

2.0 - THE PLANNING PROCESS

2.1 - CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

This Master Plan presents the collective vision of the Ventura Village community. Over 250 community members, from homeowners to renters, from business owners to representatives of agencies working in the neighborhood, have participated in vigorous and wide-ranging discussions related to this plan. Citizens have provided input on the broad concepts of the plan as well as many specific features.

2.1.1 - THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The citizen participation process for this plan began in November 1998 when Phillips District 2 and the Franklin Central Neighborhood Group voted to merge and become Ventura Village. Given that the Phillips neighborhood as a whole was too large to create a cohesive plan that would effectively address the area's many challenges, this new organization would focus its efforts on the area bounded by 24th street, the 35W/94 commons, 35W, and the Soo Line railway near Hiawatha Avenue.

By December 1998, Ventura Village became the official, Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) recognized citizen participation organization for the area. By February 1999, Ventura Village had incorporated, achieved 501c3 status, and adopted bylaws.

In January and February 1999, a group of community residents and Ventura Village board members began to discuss the possibility of creating a land use plan for the neighborhood. Residents and other Ventura Village members felt that creating a land use plan would provide a mechanism for community input into, and community control over, the redevelopment of the area. The group also felt that a land use plan would provide a focus for redevelopment efforts. At that time many participants, who had memories of the neighborhood's earlier vitality, were already discussing many of the design features that are now a prominent part of the plan: mixed-use development along Franklin Avenue, strong integration with transit,

carriage houses along alley ways, and parks that are well integrated into the neighborhood.

In April 1999 discussions began at Ventura Village meetings about creating and adopting a Master Plan. In June, a committee was established to begin the process of designing a land use plan and examining the zoning law changes that would be needed to implement the various features of the plan.

In July 1999 several resident saw the concept drawings that had been created by DJR Architecture and Grebner Associates for Hope Community's "Children's Village". These drawings had received input from community members already active in the Ventura Village planning process. Realizing that these plans were a good graphic representation of what the neighborhood wanted to achieve, Ventura Village began negotiations with DJR and Grebner Associates to include the whole neighborhood in the planning process.

On September 8 and September 16, 1999, Ventura Village hosted neighborhood-wide planning sessions to solicit additional community input into the evolving land use plan. The organization also conducted a survey of neighborhood residents, which was distributed and returned during September. Notice of the planning meetings was mailed to every address in the neighborhood and distributed to residents through block club captains. Surveys were distributed at Ventura Village meetings and at the neighborhood-wide planning sessions.

Ventura Village then formed a partnership with the City of Minneapolis to develop and finalize the neighborhood's Comprehensive Land Use Master Plan, which was expressly brought forward on the belief that community-based solutions best address community-defined problems.

Partnerships were formed with city and state agencies to make this project successful. Cooperating agencies include the Planning Commission, Public Works, Zoning and Traffic departments, as well as the Minneapolis Community Development Agency and the Metropolitan Council. Additional support has come from elected officials, neighborhood leaders, business leaders, city employees and representatives of the major institutions in the neighborhood.

The resulting multi-layered approach to revitalizing a community was recently described by the Chief Planner of a large sister city of Minneapolis as the "best new-Urbanist planning for a central city to be found anywhere in the country."

(done 11.25.00)

2.1.2 - PARTICIPATION MECHANISM

Ventura Village continues to make an active effort to solicit input into the Master Plan and to encourage participation from as many community members as possible. All Ventura Village meetings are open to all interested parties, with voting privileges accorded to every neighborhood resident, business owner, and official representative of any agency working in the area.

Basic elements of citizen participation in Ventura Village include:

- Monthly general neighborhood meetings,
- Monthly committee meetings address specific topics (e.g. NRP Implementation Committee, Housing and Land Use Committee),
- Neighborhood-wide planning sessions, and
- Resident and business-owner surveys.

Additionally, to ensure as open and wide-ranging a discussion on the Master Plan as possible, Ventura Village used NRP and MCDA citizen participation funds to send out 8 different mailings to the area's 2600 addresses. Additional efforts to solicit input were made at all general neighborhood meetings, and through the distribution and analysis of several Plan-related surveys.

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2.2 - CITIZEN RECOMMENDATIONS

Through these discussions, a broad consensus has emerged about what the community needs in order to prosper in the future. Specifically, the community has embraced:

- Low-profile, high-density housing development, including in-fill housing on vacant land in residential areas and mixed-use development along Franklin Avenue, the major commercial corridor.
- Transit-oriented and pedestrian-friendly development, including integration of commercial and residential developments in the spirit of "new urbanism".
- A mix of home-ownership and rental housing opportunities affordable to residents at a wide range of income levels.
- The reduction of crime through strategies incorporating better land use and design practices.

The consensus building of the citizen participation process has led to a renewed sense of optimism about the future of the neighborhood. Throughout the neighborhood there is a sense that, perhaps for the first time in a very long time, community members agree on the direction the neighborhood should take and feel that they control the destiny of their area. Residents participating in the planning and funding of recent developments, including the renovation of the Franklin Theater, the opening of the Ancient Traders Market, and the completion of the Franklin Avenue Streetscape have helped to foster this optimism.

Franklin Avenue is the primary economic and commercial corridor through the community. With help from a Livable Community Demonstration Account Planning/Predevelopment Grant and working with the assistance of the Franklin Avenue Business Association (FABA), Ventura Village, Inc. prepared a land use and zoning plan to guide economic development along Franklin Avenue and housing development in Ventura Village. The planning concept calls for compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development.

Through the planning session and/or the surveys, over 200 community members participated in developing the Ventura Village Vision, which became the basis for the land-use plan. The center of the Vision is a variety of low profile, high-density housing designs including carriage houses along alleyways, duplexes and triplexes on currently vacant land, town-homes on Peavey Park, and mixed-use 4-story buildings on Franklin Avenue. Resident and business owners expressed the belief that this low profile, high-density approach will:

Increase the quantity of housing in the neighborhood by several thousand units.

Increase the quality of housing in the neighborhood --- requiring new construction be of the highest quality and creating "fix-up grant" programs for existing housing.

Provide a variety of housing options for residents of various incomes, life-styles, and cultural backgrounds.

Improve the Franklin Avenue commercial corridor by providing an increased population base

Reduce crime by creating structures that hamper criminal activity. For example, carriage houses on alleyways, mixed-use buildings on Franklin Avenue, and town-homes on the fringe of Peavey Park create a 24-hour residential presence in problem areas.

Results of the planning sessions and surveys were provided to DJR Architecture and Grebner Associates at weekly design sessions where a committee of Ventura Village Residents interpreted them and assured that the design concepts were to be incorporated into the formal drawings of the Ventura Village Vision. At the October 1999 monthly meeting, DJR and Grebner presented the completed graphic representation of the Ventura Village Vision land use plan. At that time a motion was approved to support the Ventura Village Vision land use plan as presented. Residents then provided additional input on various minor aspects of the plan. The completed plan was presented to the community in November of 1999. The plan was unveiled at a ceremony attended by the Governor of Minnesota and other local and state political figures.

The Comprehensive Land Use Master Plan includes affordable housing targeted to as wide a market as possible, including downtown workers, empty nesters, retirees and families with children. Specific development plans include services and amenities to support this effort and encourage households at all income levels.

The plan addresses mass transit. The interface between bus and LRT will be critical to the integration of the system. More than any other transportation or land use measure, the attraction and accommodation of a large resident population, proximate to the region's greatest concentration of employment, service and recreational opportunities, will effectively improve access while limiting car trips.

The plan will create a pedestrian-friendly community that is not entirely automobile dependent. Since only 40 percent of Ventura Village residents have access to automobiles, the comprehensive plan works toward a "village" that contains the most needed services and retail opportunities. Major employers are located within fair weather walking distance: Abbott-Northwestern Hospital, Children's Hospital, Fairview-University Medical Center and associated medical offices; the University of Minnesota, Augsburg and St. Mary's College; Great Lakes Center under development and downtown Minneapolis, where an additional 34,000 jobs are projected by 2002. Bus service and the proposed LRT provide transportation for the thousands of job opportunities at the Mall of the America and the southern suburbs. Ventura Village has been described as, "one of the very few areas of Minneapolis where a person can enjoy a quality, middle-class life style without owning an automobile".

The Plan provides new linkages to adjacent neighborhoods. Franklin Avenue connects Ventura Village with the Stephens Square, Whittier and Seward Neighborhoods. Housing, employment, and transportation will increase as Light Rail Transit connects the airport to downtown. The proposed LRT Crystal Park Station (a higher density housing/retail project) can further receive a bus terminal linking Ventura Village, Phillips, Seward and beyond. Around the light rail station, pedestrian/green connections are emphasized throughout the residential neighborhood. In addition, revitalizing

Franklin Avenue brings back an economy of business retail and commercial into the neighborhood, thus creating jobs.