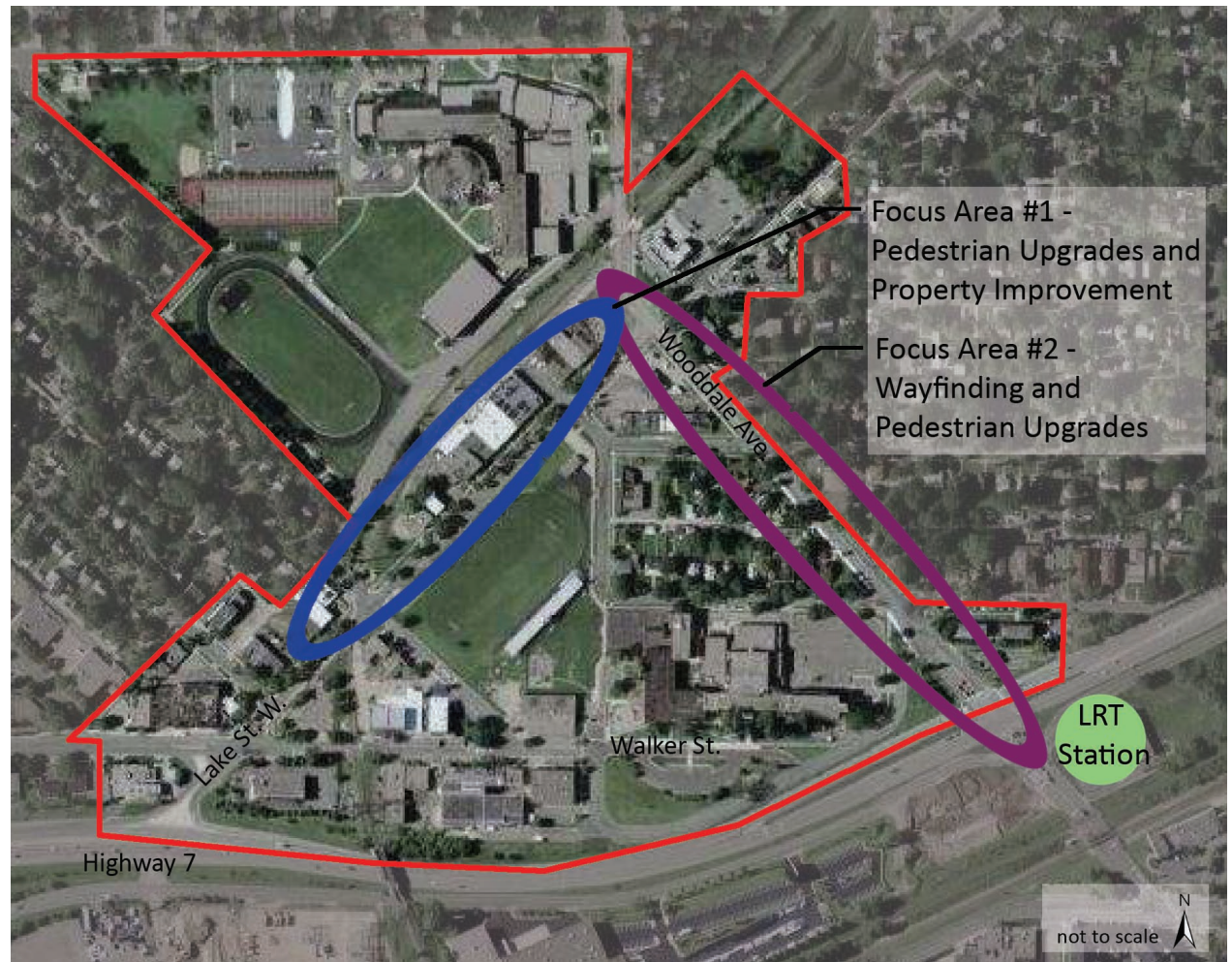


Figure 26: Opening Day Focus Areas



Figure 27: Small Improvements on Walker Street



Figure 28: Small Improvements on Lake Street to Improve Pedestrian Environment

on the northwest side of the street and the St. Louis Park High School football field on the southeast. This area can be seen as the center of the study area and will play an important role in the future of the area.

It will be important to improve the pedestrian environment in Focus Area 1 to help entice further public and private investment. One key improvement will be to install a sidewalk on the southeast (football field) side of West Lake Street. This area is currently only used for circulation during football games, but better pedestrian circulation on both sides of West Lake Street will encourage walking and better connect the northwest and southeast portions of the study area. Additional streetscaping (explained in greater detail in the Toolkit) will enhance the pedestrian environment as well. Investment in planters, pedestrian-scale street lighting, and improved signage all make for a more human-scale environment that provides pedestrians with greater safety and comfort. This is absolutely essential to making the light rail a convenient and attractive option for area residents, workers, and visitors. Local businesses will also

benefit from a more inviting streetscape.

Façade improvements should be a priority in this area as well. Most of the buildings along West Lake Street have solid structural bases, but are not visually appealing. A bucket of paint, new signage, and fresh awnings can go a long way; the Pampered Pooch building is a good example of a successful façade improvement. Figure 26 shows how simple improvements can make West Lake Street more inviting and aesthetically pleasing. By offering assistance to businesses or connecting them with low-interest business improvement loan programs, the City can help these buildings get a face lift that will ultimately catalyze the rebirth of the entire study area.

Focus Area 2 extends from the Wooddale LRT station at Wooddale and Highway 7 to West Lake Street. The largest priorities for this area leading up to opening day involve wayfinding and pedestrian and bicycle improvements. As discussed in the study area analysis section, the recently constructed Wooddale Avenue bridge is a vast improvement from the previous iteration of the intersection with Highway 7. However, even with a sidewalk and bike

lane, the bridge remains largely focused on vehicular circulation. The sidewalk and bike lanes are narrow and uninviting, with fast and frequent car traffic passing by on the bridge. Improvements from the LRT station to the bridge in the form of more defined bike lanes and enhanced crosswalks will help invite them into the Heart of the Park, rather than push them away. New streetscaping in the form of planters and smaller scale streetlights can make the bridge more comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists as well. These upgrades can be seen in Figure 28.

Perhaps the most important investment in Focus Area 2 is wayfinding signage like the one seen on page 18 in Figure 17. People getting off the LRT at the Wooddale Station must know what amenities and businesses are in the surrounding area. Signs need to be installed at the station to point riders to where local businesses, the high school, community center, and parks are. This signage will help St. Louis Park promote community amenities and businesses, drawing LRT riders into the Heart of the Park.

Twenty Years of LRT

The opening day plan is just the first set of steps in the transformation of the study area that will take place in coming years. The items in that section of the plan create the foundation for further public and private investment. The 20-Year Plan, seen in Figure 29, includes larger capital improvement suggestions for the public sector and for local property owners. The Toolkit provides greater detail on how to carry out, fund, and time these programs.

The 20-Year Plan divides the study area into five distinct districts: highway commercial, community and civic buildings, athletic/community space, traditional neighborhood, and pedestrian improvement areas. Combined, actions in each area will ensure the Heart of the Park is a thriving, transit-oriented community for years to come.

The *highway commercial* area sits between Highway 7 and Walker Street. This area is the most visible from both Highway 7 and the Southwest LRT line. Properties in this area should become denser, providing the area with more jobs and



Figure 29: Pedestrian Friendly Amenities



Figure 30: Pedestrian Improvements to Wooddale Avenue Bridge

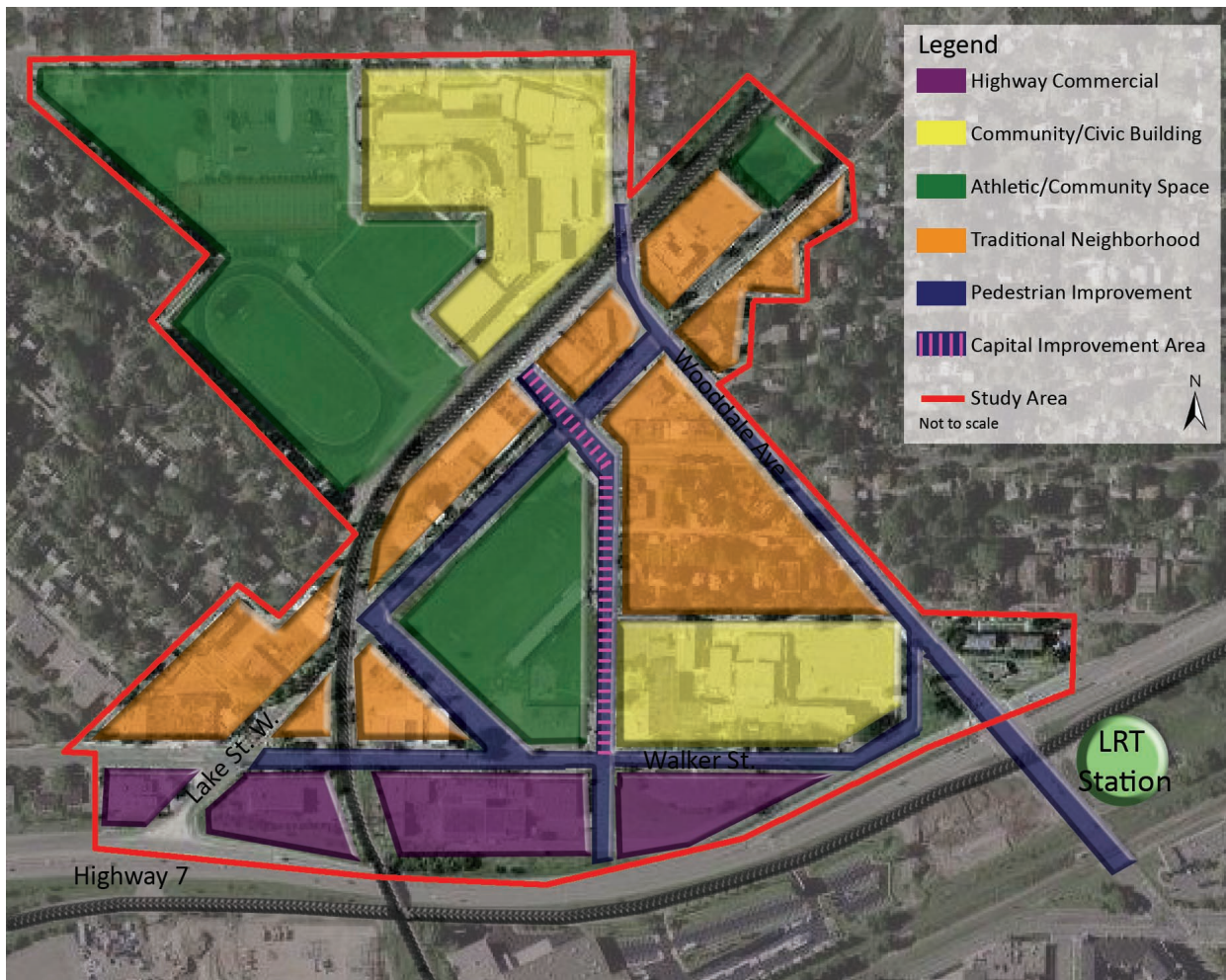


Figure 31: Twenty Years of LRT Plan

ensuring its long-term economic vitality. The daytime population will support local businesses, restaurants, and cafés. New construction in this area should entice passersby into the area -- buildings should step up in height and intensity towards Highway 7, while providing pedestrian friendly streetscapes along Walker Street.

Community and civic buildings include the high school and the community center. These specific properties are seen as anchors in the area and should be preserved and enhanced. The presence of St. Louis Park High School and the Central Community Center strongly influences the identity and sense of place of the area, and will continue to serve as anchors of the Heart of the Park. The community center site should be overhauled once the LRT is in service; surface parking should be reduced or at least reconfigured, with a new structure or park space facing Wooddale Avenue and the LRT station. St. Louis Park High School's building will see little change, though its recreational facilities deserve a major facelift.

Athletic and community space refers to the current football field, track, and

recreational space surrounding the high school, as well as Parkview Park (immediately west of the school). The community will benefit from more organized sport field space; stakeholder interviews have indicated a strong desire for year-round recreational programming in the area. To accomplish this, a dome should be placed on the existing track and field space on the high school property. Football and soccer events would relocate to this improved facility, with bleachers, a scoreboard, and other needed infrastructure moved from the existing field or added. Putting the dome on the existing track site will increase the proximity of parking for school sporting events and provide space to install bathrooms and locker rooms, which are currently in the Central Community Center building.

With the relocation of Park football and soccer games, the field on West Lake Street can be used for public and community-wide activities. This field would act as a center point for the Heart of the Park's neighborhood activities. It could be used for Park and Recreation programming, rented for group sporting events, provide additional outdoor space for the Central Community Center,

and even host neighborhood festivals and events. Both of the improved facilities will require significant investment, but they will also be areas that can draw outside visitors to the Heart of the Park. They would provide a better long-term revenue base for the school and City, while encouraging further private investment in this strong community. Local businesses would surely benefit from year-round use of both of these athletic and community facilities.

The *traditional neighborhood* district stretches along the northwest side of Lake Street and along Wooddale Avenue. The district is intended to provide a flexible development environment that can support residential, business, light industrial, or commercial land uses, where appropriate. The Toolkit recommends continued City support for the mix of uses that make for strong, resilient neighborhoods. Over time, the City must ensure property owners have enough flexibility to maintain current uses until the time is right for redevelopment or repurposing of their properties. The market will drive many of the changes to individual properties, but the City should facilitate redevelopment through



Figure 32: Increased Density in Traditional Neighborhood



Figure 33: Lake Street - 20 Years After LRT Opening



Figure 34: Example of Street that Prioritizes Pedestrians over Cars

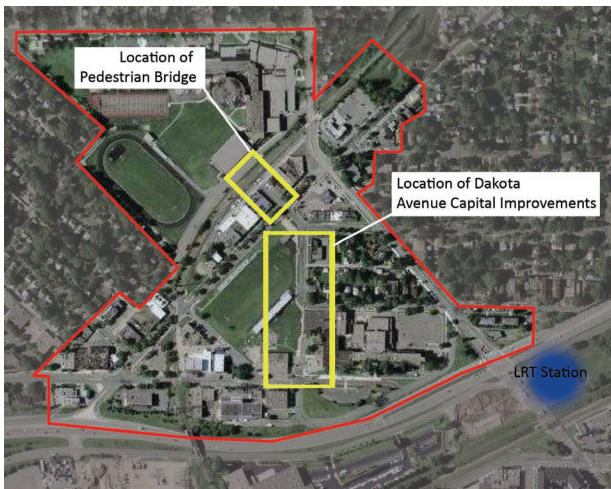


Figure 35: Location of Dakota Avenue Proposed Pedestrian Improvement Area

flexible zoning and capital improvements.

While the area will certainly reflect the benefits of traditional neighborhood design and functions, property owners will also see incentives to incorporate cutting edge technologies and energy efficient design into their buildings or homes. This part of the Heart of the Park will blend history with innovative methods of conserving resources, and even clean energy generation. The Toolkit includes a large section dedicated to opportunities for better environmental stewardship and energy efficiency.

The *pedestrian improvement* district covers most of the roads in the study area, and includes a subdistrict of capital improvement areas which will require even closer attention. Many of the pedestrian improvement concepts should already be in place on opening day, as discussed in the Opening Day plan that precedes this one. Simple changes to street lighting, signage, and streetscapes can have a huge impact on the experience of bikers and pedestrians in the area. These changes do not deliberately inconvenience people who

choose to drive; rather, they level the playing field so that walking or bicycling can be a legitimate option for residents, workers, and visitors in the Heart of the Park, regardless of their age or physical ability.

There are two major capital improvement areas. The first connects Dakota Avenue through to Walker Street seen in Figure 33. Currently this area is confusing to navigate for vehicles and pedestrians; the large parcel of land is a barrier between the north and south parts of the study area. By connecting the street via a new north-south roadway and sidewalk, the site will be easier to navigate for all users. Dakota Avenue should be transformed into a “living street,” where pedestrians receive priority over other road users. This will create an environment of slow vehicular traffic, and will allow children from the Central Community Center to more safely cross the street when using the newly turfed field space. Living streets are discussed in greater detail in the Toolkit.

The other major capital improvement area falls between the high school and West Lake Street. While there is a need to draw high school students and visitors

to West Lake and Walker Street businesses, the train tracks create a major barrier. A pedestrian bridge from the south entrance of the high school would deposit people between Lake Street buildings, in a space currently occupied by parking and an alley. The bridge can be seen in Image 35. A pedestrian bridge would better integrate St. Louis Park High School with West Lake Street businesses, and provide a grand entrance for visitors to the domed athletic complex. Train tracks would no longer be a safety concern or a barrier for pedestrians.

Overall, this plan is intended to be a combination of public and private investments that, when combined, will form the Heart of the Park, a thriving community with strong neighborhoods, businesses, and institutions. Some of the projects and changes suggested within this plan will take considerable resources to bring to fruition; a billion-dollar investment like the Southwest LRT demands thinking big. But few communities are better prepared for growth and change than this one. This is where St. Louis Park truly began, and with the work suggested in this plan, it will remain the Heart of the Park well into the future.

B. Toolkit

The Toolkit has been referenced throughout the report and is intended to be a list of action items, policies, and funding options that the City, property and business owners, and residents can use to assist in the revitalization of the study area. Transportation and street life; economic development; environment; and history, identity, and wayfinding comprise the four subject areas of the Toolkit. Not all the items in the Toolkit must be utilized as the area undergoes transformations; multiple combinations of these tools can be used to help create the Heart of the Park as envisioned here. Many of the key tools have been highlighted in the Action Plan above. The Toolkit Summary Matrix, located starting on page 57, is a useful instrument for quickly navigating the extensive Toolkit.



Figure 36: Example of Pedestrian Bridge Over Railroad Tracks



Figure 37: Rendering of Proposed Pedestrian Bridge from High School to Lake Street



Figure 38: Complete Street

1. Transportation and Street Life

Goal: Make the Heart of the Park a multi-modal, accessible area that provides safe and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure for all users.

a. Complete Streets

One of the implementation strategies in the *St. Louis Park Active Living: Sidewalk and Trails Plan* is a “road diet” - where street lanes are reduced

to provide space for pedestrian and bicycle amenities which overall equalizes the space for multiple modes of transportation. An effective way to implement a road diet is by enacting a Complete Streets policy through a local act of legislation. Minnesota passed legislation for a Complete Streets policy, allowing for variances from engineering standards so long as the streets comply with both *A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets* from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials and “Context Sensitive Solutions” in *Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities* from the Institute of Transportation Engineers.^[ii]

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park should enact a Complete Streets Policy to ensure that whenever a new road is constructed or an existing road is improved (resurfaced, repainted, etc.) that the construction includes equal access improvements for all modes of transportation. For example, that would include turning a four-lane local access road into a two-lane road with a middle turn lane and bike lanes in both directions. The

An Ideal Complete Streets Policy

“An ideal complete streets policy:

- Includes a vision for how and why the community wants to complete its streets.
- Specifies that ‘all users’ include pedestrians, bicyclists and transit passengers of all ages and abilities, as well as trucks, buses and automobiles.
- Encourages street connectivity and aims to create a comprehensive, integrated, connected network for all modes.
- Is adoptable by all agencies to cover all roads.
- Applies to both new and retrofit projects, including design, planning, maintenance, and operations, for the entire right of way.
- Makes any exceptions specific and sets a clear procedure that requires high-level approval of exceptions.
- Directs the use of the latest and best design criteria and guidelines while recognizing the need for flexibility in balancing user needs.
- Directs that complete streets solutions will complement the context of the community.
- Establishes performance standards with measurable outcomes.
- Includes specific next steps for implementation of the policy.”

Source: <http://www.completestreets.org/changing-policy/policy-elements/>

policies can be developed specifically to meet the community's goals.

Time Frame: Immediate implementation of policy and ongoing implementation during road construction and renovation.

Funding: Complete street improvements should be done in conjunction with a planned street improvement or construction so costs can be reduced. Funding depends on the jurisdiction that has control of the street and its maintenance. For local streets, St. Louis Park would be the funding source. Additional funds may be available from the Federal Department of Transportation.

b. Parking Requirements

The amount of public parking in the West Lake Street area is currently sufficient for the level of use. Any increase in use - whether it is the year-round, public recreation use of a turfed and domed field, more intensive commercial land uses, or commuters using the Wooddale LRT station - will likely require additional parking based on current parking requirements. In order to use land efficiently, it

is important to consider ways to mitigate the land use impact of large surface parking lots. Possible improvements include structured parking, on-street angled parking, back-in parking, metered parking, etc.

i. *Structured parking* increases the number of cars per square foot by building up instead of building out; it increases land efficiency which can be cost effective if there is high demand for other land uses. In St. Louis Park, structured parking would likely require bonding and fee-based-use (e.g. meters) or otherwise the City could use a public-private-partnership to fund the development of the structure. Structured parking can also be the most aesthetically pleasing option because structures can be “wrapped” by other uses including residential and commercial, and first-floor retail.

ii. *On-street angled parking*, as its name implies, allows cars to park on the street, but rather than parking parallel to the curb, they park at an angle to the curb. On-street angled parking increases the number of cars that can park on the street while also providing an old small town “main street” feel and a barrier between traffic and pedestrians.



Figure 39: Historic Use of Angled Parking



Figure 40: Back-in Angled Parking



Figure 41: Use of Meters and Angled Parking

iii. *Back-in parking*, implemented at angles on the street, not only shares the positive effects of traditional on-street angled parking, but also increases the safety of other road users, including other cars, buses and especially bicycles. Drivers must back into the parking spaces and drive forward to pull out of the space. By driving forward when they are leaving, drivers have a better view of the road and its other users. It has been shown to significantly reduce crashes, especially with bicyclists.^[iii]

iv. *Metered parking*, while not popular with many drivers, metered parking can actually serve as an economic driver for local businesses by inducing turnover and therefore more potential customers.^[iv] This may not be the best alternative for a sporting event where the duration of parking is longer and therefore more expensive, but it may be a useful tool to ensure that parking in front of businesses within the area is used primarily by the businesses' customers. Parking revenues could be partially or fully redistributed to local business or community organizations to help fund capital investments in the same area.

v. *Parking requirement reductions* can be given to properties that provide bicycle parking, community car stalls, and that are located within a quarter-mile of a bus stop or LRT station and are connected by pedestrian infrastructure. Parking requirement reductions provide incentives for use of alternative modes of transportation. Many parking requirements build for the maximum parking use and many spots sit idle during off-peak times. By limiting the parking available, people may turn to alternative modes of transportation for shorter trips and therefore reduce the demand for parking.

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park should begin by determining the number of parking spaces required by 2030. This number should be based off of projected traffic increases caused by use of the athletic fields, higher density retail business, and LRT commuting. Next the parking spaces should be reduced by considering improved public transit connections, implementation of car-share programs, and increased use of bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure (due to higher fuel prices and public health projects). St. Louis Park should then calculate the number of spaces that

can be absorbed through on-street angled parking and, only after those spaces have been accounted for, determine the cost and financing for structured parking. This way the phasing of increased parking starts with the least expensive and escalates over time.

Time Frame: Corresponding with the implementation of the turfing and doming of the athletic field(s) and the opening day of the Wooddale LRT station. (Implementation approximately 2012 to 2017.)
Funding: Depends on the infrastructure being provided. Car-sharing programs can be funded by private businesses or by the municipality. Structured parking can also be a public or privately funded venture. On-street angled parking would be delegated to the level of government that maintains a particular road (local or county public works, potentially state Department of Transportation).

c. Traffic Calming

The purpose of traffic calming is to reduce the speed of automotive traffic on a street to increase safety, decrease noise, and increase the overall desir-

ability of alternative modes of transportation by improving the experience of sharing the street or adjacent sidewalk. Traffic calming strategies generally fall into five categories:^[v]

- Horizontal deflections (chicanes, mini traffic circles, median slow points or chokers)
- Vertical deflections (road humps, speed tables, and raised crosswalks)
- Intersection pop-outs
- Traffic diverters (semi-diverters)
- Channelization

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park Should implement either median slow points (small median or island placed in the center of a roadway, slows traffic, creates a pedestrian refuge area, creates a landscaping opportunity), raised crosswalks, or intersection pop-outs (a.k.a. bump-outs) at the few major pedestrian crossings in the West Lake Street study area. These would likely be at Wooddale and West Lake, West Lake and Library, Dakota and West Lake, and Wooddale and Walker/Highway 7 Frontage Road.

Time Frame: Traffic calming improvements can prepare the area for the incoming



Figure 42: Traffic Calming Using Speed Hump at a Crosswalk



Figure 43: Traffic Calming Using Median Slow Points



Figure 44: Example of a Living Street



Figure 45: Example of a Living Street

Wooddale LRT station. Therefore, St. Louis Park should try to have major improvements completed by opening day (approximately 2017).

Funding: The City of St. Louis Park’s Public Works department would likely need to provide most funding for traffic calming infrastructure, though Hennepin County and MnDOT may be partners on certain projects (e.g. work on the Wooddale/Highway 7 bridge). Federal money may be available for walkability improvements as well. Federal programs include: Safe Routes to School, Catalogue for Federal Domestic Assistance, and Federal Transit Administration Grants.

c. Living Streets

Living streets is a concept widely implemented in Britain and Western Europe. The concept is a shared transportation space where “the pedestrian has more importance than the vehicle.”^[vi] A local example of planned implementation can be found in the Bloomington Central Station plan. This plan describes a unique street design for the center of the

development site. There is no change in grading (i.e. no curbs) and the space for cars, bikes and pedestrians is shared. The plan goes on to say the following: “The streets become more integrated with the park and the adjacent streetscapes. Pavement design will flow from the streets into the park and streetscape. Vehicular and pedestrian separation and safety will be accomplished by the following:

- Roadway edge designation: score lines in pavement with contrasting finish
- Two-foot minimum clear zone behind the roadway edge
- Vertical elements separating streetscape from roadway: trees, planters, lights, etc.”^[vii]

Living streets are most appropriate on non-thoroughfare roads, as speeds are significantly reduced to accommodate the pedestrian user. “To make this lower speed natural, the street is normally set up so that a car cannot drive in a straight line for significant distances, for example by placing planters at the edge of the street, alternating the side of the street the parking is on, or curving the street itself.”^[viii]

Recommended Action: If the new extension of Dakota between the athletic field and Community Center is not designed for angled parking, it should be designed as a living street that emphasizes the pedestrian, bicycle and non-motorized user. This design could also be implemented on the section of Library between West Lake and Walker Streets; again, if parking is removed.

Time Frame: A major infrastructure project like street reconstruction will require significant planning and funding. Therefore the living streets should be developed after the Wooddale LRT station is built in the 20-year from opening day timeframe.

Funding: Local government Public Works funding; also possible grants from Federal government.

e. Freight Crossing: Safety and Access

While the level of freight traffic is currently under debate for the Canadian Pacific-MN&S line, train track crossing safety is a concern that needs to be addressed. There is a significant amount of pedestrian and auto traffic across the tracks at the intersection

of Wooddale and West Lake Street. If freight traffic increases, St. Louis Park should install crossing arms at the intersection to prevent traffic from crossing when a train is approaching. Additionally, signage could be improved to increase visibility. In the long term, a pedestrian bridge should be built over freight tracks from Dakota to the St. Louis Park High School. This would reduce the pedestrian traffic crossing the freight rail tracks at Wooddale and West Lake Streets, increase accessibility from the high school parking lot to the businesses on West Lake, Dakota, and Walker, and increase accessibility to Central Community Center and the athletic field/football stadium.

Recommended Action: Improve signage, install crossing arms, and build a pedestrian bridge from Dakota to St. Louis Park high school.

Time Frame: Signage and crossing arms should be installed as soon as freight traffic increases (2012 - 2017). The pedestrian bridge will facilitate economic development and multi-modal accessibility. It is important but admittedly expensive and not essential. Therefore the



Figure 46: Pedestrian Improvements at Rail Crossing

time frame is long term (2017 - 2030).

Funding: The Minnesota Department of Transportation receives federal funding annually to improve safety conditions at trouble crossings. Engaging MnDOT in a study of safety precautions could enable St. Louis Park to obtain funding for improvements. A pedestrian bridge could be funded in whole or in part through the Hennepin County Transit Oriented Development (TOD) grant program (this grant was recently used to finance the construction of a pedestrian bridge over the Midtown Greenway trail at Girard Avenue in Minneapolis).

f. Streetscaping

Streetscaping entails the provision of beautification along roads and pedestrian corridors. It often includes planting trees to create a tree-canopy, planters with flowers, benches, public art, and other amenities. Streetscaping is a feature of Complete Streets and can also be used as a tool for traffic calming. In the case of traffic calming, small islands can be built with flowers and signage that create safety barriers at intersections that slow traffic.

Streetscaping also helps create a sense of place for the community. Beautification increases pride in the neighborhood, may increase property values, and if done in a unique way with local public art, can create identity.

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park should incorporate streetscaping elements (plantings, trees, public art, etc.) when implementing other projects like Complete Streets and traffic-calming measures.

Time Frame: Streetscaping can start small and be incorporated in almost any new project. Therefore the time frame for streetscaping should begin immediately but remain a constant consideration for the area (Ongoing. 2012 – 2030).

Funding: Can be included in regular capital improvements budgets. Community and business associations may be potential partners as well.

g. Painted Streets, Crosswalks, and Sidewalks

Painted streets and crosswalks can add a whimsical touch to the monotony of the normal street grid. Crosswalks



Figure 47: Streetscaping

have a functional role in improving street safety for automobiles and pedestrians, but they can also be an art form or make a statement and contribute to a sense of place. Painted or decorated streets or sidewalks can function as both an artistic statement like the painted streets in Vercorin, Switzerland or as a wayfinding tool like the Freedom Trail in Boston, MA. Painting the streets could be a way to involve the community, local artists and students in the designing and painting of the streets while increasing wayfinding ability for people visiting the community. Street painting can also serve as an attraction for the area if done properly.

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park should consider the possibilities of painted streets, sidewalks and crosswalks in the study area. We recommend painting all sidewalks in the study area to increase pedestrian safety while involving the community and giving the area a stronger sense of place. As for painted streets, the most suitable option for more permanent paint would be on Dakota Avenue and the proposed extension of Dakota Avenue, as we are proposing this street become a living street and home to a new town festival.

However, if Dakota Avenue becomes home to new angled parking, as another suggestion option, the other suitable option for a painted street is Library Lane between Walker Street and West Lake Street. The most suitable options for painted sidewalks, which would take the functional role of wayfinding as well as aesthetic character, are along Wooddale Avenue to the high school, along West Lake Street to the local businesses located there, along Walker Street to the local businesses and the historic downtown and possibly even to and along Gorham Avenue as it could become a major boulevard road connecting the study area to other parts of St. Louis Park.

Time Frame: Street, sidewalk and crosswalk painting could begin immediately, however it is important to develop a plan and to make sure the community is involved in the process and the formulation of ideas and designs so that the paintings are meaningful. The degree of permanency should also be considered. They could be something that gets redesigned each year, possibly by the art classes at the high school; and is maintained as it wears or they could be something that lasts only



Figure 48: Wayfinding in Vercorin, Switzerland



Figure 49: Wayfinding in Boston, MA



Figure 50: Painted Bike Lane

Business Improvement District Case Study: West Allis, Wisconsin

West Allis, a Milwaukee suburb of over 60,000 people, uses a Business Improvement District in a six-block area in its historic downtown. The BID uses its funding for a number of grant programs. These include partially reimbursing business owners for advertising campaigns; new or improved signage; facade improvements to buildings; and even relocation into vacant spaces. The BID has also empowered local businesses to speak with one voice on key issues like road and highway construction, and even enabled Downtown West Allis to qualify for Wisconsin's Main Streets technical assistance funding program. For more information about this BID, visit: www.downtownwestallis.org
Source: Downtown West Allis Business Improvement District.

a week for festivals or special celebrations. Each type of painting may have a different life span. We recommend that the painted crosswalks, for example, remain a permanent fixture, while street paintings could be temporary for festivals or events. Funding: Funding could come from multiple sources, the City of St. Louis Park Public Works Department, local art groups, nonprofits, foundations, corporate sponsors, etc. To keep costs down, the City should partner with members of the community including high school students and local artists to tap into free labor and artistic creativity.

2. Economic Development

Goal: To enhance the experience of the study area through public and private investments in the financial well-being of existing and future businesses.

a. Business Improvement Districts

In the future, the Heart of the Park will include a broad set of neighborhood-focused retail stores and services, along with a larger set of businesses

along Walker Street and Highway 7. The entrepreneurs who own and operate these businesses may have service delivery needs beyond the basics provided by the City of St. Louis Park. These could include additional street beautification, graffiti removal, marketing, or additional street signs, just to name a few. Businesses and property owners can opt to form a Business Improvement District (BID), a nonprofit, self-governing organization dedicated to providing these extra services in a specific area in order to both improve the quality of life and improve members' bottom lines. BIDs are a public-private partnership: they are funded through a special assessment on properties within the district, which is collected by the City, and then transferred straight to the BID. Business improvement districts are found everywhere from central business districts like downtown Minneapolis (the Downtown Improvement District) to small towns and suburbs across the nation. Each BID is unique, and is tailored to the needs of its members, their customers, and the community at large.^[ix]

Recommended Action: The City of St. Louis Park should provide area businesses and property owners with information

about how to form a BID. If changes to local or state laws affect these procedures, staff should update businesses and property owners on those changes.

Time Frame: Ongoing.

Funding: Regular staff hours.

b. Historic Preservation Incentives

While the Heart of the Park area will inevitably see new construction and redevelopment in the coming years, many buildings can be retrofitted to extend their useful life and add new value to both their tenants and owners. Due to the cost associated with meeting modern building codes and accessibility standards, landlords of all types of properties often cannot justify major overhauls. One way to overcome that challenge is for these landlords to help finance improvements through the use of historic preservation incentive programs.

i. Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits: Put simply, these tax credits allow property owners to receive a tax credit worth 20 percent of most project costs (excluding

legal and some other fees) if they rehabilitate a certified historic building. Property owners must work with the National Park Service and Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office to gain certification (in the National Register of Historic Places) and ensure eligibility. Applying for federal historic preservation tax credits requires considerable time and effort, but the payoff can make a previously impossible project more affordable and worthwhile.^[x]

ii. Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants: This program provides grants for restoration of or appropriately designed improvements to certified historically significant buildings. These grants come in three “sizes,” depending on the amount of money sought. For smaller grants (currently up to \$7,000), the application, review, and allocation processes take place on a rolling basis. Larger grants take more time and are subject to greater scrutiny, but funding can exceed \$50,000. Because this program is funded through sales taxes authorized by the state’s Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment, the total amount of funding available varies. Resources are also limited by state funding for the



Figure 51. Historically Preserved Main Street

Brownfields Cleanup Funds Case Study: Clyde Iron Works Site, Duluth, MN

This 10.2-acre site was home to the Clyde Iron Works steel foundry and manufacturing company beginning in the 1900s. As the economy changed in the 1980s from a manufacturing base to a service economy, many of Duluth's manufacturing sites became underutilized and eye sores in the community. The Clyde Iron Works site sat vacant for 20 years. In 2006 the City of Duluth and the State of Minnesota worked together to clean up the property for redevelopment. Now, it is home to seven businesses and community facilities including the Heritage Sports Center that operates year-round, bringing an estimated \$2 million in additional tourism spending to the area. Additionally, the project has leveraged \$25 million in private investment.

Duluth's Mayor Don Ness said that, "The City [of Duluth] played a role with the state of Minnesota to do the clean up for [developer,] Alex [Giuliani] to do the development. The project could not have happened if the state of Minnesota and the city of Duluth did not do the clean up." He added that the Clyde Iron Works site is a great example of, "the city and community taking ownership and becoming involved in the redevelopment."
Source: Interview with authors.

Minnesota Historical Society's Grants Office to discuss potential aid for individual projects.

Recommended Action: City staff should support efforts of local property owners to improve or rehabilitate buildings with historical value. This support will usually require connecting owners with other resources, such as those mentioned above.

Time Frame: Ongoing.

Funding: N/A

c. *Brownfield Cleanup and Site Remediation*

Brownfield sites are a hindrance to redevelopment and can prove to be a major obstacle for sites that would otherwise be redeveloped. The study area is not full of contaminated sites, but the several that are present could pose real challenges to redevelopment in the area.

Recommended Actions: The City staff should apply for funding (loans, tax incentives as well as grants) to aid in cleanup of contaminated sites on any city

owned land so it may be ready for development when the opportunity arises. Many cleanup funds are available not only to municipalities, but private businesses owners or organizations. The City should work with developers, local business owners and organizations who may be interested in the several brownfields sited in the area to begin filling out applications for all eligible funding. The City should also make these funding sources better known to the local redevelopment community at large by creating a webpage on the City's website that hosts information about brownfields cleanup grants, loans and tax incentives for contaminated land.

Time Frame: Building awareness of financial assistance for brownfields cleanup should start immediately and continue to be an ongoing effort. The City of St. Louis Park should begin working with owners of known contaminated land to apply for cleanup funding immediately. It should be an ongoing effort as new contamination arises and funding sources change over time.

Funding: A more detailed list of funding sources is listed in Appendix 3, but some of the main sources include the Minnesota

Pollution Control Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Metropolitan Council.

d. Facade Renovation Loans

The City of St. Peter, Minnesota implemented a Facade Renovation / Historical Enhancement Revolving Loan Fund. According to the program's website, "The purpose of the renovation / historical enhancement program is to provide financial incentives and assistance to encourage investments in the historical Central Business District. The program funds exterior building improvements made to eligible downtown historical buildings. Interest-free loans may be provided to finance 50% of the costs of renovation. Maximum loan amounts are \$10,000 per historic structure. Additionally, all renovation must meet the criteria of the 'Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation Projects.' The Saint Peter Heritage Preservation Commission, Economic Development Authority and City Council must approve all projects."^[xi]

Recommended Action: The St. Louis Park Economic Development Authority and the St. Louis Park Historical Society could partner on a Revolving Loan Fund similar to the program in St. Peter.

Time Frame: St. Louis Park already offers a number of great redevelopment and renovation assistance programs. While this program would benefit the historic characteristics in the West Lake Street study area, implementation of this specific program is not time critical. Long-term implementation would be most practical (2012 – 2030).

Funding: St. Louis Park Economic Development Authority and Historical Society. Federal grants may be available. See Main Streets program below.



Figure 52: Facade Renovation- Before and After



Figure 53: Renovation Completed by MN Main Streets Program

e. Minnesota Main Streets Program

“The Main Street program is a comprehensive commercial revitalization strategy that helps communities preserve some of their most significant assets -- their historic buildings.

Main Street Four Point Approach™:

- Design: Enhancing the physical appearance of the commercial district by rehabilitating historic buildings, encouraging compatible infill, land developing sensitive design management systems.
- Organization: Building consensus and cooperation among the many groups and individuals who have a role in the revitalization process.
- Promotion: Marketing the traditional commercial district’s assets to customers, potential investors, new businesses, local citizens, and visitors.
- Economic Restructuring: Strengthening the district’s existing economic base while finding ways to expand it to meet new opportunities.

For urban Main Street programs, there is a fifth Approach:

- Public Safety: Reducing crime and the perception of crime is a precondition for revitalizing neighborhood commercial districts.”

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park should register the West Lake Street study area – either West Lake Street or Walker Street – as a participating member. Coordination with the St. Louis Park Historical Society is recommended. Membership in the program will provide the area with resources and funding for economic development including façade improvements and preservation of historic attributes.

Time Frame: Membership should begin sooner than later to tap into the existing resources. Improvements on existing buildings can be a catalyst for further and more intensive economic development as the light-rail is built (2012 – 2017).

Funding: MN Main Streets program itself is a potential funding source.

f. Doming and Turfing the High School Athletic Field

The key player in the West Lake Street study area is the school district and a lot of the potential for the area relates to what happens to the football field. The St. Louis Park Parks & Recreation Department and St. Louis Park High School Athletic Department recently conducted a feasibility study on the cost and impact of turfing and doming the high school football field and potentially opening it up to more public, year-round use. According to the study, the cost of artificial turf would be \$1.5 million, and annual operations are estimated at \$10,000 (\$10,000 less than current annual costs for maintaining the natural grass). The new uses would generate approximately \$25,000 in new revenue. Doming the facility would cost an additional \$2 million; there was no revenue estimate for year-round access provided by doming. The opportunity of increased use of the football field has potential to increase traffic and revenue to local businesses.

Recommended Action: Move the football field to the current location of the track field on the high school side of West

Lake Street. Turf the track field and dome it. The newly combined track and football field will then be available for all seasons, many more users, and draw more people to the area that can support local businesses. The space at the site of the current football field should be open for recreational use with the city's park district.

Time Frame: The redevelopment of the athletic fields will be a major catalyst in the development of the West Lake Street study area. The City and school district should move quickly to facilitate additional changes responding to the increase in visitors to the area (2012 – 2017).

Funding: Funding will likely come from the St. Louis Park Parks and Recreation Department and the St. Louis Park School District. A public-private partnership may be the most feasible option for funding such an extensive project.

Local Demand for Domed Athletic Facilities

Communities like Woodbury, Stillwater, and Burnsville have seen tremendous demand for indoor athletic space at their domed facilities. These facilities charge anywhere from \$100 per hour to \$195 per hour to rent one field depending on the time of day and the season. These three facilities typically have completely booked schedules. The indoor field space is used by high school sports teams, adult and youth recreation sports teams and open walking and running for the community. Even though a domed athletic facility has high capital costs their equally high demand have made them a worthwhile community investment in other Minnesota cities.



Figure 54: Domed Athletic Field

g. Increase Community Use on Current/Former Football Field

To strengthen the relationship between the school and the community we suggest increasing the availability of the former football field to the community for exercise, pick-up games, ice-skating in the winter and other recreational activities. This area could be more accessible for non-organized recreation or it could be an area used for more organized activities through St. Louis Park's Park and Recreation programs.

Recommendations: Work with the school to promote the field space as a recreation space for all community members, not only the high school.

Time Frame: Increased access to this athletic field will have to coincide with the redevelopment of the other athletic fields to ensure the needs of the high school sports teams are met.

Funding: Making access to the field will not require additional funding, however, increasing programming for the

field or turning it into an ice skating rink in the winter will require additional resources. These may be available through the Park and Recreation department. The city could charge users of the fields to help with any additional costs.

h. Redevelopment: Utilizing Highway 7

A key challenge for businesses in the Heart of the Park is attracting customers from the busy Highway 7 corridor. There are few visual cues informing drivers of the businesses located within just a handful of blocks of the Wooddale or West Lake Street exits. The same challenge will exist for the Wooddale LRT station. Redevelopment in the Highway Commercial area defined in this report should be designed to engage passersby along Highway 7, though it should also provide an attractive, safe, and comfortable environment along local roads. This plan envisions high density commercial development along the southern edge of the study area; these buildings should be designed so that their tallest and most intense sections face Highway 7, with a stepping down of heights at the side of the buildings fronting Walker



Figure 55: Kids Playing in Community Park

Street. This will allow for a more effective use of that land while still preserving an urban neighborhood scale along local streets. LRT riders passing by the Wooddale station will see similar views as drivers along Highway 7, compounding the effectiveness of this design recommendation.

Recommended Action: Continue to partner with property owners and developers to ensure the most effective use of the valuable land between Walker Street and Highway 7. The zoning code includes complex restrictions and exceptions relating to height, density, parking, and other key variables of any redevelopment. City staff should continue to be helpful guides for those who need to prepare development applications, while alerting applicants to the long-term goals for the area as expressed in this and other plans.

Time Frame: Ongoing.

Funding: N/A

i. Rezoning Study

The City of St. Louis Park recognizes the unique attributes of the West Lake Street Study area – one of the main

ones being its unusual but completely organic composition of mixed uses. Not only does the area include a mix of building types, but the uses range anywhere from skin therapy and dentistry to athletic apparel and light industrial. The mixed-use identity of the area should be preserved and encouraged. Close to Highway 7, the City should encourage job-providing intense office or commercial uses. Current zoning (largely Commercial C-2) should be studied to ensure it provides enough flexibility to maintain the current mix of businesses and uses while also encouraging dense redevelopment.

Recommended Action: Conduct a rezoning study, with the goal of preserving a traditional neighborhood mix of uses in most of the area, and encouraging dense commercial/office redevelopment along Walker Street and Highway 7.

Time Frame: As soon as possible.

Funding: N/A



Figure 56: Example of a Neighborhood with Traditional Mixed Use Zoning

Accessory Dwelling Unit Case Study: Montgomery County, Maryland

Montgomery County, just outside Washington, D.C., passed an accessory dwelling unit ordinance in 1984 in order to ensure access to housing for persons with modest incomes, and to allow for rent-free housing for relatives of property owners. In the decade after passing the ordinance, hundreds of ADUs were built or registered (many had already existed illegally). In response to community concerns, the county included some key restrictions on ADUs. For example, the ordinance requires two off-street parking spaces unless the applicant can show that there is enough on-street supply already available. A minimum lot size for ADUs has also been seen as successful, though the county reduced the size when it found the original number prohibitively large. Overall, ADUs have been a successful addition to the housing stock in Montgomery County. For more information, and to see model ordinances, the AARP's Public Policy Institute has published a report on ADUs available online at: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/consume/d17158_dwelling.pdf

Source: Rodney L. Cobb and Scott Dvorak (2000). "Accessory Dwelling Units: Model State Act and Local Ordinance." Published by the Public Policy Institute (AARP).

j. Accessory Dwelling Units

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs), colloquially referred to as mother-in-law apartments or granny flats, are a great way to increase affordable housing options, particularly for aging residents who wish to stay in the community but may be looking to downsize. ADUs also increase residential densities while preserving neighborhood character; higher densities help keep property taxes low and provide neighborhood-oriented businesses (like those on Lake Street) with a broader customer base. Importantly, all of this can be accomplished without government subsidies. Homeowners can cover all of the costs. Some cities do provide tax incentives or community block grant money to encourage the development of accessory dwelling units, but many do not, opting to simply provide a friendly regulatory climate for ADUs.^[xii]

Because there are only a few residential properties within the study area, ADUs should also be encouraged throughout the Lenox and Sorensen neighborhoods, if not all of St. Louis Park. They will be integral to maintaining housing stability in the

area; boosting ridership for the LRT; growing St. Louis Park's tax base; and encouraging the development of more neighborhood-oriented retail and services.

Recommended Action: The City of St. Louis Park should revise its zoning ordinance to allow for accessory dwelling units where they are feasible. Residential district regulations prohibit ADUs through prohibitively restrictive rules about accessory building size, height, and design.

Time Frame: Short term (0-2 Years)

Funding: N/A

k. Live/Work Units

Similar to Accessory Dwelling Units, Live/Work units are a great way to provide more affordable housing and increase densities in neighborhoods while preserving the neighborhood character. Live/Work units allow residents to operate a business in their own home, or conversely, live in the same building as they work. Ideal consumers for Live/Work units would be small business owners with businesses such as

art studios, restaurants, hair salons, bakeries, pubs, coffee shops, and book stores.

Recommended Action: The City of St. Louis Park should revise its zoning ordinance to allow for Live/Work units where they are feasible. Like ADUs, permitting Live/Work units in neighborhoods such as Lenox and Sorensen will help maintain housing stability in the area; boost ridership for the LRT; grow St. Louis Park's tax base; and encourage the development of more neighborhood-oriented retail and services.

Time Frame: Short term (0-2 Years)

Funding: N/A

3. Environment

Goal: To promote the essence of sustainability -- to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs -- through the built form including energy efficiency, renewable energy, and eco-sensitive materials.

a. St. Louis Park Green Building Policy

The City of St. Louis Park has an existing Green Building Policy. Businesses and residences are eligible for financial assistance from the City of St. Louis Park if they comply with applicable energy and water efficiency targets. Compliance includes meeting energy and water reduction targets by using the following guidelines: Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building principles; utility energy efficiency programs (Xcel); 30% reduction of potable water, and 50% reduction of water for landscaping; 75% reduction in construction waste; concrete indoor air quality improvements; on-site storm water best management practices; and tracking of energy savings, water savings, and implementation costs.

Projects receiving financial assistance from the City that are required to comply include:

- Non residential
 - o All new municipal buildings or additions (designed for ongoing occupancy) 15,000 square feet or greater (gross) and renovations 50,000 square feet or greater (gross).



Figure 57: Green Building Techniques



Figure 58: Water Reuse Techniques

- o All new commercial, industrial, and mixed-use construction projects, additions (designed for ongoing occupancy) 15,000 square feet or greater (gross) and renovations 50,000 square feet or greater (gross) receiving \$200,000 or more in City financial assistance.

- Residential
 - o All new and renovation multifamily residential buildings.
 - o All detached single-family home renovation projects.”^[xiii]

Recommendation: Build awareness of the Green Building Policy, highlighting it as a model for private developers and property owners to follow regardless of their use of City financial aid.

Time Frame: Ongoing.

Funding: City of St. Louis Park financial assistance. City financial assistance includes:

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Housing Improvement Area Loans
- Housing Rehabilitation Fund
- Reinvestment Assistance Program

- Revenue Bonds (private activity bonds are negotiable)
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF) & Tax Abatement
- Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) Funds
- Land writedowns
- Energy efficient loans/programs

b. State Wide Energy Programs

i. Center for Energy & the Environment: The Center for Energy and Environment (CEE) offers a program for Xcel customers called the Commercial Lighting Program. Since lighting can be 18% of the energy costs for a retail building, improving efficiency can save businesses a lot of money. The program is specifically designed for small businesses, like those found in the study area. CEE provides rebates and low-interest financing (3.9%) for lighting retrofits. Payback on lighting installations is frequently around three years.

ii. Xcel Energy: Minnesota’s electricity supplier, Xcel Energy, offers energy efficiency tips and programs for both businesses and residents. Resources include educational pieces on how to reduce energy through



Figure 59: Installing New Energy Efficient Lights

behavior, calculators to determine where energy is being used wastefully, and sources for rebates on energy efficient appliances.

iii. Minnesota Energy Efficiency Program Summary: Residential energy efficiency is just as important in the study area as commercial properties' energy efficiency. Xcel Energy provides multiple ways to increase efficiency. They provide a document on their website that summarizes the rebates and incentives that they offer residential customers. This link can be found in the Matrix.

Recommended Action: Ensure business and property owners are aware of energy savings programs. Facilitate their participation in the program through educational workshops provided by the City or neighborhood organizations. The greatest barrier to participation is either not knowing a program exists or understanding how to utilize it.

Time Frame: Since programs come and go, this should be a continuous educational service offered by the City. It should definitely be promoted soon to take advantage of existing resources.

Funding: Investment of time from City staff; some investment of capital from businesses or property owners who take advantage of the programs.

c. Anaerobic Digestion

With its ability to reduce the amount of garbage sent to landfills or burners, and to generate electricity, anaerobic digestion has earned a great deal of attention in recent years. Anaerobic digestion is the process by which organic matter -- food scraps, grass clippings, pet waste, etc.-- is converted into methane and other gases, which are well suited for electricity generation, as well as for use in heating systems and as a vehicle fuel. Organics recycling more broadly refers to the collection of organic waste for composting into soil.

St. Louis Park High School already collects organic waste for composting. Expanding this program into the adjoining neighborhoods would further reduce the area's ecological footprint. Installing an anaerobic digester within the West Lake Street area could prove to be a valuable educational opportunity for youths and adults alike, while

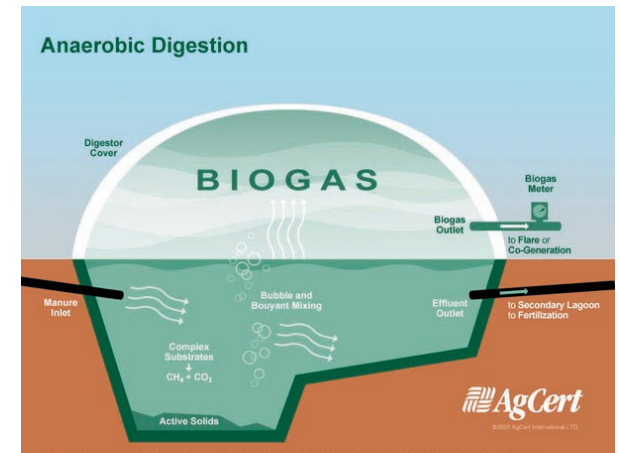


Figure 60: How Anaerobic Digestion Works



Figure 61: Anaerobic Digestion Equipment

powering and/or heating local buildings (lowering costs). Given the traffic generated by athletic events and destination businesses, a high-profile digester could be an effective tool for broadening public awareness of organics recycling (a fact that should be noted when courting investment from partners at the county, regional, or state level). Southwest Minneapolis's Linden Hills neighborhood recently pioneered organics recycling in the city, and has used a small, portable anaerobic digester to educate the public about the potential of a permanent, larger vessel (which could power or heat many of the area's buildings and street lights).

Recommended Action: Conduct a feasibility study for an anaerobic digester in the neighborhoods surrounding St. Louis Park High School (which could serve as the public face of the program, or even the physical host of a digester). City and school staff, neighborhood activists, business owners, and elected officials should form an advisory committee with the intention of directing the study, negotiating with potential funding agencies, and building community awareness and buy-in.

Time Frame: Assembling funding and ensuring feasibility could take at least two or three years.

Funding: Interested neighborhood leaders could form a nonprofit organization to help raise funds and apply for grants to fund capital costs. Hennepin County and the City of St. Louis Park are the most likely primary funders for ongoing operations, though the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and federal Environmental Protection Agency are both potential sponsors and partners.

d. Distributed Generation

Distributed Generation (DG) is also known as on-site energy production. The benefit to DG is the reduced reliance on the regional energy grid which can often save money and use more environmentally friendly energy sources. The following examples of DG will achieve either one or both of these objectives.

i. Bloom Boxes: Bloom Energy provides a product called Bloom Boxes: 100 kW fuel cells that run on a sand-like compound and produce enough energy to “power 100 average



Figure 62: Bloom Boxes

homes or a small office building.” Fuel cells are compelling because they are not intermittent (they do not rely on wind and sun which causes fluctuation in energy production) and they eliminate the efficiency loss by carrying electrons through a power grid. Bloom Energy is just an example of one company – the idea of efficient distributed generation should be the take-away.

ii. Xcel Solar Rebates: Xcel offers support for energy use management, including energy reduction tips and rebates for solar photovoltaic (PV) installations. They have a program called Solar* Rewards where businesses or residences can earn a rebate of \$2.25 per watt for up to 40 kilowatt (kW) PV systems. That is up to \$90,000, approximately one-quarter of the price of a solar installation (typically \$8k - \$10k per kW). Most homeowners only install systems as large as 3 kW (~\$6,000 rebate), or 10 kW for a small business (\$22,500 rebate).

iii. Purchase Power Agreements (PPAs): Purchase Power Agreements allow a non-profit, school, or low-capital business to install renewable energy systems without the upfront cost. An investor, often with tax

appetite, will provide the upfront capital to purchase and install the energy system (often solar panels). The agreement is that the host of the installation will pay the investor a set rate for the kilowatt hours produced. The investor is able to take advantage of tax incentives and grants, and receives remuneration from the host who is using the power. The host receives clean, renewable energy and can sometimes negotiate the rate with the investor below what a utility would require.

iv. Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE): With PACE, a local government issues a bond or other source of capital to fund a community-wide energy efficiency or renewable energy project. A special tax or assessment is placed on property owners who benefit from the project (participation is voluntary). The city is paid back over time for the installation and the property owners avoid the up front cost of the installation themselves but still benefit from energy savings or renewable energy.^[xiv]



Figure 63: LEED Certification Seal

e. *Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design*

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is a rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council to inform the environmental character of buildings. LEED includes elements for energy efficiency, renewable energy, environmentally-friendly construction materials, building processes, and more. The rating system has been developed over the years to include a structure for existing buildings (LEED-EB), new construction (LEED-NC), and most recently neighborhood design (LEED-ND). Not only does LEED provide a framework for developing a stock of environmentally-friendly buildings, but LEED certification confers status on the particular building and use. LEED can even become an identity feature for a community.

LEED-ND focuses as much on the context of place as on buildings. It has ratings for number of bike parking structures and trees per street-mile, width of sidewalks, street-grid pattern, density, public transit,

and more.^[xv] With the historic, condensed street-grid, proximity to both light rail and regional bike infrastructure, and existing sidewalks, with some improvements the West Lake Street study area is a prime candidate for eventually LEED-ND certification.

Recommended Action: St. Louis Park should consider certifying the West Lake Street study area as LEED-ND. The city staff has already shown interest in creating a ‘green’ focus for the businesses, including a renewable energy corridor. By certifying the entire neighborhood as LEED – the area will have an environmentally sensitive identity.

Time Frame: A survey of the neighborhood using LEED-ND guidelines should be conducted early to determine the improvements needed to qualify for certification. Improvements will likely include more multi-modal infrastructure, slightly higher densities, and more green building features. The improvements will take place over a longer period of time as the whole community is upgraded in preparation for the LRT station (2012 – 2017).



Figure 64: Rendering of LEED-ND Pilot Program

Funding: St. Louis Park Economic Development Agency or the Neighborhood Organizations could pay for the study and eventual certification. The improvements will be a combination of public and private investment.

f. Rain Gardens

Rain Gardens, if placed strategically, allow rainwater and runoff from impervious surfaces to be absorbed into the ground. The absorption of the water versus it flowing directly into storm water drains will improve water quality in the area by filtering out any contaminants as it is absorbed while also providing aesthetically pleasing plantings that will give the area more life.

Recommendations: We recommend that the City of St. Louis Park install rain gardens in parking lots, along boulevards, in existing parks and wherever storm water runoff is problematic.

Time Frame: This should be an ongoing activity as boulevards, streets, parking lots and parks are updated. There may be several areas, such as along West Lake Street, that could see rain garden improvements

immediatly.

Funding: While the City should lead the way in this effort, which would largely be funded by public works, it should encourage, through example and information sharing, private residents to plant rain gardens on their boulevards and yards. There may be additional funding available for rain gardens from local organizations such as church groups, the local Rotary Club, Boy and Girl Scout Clubs and many others. The city should work on establishing these partnerships for funding and volunteer labor.

4. History, Identity, and Wayfinding

Goal: To create a unique identity for the West Lake Street study area (Heart of the Park) that not only fosters community pride by providing residents and users with a recognizable community, but draws people from outside the community and makes them want to be a part of the Heart.

a. Wayfinding Signage

Everyone benefits from clear signage -- this is true whether you live in the Lenox or Sorensen neighborhoods; work on Walker Street; frequent a business on West Lake;



Figure 65: Rain Garden



Figure 66: Example of Wayfinding Signage



Figure 67: Traditional Historical Marker



Figure 68: Historic Kiosk with Public Space

or are coming to the area because of the schools and recreational facilities. Easy, clearly-marked access to the Wooddale LRT station will help make the line a success by encouraging more people to choose light rail over driving alone to their destination.

The Wooddale LRT station will require a variety of wayfinding aides, including maps of the surrounding area placed at the station itself, as well as signs in between the station and local landmarks. Research has indicated that directions that incorporate distinct and easily recognized landmarks tend to be more broadly understood than those that only rely on cardinal directions and distances.^[xvi] Potential landmarks in the Heart of the Park include the West Lake Street business corridor, St. Louis Park High School, and the Central Community Center. Attractive, high-visibility signs should direct people between these landmarks and the LRT station. These signs may incorporate local branding and art (e.g. Heart of the Park, or the name of a potential business improvement district), but should retain enough common design features to ensure consistency and clarity throughout the station area.

Recommended Action: The City of St. Louis Park should collaborate with local businesses and residents to install unique (but clear) wayfinding signage within the entire Heart of the Park district. The signs should help both visitors and locals find their way to shops, institutions, and the LRT station itself.

Time Frame: Wayfinding signage should be ready when the Wooddale LRT station opens. Riders' first impressions with the LRT could have important long-term impacts on their decision to use the line.

Funding: The City's Public Works department should take primary responsibility for planning and funding wayfinding signage.

b. Historic Markers and Kiosks

The Heart of the Park is not just centrally located; it is central in the city's history as well. Historic information markers and kiosks placed strategically throughout the area will build a sense of community and shared history, while also growing a stronger brand identity for local businesses. Historic information about a place can be communicated through many media.

In fact, successful “place branding” must come from within a community, rather than being arbitrarily decided upon by urban planners or engineers.^[xvii] This important feature of the future Heart of the Park will need champions within the community.

Recommended Action: Local residents and business owners should work together to plan out the design and installation of historical markers. The St. Louis Park Historical Society will be a natural partner in this process.

Time Frame: Place branding and historical markers do not rely upon the LRT, though they will certainly contribute to the Wooddale station area’s success as a high-ridership station. Therefore, local stakeholders should begin organizing to incorporate these features as soon as possible.

Funding: Funding for this initiative will almost certainly need to come from local residents, businesses, and institutions. Plaques or murals on privately owned buildings may be “donated” by property owners.

c. *Farmers Market*

Farmers markets have become increasingly common in recent years, and for good reason. In a sense, a farmers market provides community members with a chance to express themselves, their shared values, and “what is unique and special about [their community] and help to differentiate” their neighborhood from others. This is amplified by the inclusion of art, crafts, and specialty goods in addition to locally grown food. A semi-regular Heart of the Park market day would help build social networks in the area, draw shoppers to local businesses, and of course, provide area residents with fresh food.

Recommended Action: Interested community members should form a group dedicated to forming a Heart of the Park farmers market. The market could take place on any of the publicly-owned parcels of land currently vacant or used for parking.

Time Frame: Given the current interest in local food and the continued growth of farmers markets, interested organizers should begin work on a



Figure 69: Community Farmers Market

farmers market as soon as possible.

Funding Sources: Beyond vendor fees and local fundraising, organizers may wish to seek additional contributions (financial or otherwise) from St. Louis Park's health care providers and institutions.

d. Town Festival

Town festivals can take many forms and have many themes: art, music, food, the history of the city, carnivals, etc., but no matter what the form or theme, they bring people together, build community and contribute to an area's identity and sense of place. Our study area, as the heart and historic center of St. Louis Park, should be home to such a festival or event. St. Louis Park has many events that it hosts throughout the year, 4th of July Fireworks at Aquilla Park, Summer Concerts at Veteran's Memorial Amphitheater in Wolfe Park and the Farmers Markets at the West End and Rec Center Plaza, to name a few. However there are no events that take place in the study area, Heart of the Park.

Recommended Action: Begin to plan a festival or event that will take place in the

Heart of the Park on at least a yearly basis. The specifics of the event should be based on the needs and desires of the community determined by the community with the help of the city. The event could take place on either Library Lane or Dakota Avenue, which would be closed to automobile traffic for the event.

Time Frame: Planning for an event that will take place in the Heart of the Park should begin immediately, however it may take years for the first annual event to occur. Similar to the street painting, the preparation for this event needs to be meaningful and thorough for it to be successful.

Funding Sources: Funding for a festival could come from many sources, the City of St. Louis Park, Boosters, local clubs, organizations or businesses, foundations, nonprofits, corporate sponsors, or any combination of these.



Figure 70: Celebration in a Park

C. Toolkit Matrix

Transportation & Street Life

Goal: Make the Heart of the Park a multi-modal, accessible area that provides safe and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure for all users.

Tool Name	Description	Implementation Authority	Time Frame	Funding	Document Page Number	External Resource
Complete Streets	Enact local policy to ensure that whenever a new road is constructed or an existing road is improved (resurfaced, repainted, etc.) that the construction includes equal access improvements for all modes of transportation.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	N/A	p. 30	www.completestreets.org/
Parking Requirements	Reduce the number of surface parking spaces by using alternative parking options including Structured Parking, On-street Angled Parking, Back-in Angled Parking, Metered Parking, and Parking Requirement Reductions.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	Public or Private depending on alternative chosen	p. 31	
Traffic Calming	Reduce the speed of automotive traffic on streets to increase safety, decrease noise, and improve the overall desirability of alternative modes of transportation.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	City of St. Louis Park Public Works, Mn/DOT, Federal Grants	p. 33	Safe Routes to School: www.saferoutesinfo.org/legislation_funding/ Catalogue for Federal Domestic Assistance: www.cfda.gov Federal Transit Administration Grants: www.fta.dot.gov/funding/grants_financing_263.html
Living Streets	Implement shared transportation space where the pedestrian has more importance than the vehicle.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase Two - Opening Day + 20 years	City of St. Louis Park Public Works, Mn/DOT, Federal Grants	p. 34	See Traffic Calming
Freight Crossing: Safety & Access	Improve signage, install crossing arms, and build pedestrian bridge from Dakota to St. Louis Park high school to increase safety and prevent freight rail accidents.	City of St. Louis Park/Mn/DOT	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day (except pedestrian bridge - Phase Two)	Mn/DOT	p. 35	

Transportation & Street Life

Goal: Make the Heart of the Park a multi-modal, accessible area that provides safe and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure for all users.

Tool Name	Description	Implementation Authority	Time Frame	Funding	Document	
					Page Number	External Resource
Streetscaping	Incorporate streetscaping elements (plantings, trees, public art, etc.) when implementing other projects like Complete Streets and traffic calming measures.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	City of St. Louis Park	p. 36	
Painted Streets, Sidewalks and Crosswalks	Painted streets, sidewalks and crosswalks provide an art experience, create a unique space, and serve a purpose, be it improving safety for pedestrians crossing the street or providing valuable wayfinding information to visitors.	City of St. Louis Park in collaboration with the community (high school art students, local artist or anyone interested)	Ongoing	City of St. Louis Park Public Works	p. 36	

Economic Development

Goal: To enhance the experience of the study area through public and private investments in the financial well-being of existing and future businesses.

Tool Name	Description	Implementation Authority	Time Frame	Funding	Document	
					Page Number	External Resource
Business Improvement Districts	A non-profit, self-governing organization made of local businesses dedicated to providing extra services in a specific area in order to both improve the quality of life and member businesses' bottom lines.	Local Businesses	Ongoing	Local Businesses	p. 38	West Allis BID (example): www.downtownwestallis.org
Historic Preservation Incentives	Finance improvements to existing buildings through the use of historic preservation incentive programs. (See Funding)	Local Businesses	Ongoing	Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits and Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants	p. 39	National Park Service: www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/ Minnesota Historical Society's Grants Office: http://www.mnhs.org/shpo/grants/
Brownfield Cleanup and Site Remediation	Environmental contamination cleanup funds and tax incentives are available for property owners and developers who want to redevelop potentially contaminated land.	Local Businesses	Ongoing	Federal, State, and County loans, tax credits and grants are available	p. 40	Minnesota Brownfields: http://www.mnbrownfields.org/ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/tax/ti_guidelines.pdf [more resources in the appendix]

Economic Development

Goal: To enhance the experience of the study area through public and private investments in the financial well-being of existing and future businesses.

Tool Name	Description	Implementation Authority	Time Frame	Funding	Document	
					Page Number	External Resource
Facade Renovation Loans	Provide funds for the enhancement of building exteriors to encourage business investments in	City of St. Louis Park or MN Mainstreets	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	Possible partnership between City of St.	p. 41	City of St. Peter, Minnesota <i>Facade Renovation / Historical Enhancement Revolving Loan Fund</i> :
Minnesota Main Streets Program	Commercial revitalization strategy that helps communities preserve their historic buildings. Based on a five point approach including: Design, Organization, Promotion, Economic Restructuring, and Public Safety	City of St. Louis Park	Ongoing	Minnesota Main Streets provides some funding opportunities	p. 42	MN Mainstreets Program: http://tinyurl.com/mnmainstreets
Dome & Turf High School Athletic Fields	Dome and turf the existing track field on the high school grounds and relocate the football facilities	City of St. Louis Park and St. Louis Park School District	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	St. Louis Park Park & Rec and St. Louis Park School District	p. 43	
Increased Access to Athletic Fields	Work with the school district to allow the community to use the athletic facilities when the school does not need them.	City of St. Louis Park and the School District	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	City of St. Louis Park, the School District and User Fees	p. 44	
Zoning Flexibility	Preform a zoning study in order to ensure the preservation of traditional neighborhood development and to support existing uses and facilitate flexibility of future redevelopment	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	N/A	p. 45	
Accessory Dwelling Units	Allow for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). (a.k.a mother-in-law apartments or granny flats). ADUs increase affordable housing options and residential densities while preserving neighborhood character.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	N/A	p. 46	Example of a Model Ordinance: http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/consume/d17158_dwll.pdf
Live/Work Units	Allow for Live/Work Units which permit residents to operate a business in their home, or live in the same building as their work. Increases density and affordability of units.	City of St. Louis Park	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	N/A	p. 46	

Environment

Goal: To promote the essence of sustainability - to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs - through the built form including

Tool Name	Description	Implementation Authority	Time Frame	Funding	Document Page Number	External Resource
St. Louis Park Green Building Policy	Businesses and residences are eligible for financial assistance from the City of St. Louis Park if they comply with applicable energy and water efficiency targets.	City of St. Louis Park	Ongoing	Private investment leverages public funding assistance	p. 47	
State-wide Energy Programs	There are a variety of funding sources at the state and regional level for both businesses and residences that implement actions to decrease energy consumption.	Business, property, and home owners	Ongoing	Private investment with City staff time to inform owners about programs	p. 48	Center for Energy & the Environment: http://www.mncee.org/programs_bldgs_facilities/commercial_lighting/index.php Minnesota Energy Efficiency Program Summary: http://www.xcelenergy.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/docs/CRS-3045.pdf Excel Emery Business Tips: http://www.xcelenergy.com/Minnesota/Business/SaveEnergy_Money/Pages/Save_Energy_and_Money.aspx
Anaerobic Digestion	Anaerobic digestion is the process by which organic matter--food scraps, grass clippings, pet waste, etc.--is converted into methane and other gases, which are well suited for electricity generation, as well as for use in heating systems and as a vehicle fuel. St. Louis Park High School already collects organic waste for composting. Expanding this program into the adjoining neighborhoods would further reduce the area's ecological footprint.	City of St. Louis Park, SLP High School, and local property and business owners	At least two to three years out	Potential funding partners: city, county, federal grants	p. 49	Linden Hills Example: http://www.lhpowerandlight.org Organic Recycling Programs in Hennepin Co: http://tinyurl.com/hennepinorganics
Distributed Generation	Distributed generation (DG) is known as on-site energy generation. The benefit to DG is the reduced reliance on the regional energy grid which can often save money and use more environmentally friendly energy sources. Bloom boxes, Excel solar rebates, and purchase power agreements are all forms of DG.	City of St. Louis Park, business, and property owners	Steps should be taken early to start many of these processes but substantial improvement will be a long term investment	Improvements should be joint public/private investments	p. 50	Bloom boxes: http://www.bloomenergy.com/ Xcel Solar Rebates: http://www.xcelenergy.com/Minnesota/Business/RenewableEnergy/Solar_Rewards/Pages/home.aspx Purchase Power Agreements: http://www.epa.gov/greenpower/buygp/solarpower.htm
Rain Gardens	Rain gardens improve water quality by allowing water to be absorbed into the ground, giving pollutants a chance to filter out instead of going directly into the city's sewer system while providing aesthetic beauty.	City of St. Louis Park with help from residents, local businesses, organizations and other groups.	Immediately, where appropriate and ongoing	Potential funding partners: city, non-profits, clubs and organizations and private parties	p. 53	

History/Identity/Wayfinding

Goal: To create a unique identity for the West Lake Street study area (Heart of the Park) that not only fosters community pride by providing residents and users with a recognizable community, but

Tool Name	Description	Implementation Authority	Time Frame	Funding	Document	External Resource
					Page Number	
Wayfinding Signage	Easy, clearly-marked access to the Wooddale LRT station will help make the line a success by encouraging more people to choose Light Rail over driving alone to their destination.	City of St. Louis Park and local businesses	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	City of St. Louis Park	p. 53	
Historical Markers and Kiosks	Historic information markers and kiosks placed strategically throughout the area will build a sense of community and shared history, while also growing a stronger brand identity for local businesses. Historic information about a place can be communicated through many media.	St. Louis Park Historical Society	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	Collaborative funding - kiosks could be "donated" by local businesses or residents	p. 54	
Farmers Markets	Farmers markets have become increasingly common in recent years. A semi-regular Heart of the Park market day would help build social networks in the area, draw shoppers to local businesses, and of course, provide area residents with fresh food.	Focus groups of local residents and business owners with help of City staff	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	Vendor fees - possibly local health care and local food providers	p. 55	
Town Festival or Event	A town festival would create a stronger sense of community in the study area as well as giving it a more defined identity or sense of place. Currently, The Heart of The Park is missing an annual, or more frequent, event that draws people to the neighborhood.	City of St. Louis Park and a Festival/Event Committee	Phase One - 2011 to Opening Day	Multiple sources: City of St. Louis Park, boosters, local businesses, organizations, clubs foundations, non-profits, corporate sponsors, etc.	p. 56	

5. Conclusion

This document, the Heart of the Park Redevelopment Framework, was initiated at the direction of the City of St. Louis Park that recognized a need to focus on an undervalued gem within the city. While the area of West Lake Street has been passed over in recent years for exciting new developments like West End and Excelsior & Grand, this plan is the acknowledgement of the area's assets and future changes due to the possible light rail station on Wooddale Avenue.

The redevelopment plan has highlighted the key areas to be enhanced through capital improvements, financial incentives and private redevelopment. Heart of the Park is the capitalization of the history, education, transportation and economic development that generates a traditional neighborhood adjacent to a new LRT station and artists district. This document is to be used as a starting point for the community of St. Louis Park. We understand that the community will undergo a visioning process for this area to determine what it would like to see here. This document provides a diagnosis of existing conditions to aid the community in the planning process so they have facts about what exists on

the ground currently in this location – the land use, condition of current buildings, and current transportation infrastructure.

The Plan also provides a vision section that suggests what the area could be in 20 years. It is not meant to replace the visioning process that St. Louis Park will go through; rather it can be the conversation starter or idea sparkler for the community's unique vision.

Finally, the Plan includes a Toolkit that provides funding sources and implementation ideas to make the vision a reality. We hope this document has captured the unique features of the area and fused them into a multifaceted identity that the community can recognize and be proud of.

6. Appendices

1. Interview Summary

The following is a list of stakeholders that have been interviewed:

- City Council Members
 - o Anne Mavity
 - o Sue Sanger
 - o Sue Santa
- St. Louis Park Staff
 - o Rick Birno – Recreation Superintendent
 - o Scott Brink – City Engineer
 - o Adam Fulton – Planner
 - o Gary Morison – Assistant Zoning Administrator
 - o Marney Olson – Community Liaison
 - o John Tilton – Building Official
- Neighborhood Presidents
 - o Valerie Bartl – Sorensen
 - o Matt Elory – Lenox
- Andy Ewald – Athletic Director, SLP High School
- Mary Juberian – Manager of Youth and Family Services, Central Community Center
- Tom Metz – Principal, SLP High School

- Dennis Morris – Planning Commissioner
- Owners of Munchies (café in study area)
 - o Melanie Schumacher
 - o Todd Schumacher
- Curt Rahman – Building owner
- Staff at Perspectives, Inc. (non-profit in study area)
 - o Mark Scherman - Director of facilities
 - o Sandy Tobias - Kotyk - Property and Leasing Manager
 - o Raymond Mazorol - Principal Architect, L&M Associates
 - o Adam Newton - Landscape Architect, The Corduroy Studio
- Keith Miller Owner of Pampered Pooch

The following information summarizes the opinions and responses that were received in the interviews conducted. The interviews are summarized by general questions asked, the interview responses were left anonymous.

What do you like about the study area?

- Most business owners have residences in SLP – local live and work
- SLP has great potential as transportation costs increase (close to downtown metro, transit service, etc.), a lot of recent redevelopment activity – a lot of credit to Mayor and city staff
- Likes the local businesses in the area, this area has the potential to have a local flavor which is a good thing and it should be branded as ours (SLP)
- They have some outdoor space on the sidewalk for tables and chairs and they are willing to upgrade that area
- It is a tight knit business community along Lake Street
- Library – adds character to Lenox neighborhood; nice community
- Area has two anchors (high school & community center); like mall's department stores

- Residents see commercial/mixed use as good neighbors – love to support local businesses; great deal of loyalty
- Loves Central Community Center, the history/recreation
- People love their parks – pocket parks are definitely used and violently held on to by community
- Streets are clean and people are friendly; would walk at midnight down any street
- So many places that are easily accessible (5 mile radius); don't have to go to St Paul/Minneapolis
- Annual fall social at Webster park ~100 people turned out – community involvement
- Affordable neighborhood; overall very safe

Why did you locate (to live or do business) in the study area?

- The current building was the size that they were looking for and had enough space to expand. The building looked like it had potential and it was a reasonable site and price.
- Needed warehouse like space for dog day-care where barking dogs would not be an obnoxious neighbor

- SLP zoning was easier to deal with than other areas they were looking at.
- Good location (“life doesn't stop at the Minneapolis city line”)
- Liked the history of the space
- Moved to SLP for school district – reputation as evolved parents, small class size, overall positive reputation, larger budget, etc.
- Because it is a historical town – mature trees, older buildings, sidewalks, establish community as opposed to new development (Maple Grove or Woodbury)

What are problems in the study area, what needs to be changed/enhanced?

- There was no connection between the anchoring institutions.
- The area is in need of a signature or iconic flavor.
- Wanted to own rather than rent business space
- Make the area more self-sufficient
- the new Wooddale Bridge is pedestrian friendly
- Doesn't feel that SLP businesses/residents are ready for change that make come as a result of LRT
- Desegregation program gets Minneapolis

- residents into SLP and other suburban schools; bussing is provided but only to and from school at start and end of the day, no service is provided for after school activities
- Being in neighborhood is an issue, easy for students and non-students to cause havoc , access is too great and becomes a safety issue (people can just want into building from neighborhood)
- Biggest hassle is parking – size of individual lots cannot add parking spots; businesses share municipal lot – would need vertical parking ramps
- Doesn't see safety in the area as a big issue, the rail lines have been there for many years and the city/neighborhoods have grown up around them
- Football field is underused, they play 10-12 games a year and the rest of the time it sits empty and they are paying over \$100,000 per year to maintain the field
- Long blocks and it's hard to cross the street
- Lack gathering place
- A lot of space is marginal is just turning over; a lot of niche businesses are moving not drawing people from neighborhood
- No collaboration with businesses – freight

creates a reason for businesses to talk to each other; if they created an association it would be great for neighborhood and effectively provide for their needs

- You have to want to go there for a reason, not really a place where you go to get coffee

- Disappointed in walking aspect – sidewalks start and stopped abruptly; have to walk out into the street; very common in the area (Alabama, Zartham, etc.); draw back for pedestrians especially for strollers, children

What long term changes do you want to see?

- See some of the streets in the area completely closed to automobile traffic

- Better connection from the high school to the LRT stop.

- The area to transcend time, save the sacred spaces and keep it special.

- Needs identity

- Lights outside (crime prevention)

- Neighborhood shops (replace ugly building on Walker across from parking lot)

- LRT will be beneficial for students commuting from Brooklyn Center/Brooklyn Park/Minneapolis

- If no constraints on funding, would move stadium to track location behind high school and dome/turf that area. Parking would be better. Track access would be good amenity. Current space needs more storage and bathroom facilities.

- Area needs an “overhaul”

- PR value of flashy community center/signage visible from Hwy 7 – currently you cannot see amenities; need identity for SLP

- Opportunity to showcase school/advertise (awards won for SLP and high school; monument)

- Would make more sense to turf both track area and current football field for public/private use; SLP is “land-locked” and this would help get the most out of limited green space.

- Not emotionally invested – would sell properties for good offer

- Would make more sense to turf both track area and current football field for public/private use; SLP is “land-locked” and this would help get the most out of limited green space.

- Can foresee time when Central is torn down and redevelopment (long-term)

Need money from city for improvements

- Pent up demand for facility (soccer especially), may not benefit all existing businesses but would be beneficial in general

- Working incrementally towards improvements (see Pampered Pooch, Bike Masters, etc.); could be more with city investment (infrastructure or funding)

- This needs to be a 20-30 year plan, not a 5-10 year plan

- Questions if they need new civic buildings (referring to the city taking over some of the school’s buildings/property)

- Should be some sort of a joint venture between the public and private to get a facility for the school and for the community (in relation to the football field)

- The community center, once the LRT is built will be the most valuable property in the area

- Focal point to be on pedestrians and bikers

- Would like to see the long term density double or triple and it should focus on smart growth, more people, fewer cars

- There is a need for a broader range of housing options and there’s a need for more affordable senior housing

- Keep area quaint, like Linden Hills

- There is a need for more space dedicated

to teens; most of the activity centers are geared toward young children, for example the kiddy pool.

- If the city took over the field and if it were open to the broader community it would be the thing to revitalize that part of town the fastest, they could hold town festivals at a new community center (since it is the old downtown area)

- Would really like pedestrian amenities, but don't want much to change in the area in terms of densities and new buildings

- Make people feel like it's easy to cross tracks

- Would like sidewalks on all four sides of the blocks

- Suggest historic district – marker or streetscape

- Strong believer in strong architecture – it's bad in this area; building improvement without destroying historical character; open to demolition for some

- Area needs a true frontage road to get access from Wooddale & 7 to Louisiana Ave (especially for pedestrians – safety & attractiveness)

- Would still like to see obsolescent commercial turned into single family housing

- Would like to see more Mom & pop shops,

retail stores, electronic store; more geared to individual on foot/bicycle (rather than Sam's club attraction)

2. Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) Analysis

<i>Commercial/Office/Retail Buildings</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower rent allows for start-ups • Only 1 foreclosure since 2005 • Low vacancy • Employment gain in management and administration 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Preservation • Business incubator • Community openness to redevelopment
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower Estimated Market Value • Older building stock • Employment loss in manufacturing 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Brownfield (potentially contaminated) sites • Zoning or MN building code as barrier to redevelopment or renovation
<i>Education Buildings</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest employer • Activities at the school/community center that draw visitors 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest land holder (power to create change) • Doming & turfing football field
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Center • Inadequate parking for special events 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of doming & turfing football field • Redevelopment pressure on Community Center as property values increase with LRT station implementation
<i>Residential Buildings</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only two foreclosures since 2005 • Strong sense of community – active neighborhood organizations 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher density development of residential (in response to TOD)
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower Estimated Market Value 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment could displace existing residents and change neighborhood character
<i>Renewable Energy & Energy Efficient</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saves fossil fuel use and costs • Improves air quality and reduces impacts of climate change 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing fad of “green” and “sustainable” businesses • Rebates, grants and loans for energy efficiency and renewable energy installations
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of buildings/roofs not built to bear weight of solar panels 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of renewable energy installations

<i>Market Relevance of Buildings</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as an incubator for businesses without the means or desire to lease larger, newer spaces • Many are locally owned businesses • Low vacancy • Access to major Highways and proximity to dense housing, commercial, institutional, and industrial markets • Small parcel size conducive to neighborhood oriented businesses 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to central metro area • Future access to downtown Minneapolis/St Paul via transit (LRT) – especially as gas prices rise • LRT will likely increase nearby property values over time • St. Louis Park planning & economic development staff are flexible and eager to work with new businesses and development (friendly development culture) • Structural TOD trend
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower value buildings command lower rents • High turnover • Freight rail runs through business district • Potential environmental contamination 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small parcel size may limit redevelopment • Tightening of bank lending in general and resistance to financing ‘new’ concepts of development like TOD • Nearby Beltline and Louisiana businesses districts are competition • Removal of on-ramp to Highway 7 at Louisiana could reduce accessibility or at least the perception of accessibility
<i>Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing sidewalk infrastructure • Regional bike path (Cedar Lake Trl) • New Wooddale Bridge has both sidewalk and bike lanes 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of LRT
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Lake has sidewalk on only one side of the road because of football field • Sidewalks and bike lanes on Wooddale Bridge are narrow and potentially uninviting • No bike lanes on roads in the study area • Freight rail crossing at Wooddale and Library pose hazard to pedestrians/bicyclists 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate sidewalk or bike lane infrastructure could limit use of LRT or LRT riders visiting study area • Diversion of freight from LRT alignment to the CP – MN&S line.

<i>Automobile</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing parking is sufficient for existing use 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvements to the study area could also make vehicle travel more efficient by increasing signage and making the roads and existing street grid easier to navigate
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of street grid – navigation and wayfinding may be more difficult 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient parking if increased use of study area Increased focus on transit and pedestrian access can take away from easy vehicle travel Addition of LRT and the possible re-route of the freight rail line will increase the number of trains and impact on the timeliness of vehicle travel through the area “Hide and ride” LRT users could decrease parking for businesses and local residents

<i>Metro Transit Bus Routes</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are two Metro Transit bus routes that serve the area and the high-frequency #7 route stops across the Wooddale bridge Current routes cross paths with multiple other bus routes, which allows for transfers 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-route busses to connect with the LRT to provide greater access to more destinations
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very limited access and options for people to use as a consistent mode of travel 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LRT may replace bus routes, especially commuter express routes

<i>Wooddale LRT Station</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Wooddale Bridge over Highway 7: increased access for car, pedestrian and bike Timely accessibility as ‘central’ station to both job centers to the south and downtown Minneapolis 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued improvements to sidewalk and bike infrastructure to promote access to LRT station Broad coalition of supporters increases likelihood of federal funding - greater chance for economic development and community reinvestment in the Wooddale station area
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sidewalks and bike lanes on Wooddale bridge are narrow and may discourage use 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal funding for LRT line and station area

<i>Identity</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique, small town, main street character • Organic mix of uses • Strong presence of high school and football field – visitors on game day 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give buildings a ‘face-lift’ to make more attractive to visitors • School and Park & Rec could dome & turf football field for year-round multiple uses – increase visitors
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of unified or branded identity (e.g. West End or Excelsior & Grand) 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New opportunities and changes could open up the area to full-scale redevelopment which could threaten the character of the neighborhood

<i>Historic Elements</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site of historic downtown St. Louis Park • End of the line for St. Louis Park’s streetcar • Still contains some of the original buildings (Walker Building – 1887) 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate buildings as historic and take advantage of federal and state historic preservation tax credits for redevelopment
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic buildings are more complicated (and costly) to redevelop • Buildings may contain asbestos or lead paint • Most residents are unaware of historic nature of the area – undervalued 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment pressure could threaten historic buildings

<i>Wayfinding</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Wooddale bridge over Highway 7 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve signage and other wayfinding tools (street paint, etc.)
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks signage – unaware from outside what area contains or how to get there 	<p>Threats</p>

<i>Common Threads</i>	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home to a multitude of small, often locally owned businesses. • True mixed-use area that contributes to the "small town in the big city" character of the area. • The school, sports fields and the community center give the area a campus and youth-focused feel 	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract more local businesses to the area and retain a main street feel • Center the identity of the area around the school and community center (hub for sporting events and school functions year-round)
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older buildings and are generally a bit run down • Many businesses not have enough capital to make improvements to the buildings 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment of the area could threaten the local small businesses if they cannot afford the new rents or building space of the redeveloped parcels

3. Financial Assistance for Brownfield Cleanup and Site Remediation

Minnesota Targeted Brownfield Assessment Program (MNTBAP) from the MN Pollution Control Agency: The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has grant funds available to conduct environmental assessments at eligible brownfield sites proposed for redevelopment or reuse.

Fact Sheet on MNTBAP: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/view-document.html?gid=2419>

MNTBAP Application: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/view-document.html?gid=14203>

MNTBAP Brownfields to Green Space and Urban Gardens: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/view-document.html?gid=2418>

EPA Brownfield Tax Expensing Incentive Program: The Federal Brownfields Tax Deduction allows private entities to deduct qualifying remediation expenses on that year's tax return. The expensing program is the only Federal brownfield incentive targeted to private site owners.

Overview of the Program: http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/tax/tax_guide.pdf

Program Guidelines: http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/tax/ti_guidelines.pdf

MN Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Contamination Cleanup and Investigation Grant Program: "These grants pay up to 75 percent of the costs to investigate and clean up polluted sites. Both publicly and privately owned sites with known or suspected soil or groundwater contamination qualify. Cities, port authorities, housing and redevelopment authorities, economic development authorities, or counties are eligible."

More information about the program (applications are also found on this webpage): http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Government/Financial_Assistance/Site_Cleanup_Redevelopment_Funding/Contamination_Cleanup_Investigation_Grant_Program.aspx

Metropolitan Council Tax Base Revitalization Account (TBRA): "The TBRA helps cities clean up contaminated urban land for subsequent commercial and industrial development, thus restoring tax base and jobs near existing housing and services. This program is conducted in coordination with the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development."

Applicant Resources: <http://www.metrocouncil.org/services/livcomm/LCAresources.htm>

Hennepin County Environmental Response Fund (ERF): “The ERF is a grant program that funds the assessment and clean-up of contaminated sites. ERF grants provide funding for a variety of activities at contaminated sites where the added environmental costs hinder site improvements or redevelopment. Activities funded by ERF grants include contaminated soil and groundwater assessment and cleanup, and asbestos and lead-based paint evaluation and abatement.”

More about the program: <http://hennepin.us/portal/site/HennepinUS/menuitem.b1ab75471750e40fa01dfb47ccf06498/>

Applying for an ERF Grant: <http://hennepin.us/portal/site/HennepinUS/menuitem.b1ab75471750e40fa01dfb47ccf06498/>

Hennepin County Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan: “Hennepin County administers the Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund with funds made available through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Loans may be used for environmental clean-up of hazardous waste, hazardous waste commingled with petroleum and petroleum-only impacts. Public entities (with the exclusion

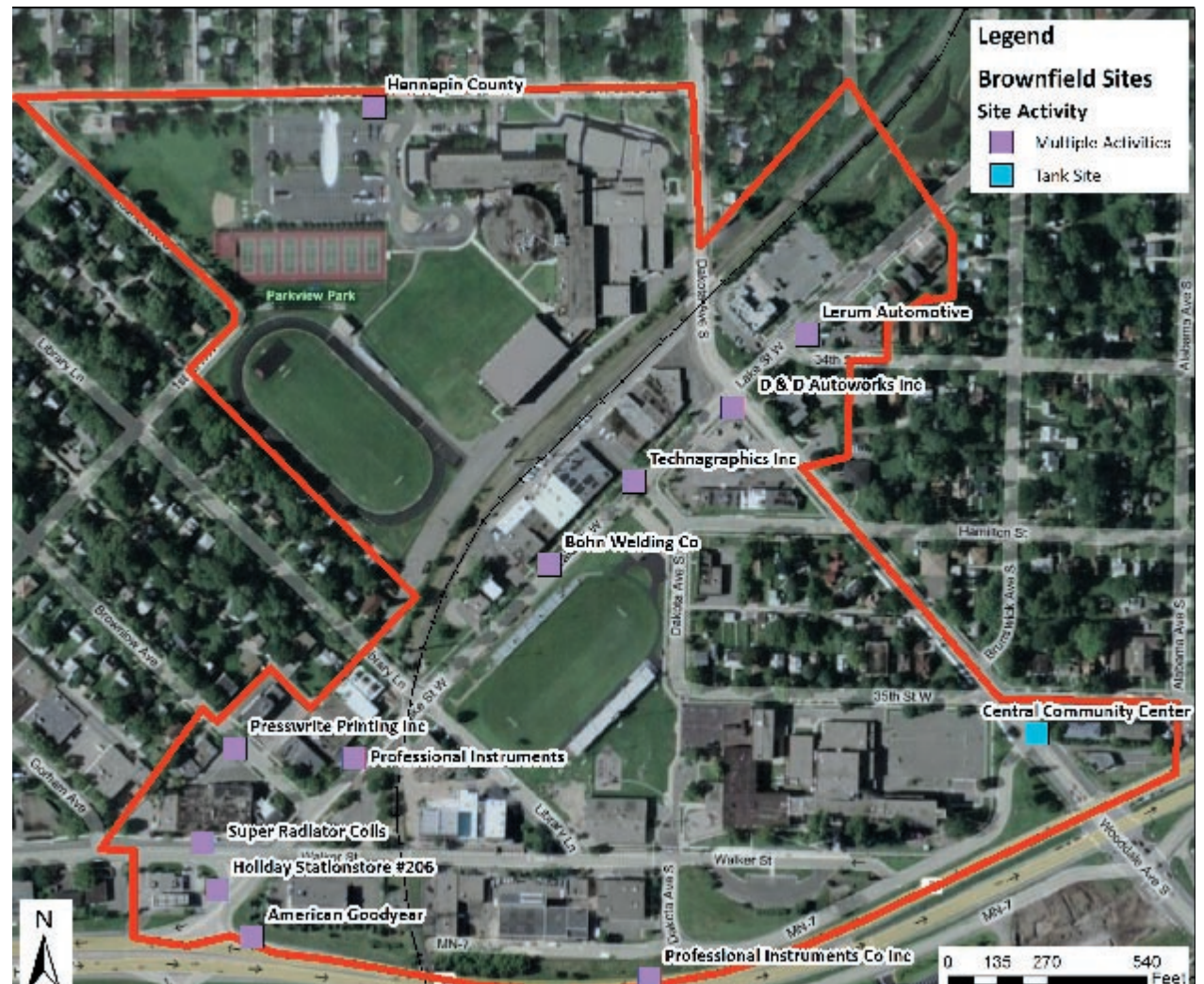


Figure 71: Brownfield Sites in the Study Area

of state agencies), private for-profit organizations, nonprofits organizations, and other interested parties located in Hennepin County are eligible for low-interest loans to assist in hazardous waste cleanup.”

More about the program:

<http://hennepin.us/portal/site/HennepinUS/menuitem.b1ab75471750e40fa01dfb47ccf06498/>

Good sources for additional updated information about Brownfields cleanup programs are:

Minnesota Brownfields: <http://www.mnbrownfields.org/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Brownfields and Land Revitalization page): http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/tax/ti_guidelines.pdf

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED): http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/Government/Financial_Assistance/Site_Cleanup,_Redevelopment,_Transit_Funding/index.aspx

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/waste/waste-and-cleanup/cleanup-programs-and-topics/cleanup-programs/petroleum-brownfields-program.html#a&b>

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