

## **City of Center City Comprehensive Plan – Visioning Meeting Wednesday, February 4, 2009 7:30 p.m.**

A “Community Visioning Meeting” was held as a part of the Comprehensive Plan process in order to obtain input from the community on various aspects of the city’s future growth and redevelopment. Approximately 25 people attended. Five groups were formed with about five people in each group.

**Participants included:** Numerous citizens, members of the City Council and Planning Commission, Mayor Jill Behnke, Zoning Administrator Terrie Trudeau, City Engineer Les Mateffy, City Attorney Peter Grundhoefer and John Anderson and Joanne Foust of Municipal Development Group, Inc.

Those in attendance were asked to respond to a number of questions. Following are the responses:

### **The best strengths of Center City:**

- The small town atmosphere;
- The hills, lakes and open spaces;
- The historic downtown and homes;
- The range of affordable homes;
- The location/proximity to the metropolitan area; and,
- The neighborhoods and people of the community.

### **The challenges facing Center City:**

- Lack of economic opportunity;
- Lake water quality;
- Preserve the historic downtown business activity and downtown commerce;
- Due to the small size of Center City, funds may lack to upgrade infrastructure;
- Retain the Chisago County seat; and,
- Planning for future growth.

### **Positive attributes of Center City’s park and recreation in the community:**

- There are five parks and improvements have been made over the years;
- Potential future recreation spots within the community including wetland preservation areas;
- The parks are located in accessible spots and well distributed throughout the neighborhoods in the community;
- An active Park Board with a lot of citizen involvement;
- Two parks have water access with the Lorens Park location having great potential for further improvements; and,
- Playground equipment at Tower Park is excellent.

### **Suggested Park and Recreation Improvements in the community:**

- Limited access to Lorens Park which also needs supervision or security due to the location;
- Need to acquire a swimming beach and athletic fields;
- Tower Park needs some type of picnic shelter or gazebo;
- Need to find new and better ways to raise money for park improvements;
- Need to replace playground equipments in some of the parks;
- Maintenance, landscaping and up keep of parks needs to be a priority;
- Improve water quality throughout the city;
- More trails need to be installed throughout the community; and,
- Find a location for a dog park.

### **Existing transportation issues in the community:**

- CSAH 9 (Summit Avenue) needs curb and gutter or to be redesigned because of instability through the city;

- Parking at courthouse needs improving due to bad intersection;
- Additional pedestrian crosswalks for safety purposes;
- Too much traffic and too high of speed on CSAH 9;
- Walkability within city is poor;
- Improve lighting on Highway 8; and,
- Intersection of Highway 8 and CR 82 (Pleasant Valley Road) needs improving.

**Future transportation recommendations or concerns:**

- Include sidewalks on both sides of Summit Avenue by the lake;
- Improve access to Highway 8;
- Add stop signs to both ends of CSAH 9 in historic district;
- Bus or light rail from Taylors Falls to Forest Lake or the need for mass transportation;
- Add a stop light to Highway 8 and CR 82 intersection;
- Redesign streets around City Hall and the Swedish Mall;
- Upgrade Main Street to Highway 8;
- Decrease traffic on Summit Avenue;
- A bike trail from Taylors Falls to Forest Lake;
- Preserve Pleasant Valley Road; and,
- Avoid runoff to the lakes by installing rain water gardens.

**The following are great things about the community:**

- Pride in the history and heritage of Center City;
- Friendly people;
- Small town atmosphere;
- The downtown area is quaint and photogenic;
- The lakes and topography or location of the city;
- Access to state parks;
- Good school system; and,
- Family friendly neighborhoods.

**The following are things we need to work on to make Center City better:**

- Enhance the cultural tourism/promote tourism;
- Need to add bike and walking trails;
- Establish a self-guided walking tour of the historic district;
- Need a good, high quality restaurant in the city;
- Improve the lake water quality;
- Aesthetic improvements and redevelopment of downtown area;
- Improve the traffic situation on CSAH 9
- Preserve the historical areas of the city;
- Attracting new businesses to the community; and,
- Need to upgrade city infrastructure.

**In 2035 I want people to say those who participated in this planning effort...:**

- Cared;
- To say thank you for your visionary effort;
- Were good custodians of the area;
- Were insightful and visionary; and,
- Were visioning what the community needed to maintain the small town feel while still allowing growth.

**In 2035 I want to describe Center City to my friend as...:**

- A city that everyone wants to live in;
- A good place to live and play;

- The best placed I ever lived in the USA;
- A place that preserved its historical identity, preserved the environment and continued to provide a safe, family friendly place for citizens of all ages; and,
- Historic, Swedish, beautiful and a good safe place to live and raise children.

### **Areas of Stability and Areas of Change**

Maps were also distributed to the groups and the first map was the yellow map and each group was asked to label on the maps areas of stability with a red marker and areas of change with a blue marker. The following is a list of the responses.

#### **Areas of Stability:**

- Calendar Island area;
- Grand Avenue;
- The residential areas along Highway 8 between North Center Lake and South Center Lake;
- Center City Historic District; and,
- The residential area on the northwest side of Pioneer Lake.

#### **Areas of Change:**

- The Highway 8 and CR 82 intersection and property surrounding the intersection west to the east edge of the current city;
- The lakeshore area north of the current city limits and west of CSAH 9;
- The area east of the current city along CSAH 37;
- Downtown;
- County Road 82 between Highway 8 and CSAH 37;
- Intersection between Upper town and Lower town by the Lutheran Church;
- Summit Avenue; and,
- Lorens Park.

### **Resource and Open Space Preservation**

Green maps were distributed to the groups so they could mark two areas of significant environmental importance and two areas for investment in parks. The following is a list of the responses.

#### **Areas of Significant Environmental Importance:**

- The lakes and wetlands throughout the city;
- The downtown area;
- The open space and farmland along Pleasant Valley Road; and,
- Local truck farming within the township areas surrounding the city.

#### **Areas of Investment for Parks:**

- The wooded and wetland areas around Little Lake in Chisago Lake Township;
- The Gustafson property adjacent to the new county property along Highway 8;
- A beach along South Center Lake; and,
- Lorens Park.

### **Future Land Use**

Those in attendance discussed the best locations for future low density residential, medium to high density residential, commercial and industrial development. Using the parcel maps that were provided, each group illustrated their proposed future land use boundaries and locations. Some groups also expressed a desire to retain some areas for agricultural preservation. Following is a summary of the general locations proposed.

**Low Density Residential:**

- Along CSAH 37;
- Along the east shoreline of North Center Lake;
- North of Hazelden on the south side of Highway 8;
- Calendar Island;
- Along Pleasant Valley Road;
- The east shoreline of Pioneer Lake;
- Along the northern portions of the Gustafson property west of CR 82; and,
- East of CR 82

**Medium to High Density Residential:**

- Along the north side of Highway 8 west of Shafer;
- West of CSAH 9 north the current city limits but not including the lakeshore;
- In the southwest corner of the intersection of CR 82 and CSAH 37;
- The area behind the County Public Works buildings;
- Areas south of Highway 8 along South Center Lake east of the current City;
- Portions of the Gustafson property north of the County owned property along CR 82; and,
- South of CSAH 37 going east towards Shafer.

**Commercial:**

- Along the north and south side of Highway 8 from CR 82 west to Shafer;
- The county owned property along Highway 8;
- The Gustafson property fronting Highway 8; and,
- The intersection of CR 82 and Highway 8.

**Industrial:**

- The area along both sides of CR 82 north of the County owned property;
- The southeast corner of the intersection of CR 82 and Highway 8;
- The Gustafson property except the Highway 8 frontage;
- The area north of the County Public Works buildings along CSAH 12; and,
- The areas north and south of Highway 8 from CR 82 west to Shafer excluding the actual highway frontage.

**Agricultural Preserve or Open Space:**

- The majority of the Chisago Lake Township area excluding a small area along CSAH 37 and Highway 8;
- Calendar Island; and,
- The area along CSAH 37 heading east of CR 82.

**Community Survey**

Surveys were also distributed to the participants of the meeting and a total of 27 surveys were either fully or partially completed. Following is some of the results from the survey process.

1. As part of the community survey process each participant was asked to rate both the current situation and future outlook of different policy areas within the community by scoring them from 1 to 5 with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent. The following tables show the results from the survey by number and percentage.

**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSE TO QUESTION NUMBER 1 – CURRENT SITUATION**

<b>Policy Area</b>	<b>1 Very Poor</b>	<b>2 Poor</b>	<b>3 Average</b>	<b>4 Good</b>	<b>5 Excellent</b>
Vitality of downtown	1 (4.5%)	13 (59.1%)	8 (36.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Neighborhood quality	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.3%)	3 (13.0%)	15 (65.2%)	4 (17.4%)
Farmland preservation	1 (5.3%)	5 (26.3%)	9 (47.4%)	4 (21.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Housing affordability	0 (0.0%)	2 (8.7%)	15 (65.2%)	4 (17.4%)	2 (8.7%)
Economic opportunity	5 (21.7%)	15 (65.2%)	3 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Housing quality	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (47.8%)	11 (47.8%)	1 (4.3%)
Urban aesthetics	1 (4.5%)	6 (27.3%)	8 (36.4%)	6 (27.3%)	1 (4.5%)
Traffic flow	2 (8.7%)	7 (30.4%)	8 (34.8%)	6 (26.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Open Space	1 (4.5%)	5 (22.7%)	7 (31.8%)	8 (36.4%)	1 (4.5%)
Recreation opportunities	0 (0.0%)	5 (21.7%)	8 (34.8%)	9 (39.1%)	1 (4.3%)
Air quality	0 (0.0%)	3 (13.6%)	3 (13.6%)	7 (31.8%)	9 (40.9%)
Water quality	6 (26.1%)	7 (30.4%)	4 (17.4%)	5 (21.7%)	1 (4.3%)
Public safety	1 (4.3%)	1 (4.3%)	3 (13.0%)	13 (56.5%)	5 (21.7%)
Urban land consumption	1 (4.5%)	7 (31.8%)	12 (54.5%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)
Infrastructure	2 (8.7%)	8 (34.8%)	12 (52.2%)	1 (4.3%)	0 (0.0%)

Source: February 4, 2009 Visioning Meeting Community Survey

**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSE TO QUESTION NUMBER 1 – FUTURE OUTLOOK**

<b>Policy Area</b>	<b>1 Very Poor</b>	<b>2 Poor</b>	<b>3 Average</b>	<b>4 Good</b>	<b>5 Excellent</b>
Vitality of downtown	2 (9.1%)	4 (18.2%)	6 (27.3%)	8 (36.4%)	2 (9.1%)
Neighborhood quality	1 (4.5%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (27.3%)	10 (45.5%)	5 (22.7%)
Farmland preservation	4 (20.0%)	8 (40.0%)	4 (20.0%)	2 (10.0%)	2 (10.0%)
Housing affordability	1 (4.5%)	2 (9.1%)	10 (45.5%)	5 (22.7%)	4 (18.2%)
Economic opportunity	0 (0.0%)	7 (31.8%)	8 (36.4%)	5 (22.7%)	2 (9.1%)
Housing quality	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (33.3%)	10 (47.6%)	4 (19.0%)
Urban aesthetics	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	6 (28.6%)	8 (38.1%)	3 (14.3%)
Traffic flow	2 (9.5%)	3 (14.3%)	8 (38.1%)	5 (23.8%)	3 (14.3%)
Open Space	5 (23.8%)	1 (4.8%)	6 (28.6%)	4 (19.0%)	5 (23.8%)
Recreation opportunities	1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	3 (13.6%)	8 (36.4%)	7 (31.8%)
Air quality	2 (10.5%)	2 (10.5%)	4 (21.1%)	7 (36.8%)	4 (21.1%)
Water quality	5 (25.0%)	3 (15.0%)	2 (10.0%)	6 (30.0%)	4 (20.0%)
Public safety	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (23.8%)	5 (23.8%)	7 (33.3%)
Urban land consumption	5 (25.0%)	4 (20.0%)	5 (25.0%)	1 (5.0%)	5 (25.0%)
Infrastructure	2 (9.5%)	3 (14.3%)	8 (38.1%)	5 (23.8%)	3 (14.3%)

Source: February 4, 2009 Visioning Meeting Community Survey

2. What in your opinion is the city's sentiment toward the growth of retail and service business outside of the downtown? (23 responses received)
  - a. There is a general consensus that it should be restricted. 4 17%
  - b. There is consensus that it should be restricted in some cases. 3 13%
  - c. There is much disagreement on the issue. 5 22%
  - d. There is a consensus it should be encouraged in some cases. 8 35%
  - e. There is a general consensus it should be encouraged. 3 13%
  
3. What in your opinion is the city's sentiment toward the growth of industrial establishments? (23 responses received)

- a. There is a general consensus that it should be restricted. 4 17%
  - b. There is consensus that it should be restricted in some cases. 6 26%
  - c. There is much disagreement on the issue. 3 13%
  - d. There is a consensus it should be encouraged in some cases. 8 35%
  - e. There is a general consensus it should be encouraged. 2 9%
4. What is your opinion is the city's sentiment toward residential development? (23 responses received)
- a. There is a general consensus that it should be restricted. 4 17%
  - b. There is consensus that it should be restricted in some cases. 6 26%
  - c. There is much disagreement on the issue. 4 17%
  - d. There is a consensus it should be encouraged in some cases. 7 30%
  - e. There is a general consensus it should be encouraged. 2 9%
5. Each participant was asked to rate their attitude towards certain types of development with 1 being strongly discourage and 5 being strongly encourage. The following table shows the responses in number and percentage.

**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSE TO QUESTION NUMBER 5  
ATTITUDE TOWARD DEVELOPMENT**

<b>Policy Area</b>	<b>1 Strongly Discourage</b>	<b>2 Discourage</b>	<b>3 Neutral</b>	<b>4 Encourage</b>	<b>5 Strongly Encourage</b>
Downtown Commercial	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.5%)	4 (18.2%)	3 (13.6%)	14 (63.6%)
Highway Commercial	5 (23.8%)	2 (9.5%)	5 (23.8%)	2 (9.5%)	7 (33.3%)
Industrial	4 (18.2%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (22.7%)	8 (36.4%)	2 (9.5%)
Residential	0 (0.0%)	5 (22.7%)	7 (31.8%)	6 (27.3%)	4 (18.2%)
Multiple Family Housing	3 (13.6%)	6 (27.3%)	10 (45.5%)	1 (4.5%)	2 (9.1%)
Affordable Housing	1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	10 (45.5%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (22.7%)

Source: February 4, 2009 Visioning Meeting Community Survey

6. Those who responded to the survey were asked to prioritize which issues should be a priority in Center City. When they rated each item 1 was considered a low priority and 5 was a high priority. The following table illustrates the responses for each issue by categorizing them by number and percentage for each response.

**COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONSE TO QUESTION NUMBER 6  
PRIORITY OF ISSUES**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>1 Low</b>	<b>2 Low- Medium</b>	<b>3 Medium</b>	<b>4 Medium- High</b>	<b>5 High</b>
Improve traffic routes	1 (4.5%)	3 (13.6%)	5 (22.7%)	7 (31.8%)	6 (27.3%)
Limit urban sprawl	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (19.0%)	11 (52.4%)
Secure an annexation agreement	4 (19.0%)	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	8 (38.1%)	4 (19.0%)
Make land available for residential development	4 (19.0%)	4 (19.0%)	9 (42.9%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)
Curtail loss of agriculture land to urbanization	0 (0.0%)	4 (19.0%)	4 (19.0%)	5 (23.8%)	8 (38.1%)
Reduce high housing costs	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.0%)	9 (42.9%)	3 (14.3%)	3 (14.3%)
Increase infrastructure (water, sewer) capacity	1 (4.8%)	4 (19.0%)	10 (47.6%)	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.0%)
Downtown preservation/revitalization	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	5 (23.8%)	14 (66.7%)
Cope with lack of government funding	1 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (19.0%)	9 (42.9%)	7 (33.3%)
Avoid destruction of wildlife habitat	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (13.6%)	6 (27.3%)	13 (59.1%)
Avoid destruction of wetlands	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (19.0%)	16 (76.2%)
Prevent water pollution	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	21 (100%)
Protect groundwater supply (volume)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (10.0%)	18 (90.0%)
Eliminate city government "red tape"	1 (4.8%)	5 (23.8%)	6 (28.6%)	3 (14.3%)	6 (28.6%)
Prevent/reverse general decline of city	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (15.8%)	2 (10.5%)	14 (73.7%)
Provide sufficient low-income housing	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	9 (42.9%)	6 (28.6%)	1 (4.8%)
Reverse govt. encroachment on property rights	4 (19.0%)	2 (9.5%)	6 (28.6%)	5 (23.8%)	4 (19.0%)
Preserve environmentally sensitive land	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (85.7%)
Embrace green design/development concepts	0 (0.0%)	1 (4.8%)	1 (4.8%)	3 (14.3%)	16 (76.2%)

Source: February 4, 2009 Visioning Meeting Community Survey

7. In your opinion should the city attempt to expand its city boundaries through annexation? Is so, what is the best way to avoid conflict? Following are some of the most common responses.

- Yes (9 responses)
  - Through annexation agreements;
  - Plan with the Township Board;
  - Seek agreements that the property owners would like to see;
  - Voluntary annexations only;
  - Offer benefits to be part of growing community;
  - Have discussions with land owners; and
  - Contact property owners to see what their viewpoint is.
- No (9 responses)
  - I detest development and urbanization of rural land and annexation may be necessary to only prevent encroachment of urban development;
  - Do not force it but you can invite people in; and,
  - There is no need for annexation.

8. Here are some of the additional comments that were received.
  - Explore consolidation with Lindstrom;
  - Growth is keeping with the founders vision for the city;
  - Safe walking paths are needed from the courthouse to the downtown;
  - Preserve the historic district structures and adjoining lakeshore properties;
  - Limit the traffic on CSAH 9;
  - City need to understand that business and commercial growth will help keep taxes low.
  - Summit Avenue redevelopment; and
  - Keep the historic feeling of the area.

#### **Future Input**

It was also noted that the Comprehensive Planning Committee reviews various sections of the Comprehensive Plan at the Planning Commission's monthly meetings held the third Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. In addition, an open house and a public hearing will also be held prior to the adoption of a comprehensive plan, which is anticipated to be late in 2009 or early 2010.