

BEYOND THE RAILS



SOUTHWEST LRT
community works

2015 ANNUAL REPORT



Lake Calhoun near the proposed West Lake station, Minneapolis

EDEN PRAIRIE, MINNETONKA, HOPKINS, ST. LOUIS PARK, MINNEAPOLIS

“In 2015, cities along the Southwest Light Rail Transit line took major steps towards creating vibrant and connected communities. Before shovels hit the ground, it is imperative that we work collaboratively to maximize this shared investment.” – Jan Callison, Hennepin County Board Chair and Chair of the SWLRT Community Works Steering Committee.

The Shady Oak Development Strategy was a partnership between the cities of Minnetonka and Hopkins with funding assistance from the Metropolitan Council. The Strategy identifies a shared vision and zoning code for the area around Shady Oak light rail station, which is located in both Minnetonka and Hopkins.



Shady Oak Beach

BUILDING VIBRANT CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

The Southwest Light Rail Transit line (SWLRT) will begin operations in 2020. With that comes the promise of new housing developments, connected communities, improved access to jobs, and significant economic growth. This won't come to fruition without careful planning and collaboration among the communities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, Edina and Minneapolis where 15 light rail stations will be located. Guiding this partnership is Hennepin County and a Steering Committee of key organizations and government agencies that work together under the banner of Southwest LRT Community Works. The Southwest LRT Community Works "beyond the rails" initiative is about building vibrant communities through connections, jobs, housing and natural systems.

A lot is at stake. When the SWLRT is complete, the metro area's light rail transit system will reach more than 400,000 jobs or more than 25% of the region's total employment. Of that, about 200,000 jobs will be within walking distance of SWLRT stations.

Helping guide this work is the Southwest Corridor Investment Framework, which was prepared collaboratively by SWLRT Community Works partners. This framework provides the direction to enhance communities along the corridor, creating a premiere destination that is accessible, livable and vibrant.

"As co-chair of the SWLRT Community Works Technical Implementation Committee, I see the importance of collaboration. Each city has their own identity and strategies for getting ready for the SWLRT, but there are so many reasons to work together in order to optimize benefits all along the corridor." — Julie Wischnack, Minnetonka Community Development Director



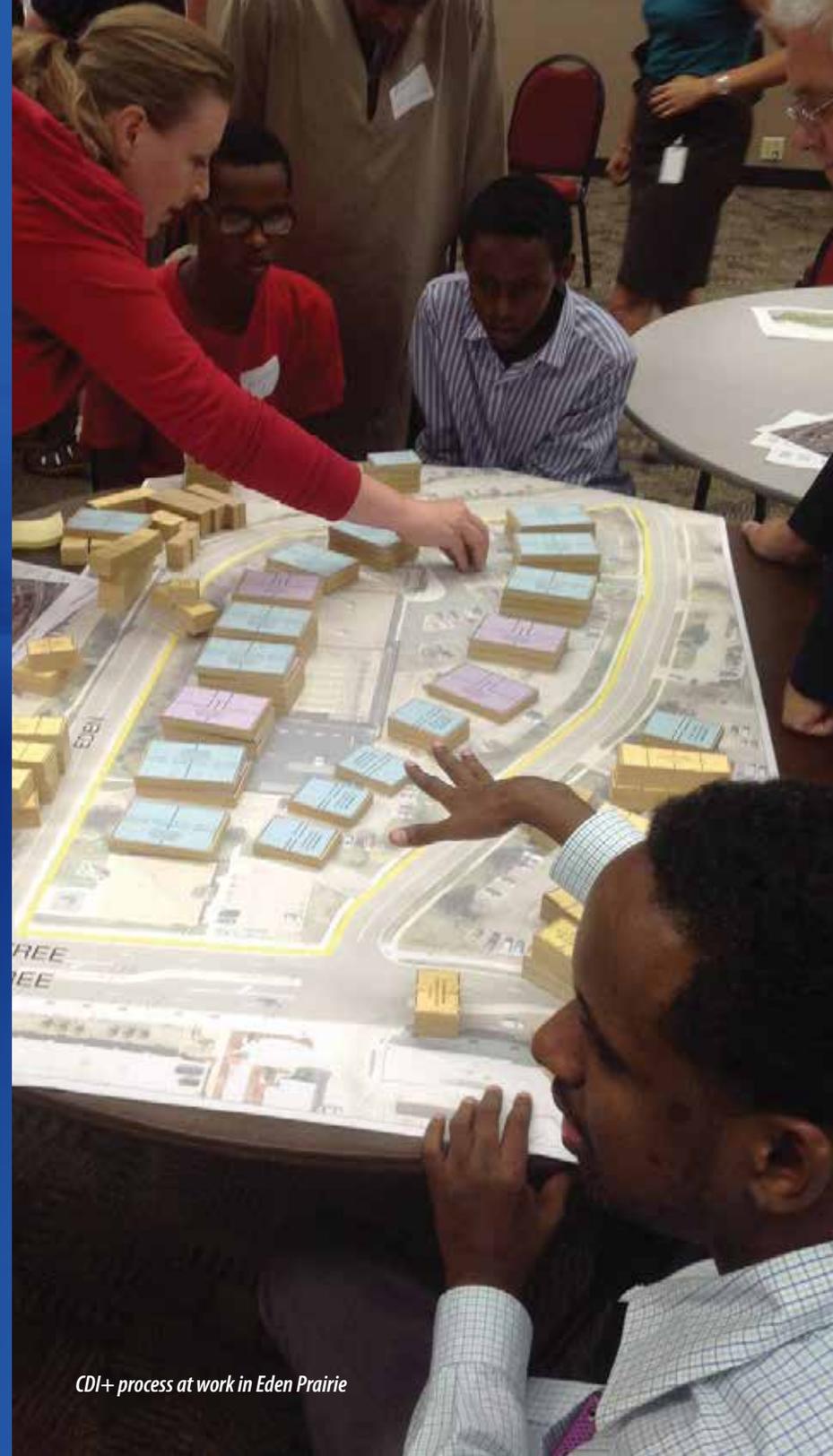
CDI+ PROCESS – A GREAT WAY TO ENGAGE COMMUNITIES

The benefits of a light rail line extend well beyond the tracks, bringing unique opportunities for growth and development around stations. To capitalize on this corridor of opportunity, cities are actively engaging their communities to ensure they realize the greatest possible economic and community benefits.

The Corridor Development Initiative Plus (CDI+) process is just one example. CDI+, which is funded by the Metropolitan Council and led by Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), guides communities through a visioning process that includes hands-on design exercises where participants are encouraged to think and plan ways to make the most of this investment. At the core of the conversation is the question: how does transit oriented development happen in a way that benefits both the community and the greater region? “Getting community members directly engaged in hands-on planning exercises helps us all visualize what changes can happen and how changes will fit within a new transit landscape” says Gretchen Nicholls, program officer at Twin Cities LISC.

LISC conducted the CDI+ process for the Eden Prairie Town Center, Blake Road and Wooddale stations to help communities better understand, engage and shape changes that will come with the SWLRT.

“The CDI+ process was very well done and generated highly active community interactions. This process has had far-reaching impact including influencing our city leaders’ thinking about affordable housing and creation of job opportunities. For example, we now better understand the need for housing options that will accommodate large families.” – Molly Koivumaki, Eden Prairie Housing and Community Services Manager



CDI+ process at work in Eden Prairie

AREAS OF FOCUS

CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

The SWLRT will connect communities and provide a unique opportunity to explore innovative ways to improve the access within station areas through bike and pedestrian friendly investments.

HOPKINS ARTERY

The Artery in Hopkins will connect Hopkins Mainstreet to the SWLRT and is envisioned as a pedestrian-seductive, art-infused, interactive and vibrant corridor. In July 2015, the City of Hopkins hosted the Artery Experiment – an Open Streets event – to test out plans for the Artery through temporary public art installations, bike trails, and outdoor community space.

“The SWLRT provides an opportunity to rethink transportation within our community. Through collaboration and innovation, we are improving connectivity to the greater metro area as well catalyzing development within our own city.” – Molly Cummings, Hopkins Mayor

WEST 70TH STREET EXTENSION

In Eden Prairie, the West 70th Street extension provides an opportunity to redesign the street to incorporate pedestrian and bike friendly design, green the street, and improve aesthetics. In 2015, West 70th Street was extended to Flying Cloud Drive with stormwater improvements, enhanced streetscaping, and new sidewalks and bike lanes. The next phase will continue these improvements and provide enhanced access to area businesses and to the proposed SWLRT Golden Triangle station. A Hennepin County transit-oriented development grant was awarded to the project to support this effort.

A second phase is planned for 2017 or 2018. This phase will include the reconstruction of the eastern segment of the roadway. It will extend multi-modal improvements from the Golden Triangle station east to Shady Oak Road. A \$470,000 Hennepin County transit-oriented development grant was awarded to the project to support this effort.

BIKE FACILITY ASSESSMENT

SWLRT Community Works partners worked together on a corridor bike facilities assessment. The ultimate goal for the Southwest Corridor Bike Facility Assessment (BFA) is to support increased ridership by encouraging bicycle use through development of bike parking, pump stations, fix it centers and other amenities that support cycling to SWLRT stations.

“Minneapolis has a nationally-recognized reputation as being bicycle friendly. The Bike Facility Assessment builds upon this to expand this reputation to the broader southwest metro area.” – Simon Blenski, Minneapolis Transportation Planner



Rendering of the Downtown Hopkins Artery



West 70th Connection streetscape plans



Bike trails will connect to LRT

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

The SWLRT provides a unique opportunity for a broader range of housing choices for those who wish to live in this exciting corridor. In 2015, the SWLRT Community Works partnership prepared the Southwest Corridor Housing Strategy, a plan to support and encourage a full range of housing choices along the SWLRT. Funders, developers, housing advocates, city councils and commissions were engaged in the process of creating this strategy.

“Access to a range of housing options is critical for ensuring a healthy and inclusive metro area. To support this, we need to plan for and prioritize housing opportunities. This report serves as the foundation to ensure we’re creating communities that are inclusive to all who want to live here.” – Anne Mavity, St. Louis Park Council Member and member of the SWLRT Community Works Steering Committee

HENNEPIN COUNTY

SOUTHWEST LRT
COMMUNITY WORKS



Corridor Housing Strategy

A plan to support and encourage a full range of housing choices in METRO Green Line Extension station areas

January 2016

www.hennepin.us/southwestlrt

NATURAL SYSTEMS

COTTAGEVILLE PARK

A newly developed crown jewel in the heart of Hopkins near the proposed Blake Road Station showcases a partnership to preserve and enhance natural systems. For years, Cottageville Park was known as an unsightly space that was largely hidden from public view. Today, the park is a 5-acre green space that welcomes community members to exercise, relax, garden and connect. The park is part of the Minnehaha Creek Greenway, a stretch of more than 50 acres of continuous green space along Minnehaha Creek designed with a vision of adding long term value in these communities. By connecting residents to parks, trails and natural space, reinvestment in the area has been catalyzed, stimulating the local economy and creating employment opportunities.

A bit of history – urban expansion experienced post-World War II ignored the naturally beneficial impact of Minnehaha Creek on the area’s ecosystem. Wetlands were filled and the meandering creek was straightened, resulting in a polluted waterway that failed to serve the community as an environmental resource and community asset. The Cottageville Park project is part of a larger mission to carefully restore the creek to its former state by redirecting the water through a series of curves, rebuilding wetlands and wildlife habitat, managing regional stormwater runoff and incorporating opportunities for public access.

“Through collaborative planning, Cottageville Park creates value for the community by integrating the landscape improvements with the natural asset of Minnehaha Creek, creating a regional amenity for generations to come.” – Sherry White, President of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District Board of Managers



TRANSIT ORIENTED PLACES

Local governments and developers recognize the value and success of transit oriented places and are already moving forward with developments that anticipate SWLRT.

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD) IN ST. LOUIS PARK

In St. Louis Park, a number of developments near proposed SWLRT stations are planned or underway. Site preparation began in 2015 on the Shoreham. This 2.23 acre redevelopment located near the future SWLRT West Lake station will include 150 residential units and 20,000 square feet of commercial and office space. The mixed use development was awarded a Hennepin County transit oriented development grant that will assist with public improvements such as sidewalks, bicycle parking and racks, a bicycle repair station, showers for commuters, landscape upgrades, improved lighting, and a pedestrian plaza.

Across the street from the proposed SWLRT Wooddale station stands Towerlight. Towerlight is a senior “age in place” facility, meaning that residents can move into the complex, live independently, and then subscribe to medical services. This mixed use development includes 115 residential units and 26,000 square feet of ground floor commercial space. This project was also awarded a Hennepin County transit oriented development grant.

“Developers are very interested in the SWLRT corridor, and are continuing to make investments to create dynamic, transit oriented hubs that will ultimately transform communities for the better.” – Meg McMonigal, St Louis Park Principal Planner



Facade Enhancement on Mainstreet, Hopkins

BUSINESS SUPPORT

FACADE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The City of Hopkins launched a pilot façade enhancement grant program with funds from Hennepin County through a McKnight Foundation grant. A competitive application process resulted in five projects being selected. The businesses utilized the design expertise of Hopkins-based Wilkus Architects to develop plans to enhance the appearance of their property while complementing the historic architecture of Mainstreet. The purpose of the program is to position Mainstreet businesses to best take advantage of the expanded market area that the SWLRT will bring.

The McKnight Foundation also supported assistance for Mainstreet businesses through the Neighborhood Development Center (NDC). NDC works with organizations to strengthen them in preparation for the disruption of LRT construction as well as to enable them to maximize the benefits of LRT for their business once the line is open.

“The aesthetic of Mainstreet plays a vital role in creating a unique and welcoming environment for both visitors and residents. The goal is to strengthen the vitality of Mainstreet by improving the pedestrian experience, increasing building transparency, and beautifying buildings through façade revitalization efforts, which will have a lasting impact on downtown Hopkins.” – Kersten Elverum, Hopkins Director of Planning & Economic Development



The Shoreham in St Louis Park

Downtown Hopkins



SOUTHWEST LRT community works

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