

# Downtown 2040 Plan

## F.A.Q.

A number of questions and comments were received about the Downtown 2040 Plan. Below are responses to the general list of topics raised or commented on.

**1.What is the status of the Community Center, what spaces and features will it include and where will it be located?** *A new Community Center has been discussed for a few years now; the City along with Friends of the Community Center will continue to consider next steps about investing in a new facility. This will likely be a multi-step decision-making process that will require due diligence regarding location, cost, user needs/wants, maintenance, and location. The Downtown Plan suggests a couple of locations for a new Community Center and both have cost and benefit variables. If and when a decision is made to move forward the city will be sure to consider the broad range of uses and users for the facility, the ability for the city to fund including the use of tax revenues and user fees, and a location that will be convenient for all citizens and include adequate parking.*

**2.How does the Downtown Plan relate to the Comprehensive Plan?** *The current Comprehensive Plan dates back to 2007 (as does the Downtown Plan); the City will begin updating this policy document after the completion and adoption of the Downtown Plan. Both initiatives take into consideration growth and change over multiple decades but more clearly focus on near term opportunities and to some extent trends. Regardless, change, both small and large scales, is happening year by year and these policies help shape fiscal and community well being so it is important to keep them updated and relevant. These are both policy documents that help city leaders make decisions about overall land use, housing, transportation, open space and infrastructure needs. The Downtown Plan will be adopted first as official public policy; then when the Comprehensive Plan is complete and adopted the Downtown Plan will be incorporated as an official element and amendment.*

**3.What is the environmental status and health of Buffalo Lake? What is this plan and the City doing about the quality and condition of Buffalo Lake? Who is responsible for the water quality of the lake?**

The health and water quality of Buffalo Lake is a complicated issue involving a large watershed and thousands of acres of land that includes agricultural and urban stormwater runoff. Future solutions and actions would include City of Buffalo, citizen volunteers, Wright SWCD, The Crow River Watershed District, state agencies (e.g., Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Board of Water Soil Resource (BWSR), MN PCA, local units of government, and lake association members. City of Buffalo also refers to its Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan for best practices regarding stormwater discharge and runoff related to local sites, streams and lakes.

**4.How does the Plan address landscape and streetscape improvements?**

The Plan does include street and streetscape improvements including needed repaving on downtown streets, improved pedestrian crosswalks in key locations and street trees including adding some tree canopy in parking areas. Streets and streetscape improvements will be shared with the City Engineer to incorporate into the pavement management plan and timing will be based on City-wide needs and available funding.

#### **5. How does the Plan address lakefront development?**

A long term vision for downtown is really comprised of a lot of smaller, incremental ideas and recommendations that over time can be realistically implemented. The ‘big idea’ that drives and contains the many smaller ideas is the notion of a well-defined lakefront public space that is welcoming and equitable for all to enjoy. A necessary step is to first assemble the land along the lakefront so the ‘vision’ can be put into practice and the assumption is private owners would need to be willing sellers. The Plan does not guarantee that this will happen but does guide future decision making so that it is possible. That said we hope many of the recommendations will be implemented but also know that some may not.

#### **6. Can we move the library and make it into a restaurant on the lake? Will there be more parking for library users in the future?**

The library is a public facility that serves all patrons and residents and is certainly located on a highly visible lot on the lakefront. It is already in public ownership making it easier to enhance and improve its site environment without having to acquire private property. The Plan also recognizes that the city has to be prudent about maintaining multiple facilities and has a finite budget with which to do so. Fiscal responsibility will always be a contributing factor with whether building a new fire station, community center, public restrooms or maintaining streets and public infrastructure.

With the relocation of the Wright County Government Center the parking areas located due east of the library are anticipated to be able to provide more usable parking in the future.

#### **7. When will the Buffalo Cinema re-open? Who owns the building and how can it be reused to support downtown?**

The former cinema building is privately owned and at this time we do not know what next steps the owner will take with opening the building or what use it may support. The City has supported the study of an idea for an arts and community theater “center” and the former cinema was discussed as one possibility for housing these related activities but no decision has been made about that.

#### **8. How much will the Downtown Plan cost and who will pay for it?**

The Plan prioritizes short and long term improvements in downtown some of which are public facilities and services. It is equally a guide for how private investments will be made. The City Council will decide on annual and budget basis how much public funding will go into improvements like street repaving, parking upgrades and landscaping. On the private side we do not have a specific dollar amount for how and when development will happen but the Plan assumes new development (housing, shops, offices, restaurants, etc.) will be supported by the market place and delivered by private sector resources. Redevelopment ideas like the site of the Lakeview Mall or even the Wright County site are based on owner comments/input and will be redeveloped when the market place can supply a demand. The Plan

relies on the zoning code that provides the fundamental legal and regulatory basis for how private owners can develop their property.

**9.What is the "local character and identity of downtown"? How does the Plan define this and how does the Plan focus on maintaining/preserving the historic buildings and setting?**

With origins dating back to the late 1800's, downtown Buffalo has some legacy buildings and patterns that provide a unique sense of place with brick materials, 2 and 3 story heights, people-friendly, walkable block network and alley access that are features of a different era of construction techniques and market forces. Downtown has changed and responded to different periods of construction such as when the historic courthouse was torn down and rebuilt and subsequent additions were made each with a different style and construction method. Recent additions such as Havenwood and Alo were built mainly as a response to market demand rather than local design requirements. The Plan encourages the use of brick materials, compatible scale and height when improving existing buildings/shopfronts and for new construction. And while these standards are not codified today this is a good opportunity to establish more specific design guidelines for downtown.

If you have more questions please contact:

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