

An External Review of the Post-Development Phase of the Crest Ridge Corporate Center, Glen Lake Redevelopment, and Goodwill Industries Development

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An External Review of Post-Development Phase of The Crest Ridge Corporate Center

I. Introduction to Review

The Minnetonka Planning Division routinely works with developers and reviews and manages development projects in the community, some of which are initially contentious with neighbors who live nearby. Objections to the projects range from concerns about density and traffic to potential negative impacts on natural resources or community character. Three prominent examples of such development projects were Goodwill Industries Development, Crest Ridge Corporate Center, and Glen Lake Redevelopment, which were contentious at the time that the projects were initiated.

Through the University of Minnesota's Resilient Communities Project (RCP), the City of Minnetonka partnered with faculty and students from the courses *Principles and Methods of Evaluation* and *Evaluation Problems* to evaluate these past development projects in order to assess public perceptions of these controversial projects and the City of Minnetonka's public engagement processes during the review of development proposals. Students conducted phone and group interviews with city residents who had expressed an opinion on these projects during the formal review process. Residents were asked questions pertaining to their initial opinions, their opinions now that projects had been completed, and their general views of the public review process. The results of this evaluation aim to help the city in review of future projects and in consideration of changes to the public review process.

The evaluation took place between December 2013 and April 2013. This report presents the highlights of the evaluation findings that pertain specifically to the Crest Ridge Corporate Center project, followed by specific recommendations.

II. Background of the Crest Ridge Corporate Center

In December 2007, the City Council considered a proposal by OPUS Northwest LLC to redevelop the existing Wilshire, single-family residential neighborhood at the Southeast corner of the I-394/Hopkins Crossroad interchange. Since 1980, the Minnetonka Comprehensive Plan had suggested the redevelopment of this area for office use. In 2006-2007, OPUS Northwest acquired all of the residential properties in the neighborhood and proposed a 14-acre project, including the construction of two office buildings and associated parking structures. City staff supported the development and solicited feedback from nearly 120 property owners. There was opposition to the development. Area residents originally discussed 3 primary concerns: parking structure location, office building height, and traffic implications. After citizens' concerns were expressed, the developer revised his plan and made some adjustments to the original design to address some of these concerns.

III. Evaluation Methods



Methods for this evaluation included individual phone interviews and group interviews. The sample for the post-development evaluation was drawn from a pool of individuals who made a public expression of dissatisfaction with these controversial development projects during the formal review process. The City provided the evaluation team with the public records from which study participants were identified and selected.

The evaluation team conducted 15 individual phone interviews and two group interviews with a total of additional 9 participants. The same set of questions was formulated for both phone interviews and group interviews to get the most relevant and consistent data from participants. All of the phone interviews were conducted by one member of the evaluation team, one group interview was conducted by four members with one facilitator and the second group interview was conducted by two members with the same facilitator. With the permission of the interviewees, the evaluation team recorded the sessions and transcribed the recordings. Phone interviews lasted for approximately 20 to 40 minutes and group interviews for about 40 minutes to an hour. The evaluation team took careful precautions to maintain participants' confidentiality in the reports.

All of the phone interview and group interview transcripts were read by the evaluators and coded in themes and subthemes. After careful analysis of qualitative data, first individually and then as a group, the evaluation team formulated over-arching themes to account for all the data collected. Primary concerns with the project, satisfaction with the city's review process, and recommendations for the city were the major themes identified in the analysis.

A more detailed discussion of these themes specifically pertaining to Crest Ridge Corporate Center is presented in the following findings section of the report.

IV. Study Participant Characteristics: Crest Ridge Corporate Center

Of 24 total study participants, 4 (17%) people participated in phone interviews specifically to discuss the Crest Ridge Corporate Center. Two females and two males participated in the phone interviews, and all of these participants happened to be long-term residents of the City of Minnetonka (defined as individuals who lived in the neighborhood for over 8 years during the last 15 years).

V. Primary Concerns Identified by Residents

The section presents the three common and primary areas of concerns identified by residents, providing a brief explanation and illustrative remarks from the residents. Based on the data collected, the evaluation team concluded that there are very few concerns lingering regarding the Corporate Center while some concerns have evaporated almost completely such as traffic implications. The City responded initially to most of the resident complaints.



#1: The Location of the Project

There were concerns raised related to the location of the development. A couple of study participants indicated that the location of the building and the adjacent parking garage would devalue residential properties in close proximity. This concern exists to this date. In addition, there were concerns that the building was going to create noise and lighting generated by cars in the parking garage for neighbors in the area. This concern appears to have been mitigated over time thanks to adjustments made to the parking garage. While some residents had concerns about traffic before, it does not seem to be a problem anymore. Yet one resident is concerned about the quality of life in the neighborhood with all the fumes invited by the parking ramp.

“I felt there was some pandering going on. The developer said that they would have more lighting at the ramp. It was never put on the contract. The light was glaring on them all night long. The light that was promised did not occur. People do not have the time to run to the city and check what the developer has been up to.”

“It makes me nervous to think about the devaluation of my property. One neighbor sold her house. The realtor said there is nothing to compare your lot to. The value would diminish by 25%. It is our one investment. Opus has many assets though. For middle-class people, this is our only investment.”

#2: The Scale of the Project

A couple of study participants were concerned about the scale of the project. One resident felt as if his/her home would be held hostage by a very big building and a tall parking garage.

“I was opposed to the scale of the project. My street was supposed to be [a] mid-density area. The developer was thinking of creating high-end homes/offices. The plan to create a 5-story building and a huge parking ramp was unrealistic.”

VI. The City of Minnetonka’s Review Process

This section presents the evaluation findings related to the residents’ perceptions of the City of Minnetonka’s public review process. To evaluate the City’s public engagement process, the evaluation team considered four important criteria to organize the residents’ experiences and perceptions.

#1: City’s outreach

Residents heard about and followed the project either at neighborhood meetings or through postcards from the city. Some residents had the opportunity to talk to the City Council members who visited their neighborhood.



“We were sent a notice by the city of Minnetonka, and then we got several notices for public meetings with the developer/city throughout the whole process.”

#2: Residents’ ability to raise their concerns

Residents used various means to convey their feelings to the City of Minnetonka about the development project. Some of these means included emails, telephone conversations, and attending meetings.

“I feel that the city is pretty responsive. They call it an open mic. I get stuff through phone calls. But when I called, they were really good listeners. I wished that it was not me who had to make the phone call. It means that you need to take the action to call them. As time goes on, people get worn down. That is what the developers know and feel.”

“It depends on the project and on the people they’re dealing [with]. As I explained, I wasn’t going to be pushed around. A lot of people allow themselves to be pushed around. They go in and they spasm and they cry in front of the Planning Commission and or the City Commission, but they don’t have any alternative. They get blown away. I felt that I got listened to.”

#3: The City of Minnetonka’s willingness to listen

Residents felt that the City listened to their concerns after all, although one participant believed that it was only because they effectively and persistently expressed their concerns and complaints about possible traffic, noise, lighting, and aesthetics problems.

“I don’t know that we had much influence on how tall this parking building was or anything. I think some of the close neighbors would have liked more input.”

“The city has been good about coming to our neighborhood meetings. [The City Council Officer] was very good about listening. I did feel like that she was hearing me. I thought that the city was good about handling this hot button situation. I also felt that the city had so much pressure from the people who felt they were held hostage.”

#4: Acting on resident comments

Residents have said that the City heard some of their concerns, adjusted plans, but this only happened because they were raising the issues that affected their lives directly.

“I think it [our opinion] was valued. Notes were taken by the planner and the City Council member. I think our neighborhood as a whole was listened to because the developer made some adjustments to the development plan to try to assist the neighbors with some of their concerns.”



“They were going to build a parking ramp with the traditional openings on each floor, and I fought it so we got solid walls, so consequently we got the best of the world because the city planning agreed with me and had the developer put solid walls all the way up.”

VII. Residents’ Overall Experience with the Review Process

Some residents expressed that each project is specific to the local context and that the city deals with each project a different way. In this particular situation study participants felt that their concerns were heard and that the developer was able to adjust his original design and plans to adapt and address some of these concerns.

VIII. Recommendations for the City of Minnetonka

Due to low participation of residents in discussing the Crest Ridge Corporate Center, the evaluation team was unable to solicit or generate specific recommendations that pertained to this project. The main finding of the post-development evaluation of Crest Ridge was that the residents whose lives seemed to be affected by the project the most were able to raise their concerns through effective means and eventually felt that they succeeded to affect the design of the plan according to their needs.



An External Review of Post-Development Phase of Glen Lake Redevelopment

IX. Introduction to Review

The Minnetonka Planning Division routinely works with developers and reviews and manages development projects in the community, some of which are initially contentious with neighbors who live nearby. Objections to the projects range from concerns about density and traffic to potential negative impacts on natural resources or community character. Three prominent examples of such development projects were Goodwill Industries Development, Crest Ridge Corporate Center, and Glen Lake Redevelopment, which were contentious at the time that the projects were initiated.

Through the University of Minnesota's Resilient Communities Project (RCP), the City of Minnetonka partnered with faculty and students from the courses *Principles and Methods of Evaluation* and *Evaluation Problems* to evaluate these past development projects in order to assess public perceptions of these controversial projects and the City of Minnetonka's public engagement processes during the review of development proposals. Students conducted phone and group interviews with city residents who had expressed an opinion on these projects during the formal review process. Residents were asked questions pertaining to their initial opinions, their opinions now that projects had been completed, and their general views of the public review process. The results of this evaluation aim to help the city in review of future projects and in consideration of changes to the public review process.

The evaluation took place between December 2013 and April 2013. This report presents the highlights of the evaluation findings that pertain specifically to the Glen Lake Redevelopment project, followed by specific recommendations.

X. Background of Glen Lake Redevelopment Project

Glen Lake is a commercial/residential neighborhood in the southeast section of Minnetonka. In 2005-2006, a developer proposed a three-phase redevelopment of several commercial properties, consisting of condominiums and retail/service commercial and restaurants. The project included both affordable mid-range and senior housing units. The developer owned Glen Lake Shopping Center and wanted to redevelop this property. The City staff believed that the future viability of redevelopment depended on this redevelopment due to struggling businesses. The city approached the developer to develop the land south of Excelsior as well, where the city wanted a strip mall to be built. The developer asked for a third piece of land to build a condominium and generate revenue to build the strip mall. The City agreed. There was general support for redeveloping the land south of Excelsior. The City solicited feedback from nearly 1000 area property owners and found a significant vocal opposition to the way that the City and the developer were going to develop the land. A neighborhood survey result indicated that 77 out of 145 (53%) respondents somewhat or strongly opposed to the redevelopment.



XI. Evaluation Methods

Methods for this evaluation included individual phone interviews and group interviews. The sample for the post-development evaluation was drawn from a pool of individuals who made a public expression of dissatisfaction with these controversial development projects during the formal review process. The City provided the evaluation team with the public records from which study participants were identified and selected.

The evaluation team conducted 15 individual phone interviews and two group interviews with a total of additional 9 participants. The same set of questions was formulated for both phone interviews and group interviews to get the most relevant and consistent data from participants. All of the phone interviews were conducted by one member of the evaluation team, one group interview was conducted by four members with one facilitator and the second group interview was conducted by two members with the same facilitator. With the permission of the interviewees, the evaluation team recorded the sessions and transcribed the recordings. Phone interviews lasted for approximately 20 to 40 minutes and group interviews for about 40 minutes to an hour. The evaluation team took careful precautions to maintain participants' confidentiality in the reports.

All of the phone interview and group interview transcripts were read by the evaluators and coded in themes and subthemes. After careful analysis of qualitative data, first individually and then as a group, the evaluation team formulated overarching themes to account for all the data collected. Primary concerns with the project, satisfaction with the city's review process, overall and recommendations for the city were the major themes identified in the analysis.

A more detailed discussion of these themes specifically pertaining to the Glen Lake Redevelopment Project is presented in the following findings section of the report.

XII. Study Participant Characteristics: Glen Lake Redevelopment Project

Of 24 total study participants, 11 (46%) people participated in either phone or group interviews specifically to discuss the Glen Lake Redevelopment Project. A majority of these participants (7) are female, and all of these participants are long-term residents of the City of Minnetonka (defined as individuals who lived in the neighborhood for over 8 years during the last 15 years).

XIII. Primary Concerns Identified by Residents

This section presents the three main areas of concerns identified by residents, providing a brief explanation and illustrative remarks from the residents. Based on the data collected, the evaluation team concluded that although it has been years since the redevelopment, the residents still having some lingering hurt feelings about the process. Yet some of their concerns



that seemed significant at the time have evaporated over time. Some participants reported that they use some of the commercial place and facilities and really like them.

#1: Density and Size of Development

The study participants indicated that their neighborhood consisted of predominantly single-family houses. Thus, they worried that the redevelopment project with its high condominiums would substantially damage the low-density characteristic of the neighborhood. Parallel to this, study participants did not seem to be happy that zoning was changed from low-density area to high density area. They fear that the “small town feel” of their neighborhood has been damaged with more residences available. Residents were not happy that eminent domain was used and that the city had to pay several businesses to relocate.

“They have gone ahead and built these monstrous buildings which I think is much too large for little Glen Lake.”

“It was very high density, and the proposal for the condominium on the lake was very close to the shoreline, and they wanted exemptions to all the setback requirements for the park; the development they were proposing was right next to the city park.”

“I have lived here a long time and felt that they would make it too commercial and it would lose its small town feeling it had for all those years.”

“For me I went psycho about it because it was so big. So I was trying to get people to see how tall this thing was going to be. It was going to shadow all the senior housing that is directly north from it because the sun comes from the south. I couldn’t really determine, but the size just made it look that it was going to make everybody living on that side live in shadow.”

“It was going to be the largest condominium on the Lake from the density point of view. The city should have handled the process more transparently. They talked about how they worked with the developer, saying that this is the only way they can do it. They would exercise the eminent domain on the extended area of development. One of the homeowners got a million-dollar buy-out.”

#2: Landscape

Study participants had specific concerns related to the landscape around the lake. First and foremost, almost all study participants are still unhappy about the fact that the developer razed trees on the lakeshore. The building on the lakeshore would be so tall that it would shadow surrounding buildings. One resident also complained that the building would be too close to the street.

“The thing I didn’t like is the part of the development was at the Glen Lake area and they deforested some fantastic trees.”

“One of the things that was very disturbing to most of us in the area was they let [the developer] cut down the trees on the Glen Lake shore, and they still have not planted anything; it is still very barren.”

#3: Change in plans

The fact that some phases of the redevelopment project were not executed as planned left some residents in dismay. The buildings were supposed to be condominiums, but now they are senior homes or apartments, partly due to the crash of the housing market. The strip mall and the condos on the lakeshore were never built.

“Also, the development is unfinished. They weren’t able to finish the third set or Phase 3 or whatever it’s called so there is a field of weeds. They got into some sort of issue with the developer, and he couldn’t deliver. And it wasn’t done the way it was going to be done. They ran into difficulties. I don’t know quite what they were.”

“The developer kept changing his mind because of money. His plans would change and then they would hold another meeting, but he kept moving forward with what he wanted to do.”

“I was not too worried about it when it was going to be condominiums, and all of a sudden when they started building, they changed them to apartments and I would have objected to apartments. People take care of their units better with condos, you know?”

“Well, it gets worse because of the building that has not been built on the lake and that is close to where I live. It is supposed to be 500 feet tall, the biggest one and it has not gotten built yet. It was supposed to be all these high end condos, and he was going to have a cook there to cook for them and have all these parties and he paid a million dollars for this guy’s property and it was probably worth maybe \$350[000].”

XIV. The City of Minnetonka’s Review Process

This section presents the evaluation findings related to the residents’ perceptions of the City of Minnetonka’s public review process. To evaluate the City’s public engagement process, the evaluation team considered four important criteria to organize the residents’ experiences and perceptions.

#1: City’s outreach



Residents heard about and followed the project either through postcards sent by the city, audio recordings of meetings, and articles in the local newspaper. One resident complained that it is hard to identify people and follow conversations in an audio recording. Some residents were involved in earlier master plan development. Also, participants indicated that some City Council members came to the neighborhood and talked to residents directly about the project.

“They [the city] sent notices and said there would be an open meeting. Also the Minnetonka newsletter talked about it.”

“We gathered petitions and we spoke at several public meetings before the city council.”

#2: Residents’ ability to raise their concerns

Residents used a number of ways to voice their concerns: attending Planning Commission and City Council meetings, organizing neighborhood meetings, as well as petitioning, writing letters and sending emails to the city. Some participants directly called city officials. One resident resented that he/she was not allowed to speak during the city’s planning sessions with the developer as well as during the city council meeting. Another resident said that planning meetings may not be the best venue for people to voice their opinions because some residents become very emotional. She also noted that you could only hear the negative side during these meetings.

“For the Glen Lake project some meetings were attended by 200 people and people were edging on emotional.”

#3: The City of Minnetonka’s willingness to listen

Residents felt that the City showed willingness to listen to their opinions. Yet many residents think that by the time the City officials reached out to them, the plan was already drawn and it was at a late stage of the redevelopment planning. One resident says that the city asked for residents’ input only because it is required by statute to do so. Some residents felt that they attended the meetings, were listened to, but that the developer changed plans later and residents were not notified of these changes.

“I wasn’t concerned when it was going to be condominiums, but they changed it after we went to the meetings, unbeknownst to me and everybody else.”

“It was presented fait accompli before the neighborhood had any input at all. The developer has been already working with the city, and the city has encouraged the developer to go beyond his original plan. By the time it got to the public input, they already knew what they were going to do.”

#4: Acting on resident comments

Many residents feel that although the city is inviting them to voice their opinion, the Planning Commission and the City Council are not valuing their input. The residents are involved at a stage when the plan was already drawn and neither the planning commission nor the developer was willing to change the plan. One resident said that the City Council officials were not sympathetic to the residents' concerns and requested that there should be a chance for the residents to change the plan. Another resident felt that City Council officials are not representing the residents' interest. One resident said a large-scale redevelopment project should not be approached in the same manner as a request by property owners to change variances. The city should discuss with residents before the plan is drawn.

"It kind of makes you feel like our input wasn't really valued about it too much anyway. Like it is just a formality to go through, and I think it would have been done whether or not we were there to tell you the truth."

"I cannot emphasize enough how much I appreciate how they handle things. However, this just did not happen this time. No one was opposed to the project; we were opposed to the way it was being railroading at the initial meetings. He [the developer] came in with beautiful charts and expensive diagrams, and it was clear this was not the first meeting."

"The point is that when the City Council agreed to a certain plan and at the end nothing of that was built. The buildings were razed but nothing of the plan they agreed to was completed. You just have zero faith in the City Council ever again."

XV. Residents' Overall Experience with the Review Process

Residents expressed that it was too late by the time that the City Planning Commission asked them for input. Study participants believed that the plan was already drawn, and both the City and the developer had made up their minds and were unwilling to change the plan. Some residents indicated that the developer co-opted some city officials to proceed with the plan as it was.

Study participants raised some important issues related to the public review process. One resident raised doubt on the rule that residents are not allowed to speak at the City Council meeting as well as the city's planning meetings with the developer although the only venue that allows citizens' input is the Planning Commission meeting. One resident commented that the city planning process is not transparent, arguing that residents think that the City Council meeting is where they should voice their concerns to elected officials, but in reality, the City Council only listens to what the Planning Commission recommends. Overall, study participants were aware that residents have to go to the Planning Commission meeting in order to influence



the redevelopment plan. Yet they believed that the importance of the Planning Commission meeting is not clearly communicated to residents.

XVI. Recommendations for the City of Minnetonka

The study participants made the following recommendations for the City of Minnetonka to improve its public review process for future development initiatives.

- The city should approach residents for inputs on the land to be redeveloped before any developer approaches the city. The concept meeting with the Minnetonka Mills project could be a model for future redevelopment project.
- The city should also communicate the planning process clearly to residents so that residents understand the importance of attending Planning Commission meetings.
- City officials need to change their orientation of redevelopment projects - from serving commercial interests to serving the interest of residents.
- The city should allow residents to provide input at the city's planning sessions with developers and to voice their opinion at the City Council's meeting. The city should publicize these planning sessions. The city should also video-record these planning sessions, making them available to the public.
- The city could consider holding informal meetings that provide coffee, snacks and a space for residents, city planning officials, and the developer to mingle and discuss a potential redevelopment project.
- The city should consider using social media that connect city officials, developers, and residents. For example, the city could open a blog that disseminates information about redevelopment projects, invites citizens to comment, and allows both developers and city officials to answer residents' concerns. Social media would attract younger generations to participate in the planning process for redevelopment projects. Also these "off-site" platforms are more flexible than public meetings and would allow residents to participate at a time that is convenient to them.
- The city could do a better job in managing public relations. It would be helpful if city officials show empathy towards residents who are negatively affected by redevelopment projects.



An External Review of Post-Development Phase of Goodwill Industries

XVII. Introduction to Review

The Minnetonka Planning Division routinely works with developers and reviews and manages development projects in the community, some of which are initially contentious with neighbors who live nearby. Objections to the projects range from concerns about density and traffic to potential negative impacts on natural resources or community character. Three prominent examples of such development projects were Goodwill Industries Development, Crest Ridge Corporate Center, and Glen Lake Redevelopment, which were contentious at the time that the projects were initiated.

Through the University of Minnesota's Resilient Communities Project (RCP), the City of Minnetonka partnered with faculty and students from the courses *Principles and Methods of Evaluation* and *Evaluation Problems* to evaluate these past development projects in order to assess public perceptions of these controversial projects and the City of Minnetonka's public engagement processes during the review of development proposals. Students conducted phone and group interviews with city residents who had expressed an opinion on these projects during the formal review process. Residents were asked questions pertaining to their initial opinions, their opinions now that projects had been completed, and their general views of the public review process. The results of this evaluation aim to help the city in review of future projects and in consideration of changes to the public review process.

The evaluation took place between December 2013 and April 2013. This report presents the highlights of the evaluation findings that pertain specifically to the Goodwill Industries Development, followed by specific recommendations.

XVIII. Background of Goodwill Industries Development

In 2010, the city received a proposal from Goodwill Industries for renovation and reuse of a vacant building near the Knollway neighborhood, located near the I-394/I-494 interchange. Due to its commercial use and economic advantage, city staff approved the project on April 15, 2010. However, when the city solicited feedback from approximately 70 property owners in the area, there was a significant vocal opposition to the project. The residents opposed to the project primarily for two reasons: 1) "The proposal's perceived traffic implications on Horn Drive Wayzata Boulevard; and 2) on-going nuisance issues associated with existing businesses on Wayzata Boulevard" (City Council Agenda Item #14, May 3, 2010). Residents indicated in their appeal to the approval of the proposal that the traffic study conducted by the City did not reflect peak traffic generation. Despite the residents' concerns about traffic and safety issues, the City ruled that "an anticipated increase in customers and traffic to the site does not justify denial of a commercial use of a commercial property" (City Council Agenda Item #14, May 3, 2010).



XIX. Evaluation Methods

Methods for this evaluation included individual phone interviews and group interviews. The sample for the post-development evaluation was drawn from a pool of individuals who made a public expression of dissatisfaction with these controversial development projects during the formal review process. The City provided the evaluation team with the public records from which study participants were identified and selected.

The evaluation team conducted 15 individual phone interviews and two group interviews with a total of additional 9 participants. The same set of questions was formulated for both phone interviews and group interviews to get the most relevant and consistent data from participants. All of the phone interviews were conducted by one member of the evaluation team, one group interview was conducted by four members with one facilitator, and the second group interview was conducted by two members with the same facilitator. With the permission of the interviewees, the evaluation team recorded the sessions and transcribed the recordings. Phone interviews lasted for approximately 20 to 40 minutes and group interviews for about 40 minutes to an hour. The evaluation team took careful precautions to maintain participants' confidentiality in the reports.

All of the phone interview and group interview transcripts were read by the evaluators and coded in themes and subthemes. After careful analysis of qualitative data, first individually and then as a group, the evaluation team formulated over-arching themes to account for all the data collected. Primary concerns with the project, satisfaction with the city's review process, and recommendations for the city were the major themes identified in the analysis.

A more detailed discussion of these themes is presented in the following findings section of our report.

XX. Study Participant Characteristics: Goodwill Industries Development

Of 24 total study participants, 9 people (38%) participated in the phone (3) or group interviews (6) to discuss the Goodwill Industries. Slightly more than half of these participants (5) were female, and almost all participants appeared to be long-term residents (defined as individuals who lived in the neighborhood for over 8 years during the last 15 years).

XXI. Primary Concerns Identified by Residents

The section presents the five common and primary areas of concerns identified by residents, providing a brief explanation and illustrative remarks. Based on the data collected, the evaluation team concluded that the residents' concerns pertaining to Goodwill Industries Development did not seem to change over time.



#1: Traffic

Increased traffic in the neighborhood appeared to be the biggest concern for the study participants. Before the Goodwill Retail Store opened, residents were concerned that the store would draw a lot of traffic that the neighborhood could not accommodate. Study participants indicated that their concerns have been warranted with the amount of traffic in their neighborhood ever since the retail store opened. Participants also mentioned that the amount of traffic has been much more than the city planners had expected. According to them, the shoppers at the retail store are the blame. Occasionally donors also create some traffic, but that did not seem to be the main concern. Participants often mentioned that there is one driveway that exits the Goodwill into Horn Drive that Goodwill customers use, creating traffic in the neighborhood. Participants resented that some cars that are trying to pass Goodwill see the traffic and drive into the neighborhood to get by it.

“It’s so packed. They [the customers of Goodwill] are going a long way, and it’s a mess all the time.”

“Because now they are struggling to get in and out. There is no sign except right at the intersection that says no outlet. So we see people who see the big pack of people who are trying to get out, they go left to the neighborhood and they drive around the neighborhood. There is tons of traffic, and we shouldn’t have that kind of traffic. They are looking for a way out.”

“I threatened to go down to the city and asked for a 3-way stop sign, but I know I will get shut down and I do not know if that’s actually a city or county problem, but that is my big concern.”

#2: Road Safety

Parallel to a seemingly dramatic increase in traffic, the study participants perceived accompanying safety issues to be a pressing problem in their neighborhood. Participants indicated that there is no stop sign at the intersection of Horn Drive and Wayzata Boulevard. Plus, they believed that customers of Goodwill do not look around when they drive in and out of the store or the neighborhood. Some residents consider the big delivery trucks of Goodwill a hazard. As a result, the participants felt that the amount of traffic and “ruthless drivers” are a danger to local residents, especially children. Some residents indicated that they have asked the city for a stop sign, but, according to them, the City has not yet responded to their request.

“I am actually more amazed at how dramatic the traffic problems have been for the neighborhood. For example, the parking lot access to Horne Drive, which is the only access to the neighborhood, has to get in and out of the residential area. The patrons at the Goodwill do not stop. Most do not stop at the driveway.”

“And we do have some young children. Two babies just moved in that are under 2. The other issue we are dealing with is the trucks that are coming to deliver for those car

dealerships. My neighbors and I call the police every time we see those car haulers stop at the boulevard in front of the non-parking sign. What are they thinking? There's a car hauler in front of Goodwill trying to deliver cars. And you have all the people who are coming in and out of Goodwill. That's not very safe."

"It is still the traffic... I do not know how many times I have almost been hit because the Goodwill patrons just fly out of the parking lot while we are trying to get out and it is like slamming on your brake."

#3: Parking

Another commonly mentioned concern was related to parking. Study participants felt that the store attracts too many customers that the parking is not sufficient to accommodate. As a result, participants believed that the customers of Goodwill often park on Horne Drive, which is the only road to enter the neighborhood and do not want to go parking next door at the strip mall because it is farther from Goodwill. Since it is illegal to park on Horne Drive, some study participants have repeatedly called the police to tow the cars. The police had been very responsive to these calls, but to residents' surprise, illegal parking on Horne Drive did not stop. Participants also indicated that some customers park illegally on Wayzata Boulevard as well. Residents felt that they were spending too much time reporting to police. One resident says the city has not arranged enough parking because of economic concerns.

"We have tremendous issues with parking... patrons of the Goodwill come out of the parking lot and park on Horne Drive which is signed . . . as a no parking area. They will park there and they will cause traffic issues for the neighborhood, for the school buses that come into the neighborhood, for the handicap accessible as well, so they create a dangerous situation."

"They (the city planners) said that there will be enough parking. "Every day they spill out in to the neighborhood." A week or two ago, I saw people parking on Wayzata Blvd in front of the Goodwill. The whole boulevard is prohibited, but there were 5 or 6 six cars lined up in front of the store because there's no parking spot inside."

"I have pictures of other Goodwill sites. They are two to three times of our existing site. I tell them this site is way too small. There is no room for parking. This creates traffic. The boulevard there is only one lane construction. People are parking where they should not."

#4: Noise and Light

The traffic creates noise and light from the cars are directed into the neighbors' yards, which at times was disturbing.

“We also have issues with the lights from the cars that come into the area where they have their drop off. The car lights are directed to the north right into some neighbors’ yards, and, though there were some small trees put in that we were told would be screening, they are not screening, they are not screening the lights, particularly in the winter time.”

#5: Trash

Some study participants indicated that they had found dirty diapers, disposed furniture, clothing and other garbage around Goodwill, which disturbed them.

“We also had problems with garbage from the Goodwill, and it was very obvious someone had dumped it out of their car onto the grass, and I had to personally go into the Goodwill because it had been there for 24 hours to ask that they have someone come out and maintain.”

“Near by the bus stop, once a week, I am looking at a couch or a bag of clothing. There are shopping carts on the parking lot. They don’t do much with trash. People open their door and throw the trash. At one point, I saw a Goodwill officer picking up the trash, only on Goodwill property.”

XXII. The City of Minnetonka’s Review Process

This section presents the evaluation findings related to the residents’ perceptions of the City of Minnetonka’s public review process. To evaluate the City’s public engagement process, the evaluation team considered four important criteria to organize the residents’ experiences and perceptions.

#1: City’s outreach

Study participants indicated that they had heard about the development via e-mail, newsletters, and postcards. Also, meetings were held by the private developer to let residents know about the project.

“I believe it was a notice of a neighborhood meeting being conducted by the private developer of the Goodwill project, inviting the neighborhood to see their plans.”

#2: Residents’ ability to raise their concerns

Study participants felt that they were given opportunities to raise their concerns related to the development. They appeared to have used a number of ways to do so such as petitioning, speaking at radio, mailing elected officials at the city council, and attending a planning



commission meeting and city council meeting. City council officials also came to the neighborhood and talked to residents directly.

“We were allowed to voice our concerns directly to the developer at their initial planning stage... and then we were able to also write in comments if someone was not able to attend. We then were also able to make public comments at the Planning Commission Meeting, and then once the project went on to the City Council Meeting, they asked that one or two residents basically represent the rest of the neighborhood.”

“I don’t know of any other way we can make them listen. We voice our opinions at meetings and our neighbors are at the city at least 2 times a week figuring out what is going on, and they include us on any kind of info they have.”

#3: The City of Minnetonka’s willingness to listen

Study participants believed that they had enough opportunities to raise their concerns. However, according to them, neither the city nor the developer was really “listening” because they were not willing to change or adapt the plan to residents’ voice.

“The very first meeting with postcard [notification], that was the developer. They took some questions. They said this is the plan, it is already done. They were very specific about THIS IS DONE, you can say whatever you want, but we are not changing it.”

“My perception is that it is already a done deal, but they are trying to get a motion that they are listening to us.”

#4: Acting on resident comments

Residents believed that the City implemented the plans the way the developers originally proposed it. Some residents believe that if the City listened to their concerns and decided to put a three-way stop sign at a particular intersection, a lot of the traffic problems would have been avoided.

“Well, the city says that there is no problem, that there is not enough traffic, but you can argue... excuse the expression... that hell freezes over and they are still going to hold their ground. They don’t listen to us.”

“[I have] zero faith. I was trying to protect our neighborhood. I am not opposed to Goodwill. It is a family neighborhood. Protect the children. They (the city) are concerned about the commercial. They are not concerned about our neighborhood.”



“They could listen to all these inputs we have. They could have put it off a little bit longer, research some of the things that we brought to their attention. To me it’s obvious the existing Goodwill site plan is just crazy.”

XXIII. Residents’ Overall Experience with the Review Process

Overall, although the study participants indicated that they were given opportunities to raise their concerns related to Goodwill Industries, they believed that the City did not fully act on their appeal to the proposal. One resident resented that they do not have avenue to talk to the developer directly. The developer was not responsive to her mails. She also commented that the planning process was not transparent because the city did not publicize their planning sessions with developers. Residents were not aware of these sessions. One resident said Goodwill Industries representatives never attended any meetings; it was always the developer or the attorney. Another resident said that the city is giving in to economic benefit from having such a mall and from attracting commercial venues. Despite all these concerns about this specific project, study participants were satisfied with the way the city dealt with potential landscape damage caused by the store’s opening.

XXIV. Recommendations for the City of Minnetonka

The study participants made the following recommendations for the City of Minnetonka to improve its public review process for future development initiatives.

- The City should locate stop signs at appropriate intersections on Horn Drive to regulate traffic and reduce safety concerns.
- The city should publicize the planning sessions with developers and invite residents to come and voice their concerns. The City should video-record these planning sessions and make them available to the public.
- It would be helpful if the City established a venue for residents to communicate directly with developers and future tenants.
- The city should also provide more opportunities for residents to provide post-development feedback, just as the Resilient Communities Project is doing. Residents enjoyed sharing their experience at the focus group session.