

Linden Hills Small Area Plan

Synthesized summary of February 28th Community Workshop's Small Group Discussion

At the February 28th Community Workshop participants participated in small group (8-10 people) discussions that were facilitated by the project team. The conversations explored some of the common themes in the responses to the survey questions. The groups then moved on to develop draft vision statements for the future of the commercial areas of Linden Hills.

The follow is a synthesized summary of the small group discussion. The summary has been organized by common themes. The notes from each group's discussion can be found on the project webpage LHSAP.org or by clicking [here](#).

Issues and Opportunities:

- **Business Mix**

A continuous theme throughout the groups was a concern was that there were too many specialty shops that don't serve the immediate community's daily and weekly needs. The moving of the co-op to 44th & France identifies a hole in meeting the daily needs and convenience that is desired at 43rd & Upton. This might create opportunities for existing businesses to carry some goods or new business to develop that help meet those needs.

There seemed to be consensus that, despite the concerns listed above, there are many community serving businesses that do exist in the commercial areas and that is a very attractive amenity to most. The businesses create destinations that promote the walkability of the area and that much of the charm of the area is due to the vitality of the business areas.

- **Housing Options**

Another continuous theme was the need for more housing choices. The issues were both in the type of housing (single family, townhomes, apartments and condominiums) and the affordability of the housing.

There were specific concerns that there are no or few options to age in the community and transition from a single family home to smaller units that are more attractive to an aging population. Features include less or no maintenance, single level living, as well as housing that provided more assisted care. It was identified that existing multi-family housing options do not reflect the contemporary desires in attributes and features of the units or buildings.

Affordability was also listed as a concern. This was mostly attributed to housing for the aging population or seniors. There were concerns about more broad scale

affordability to provide options at more of a range of price points than currently exists.

- **Development- New building design**

Density of new development was discussed with each group, while there were various responses. A common theme emerged that it was not density (the number of units) that was the biggest concern- it was the scale (height, massing and length) of proposed buildings that was objectionable because the proposals did not fit the character and scale of surrounding (ignoring their context) and not transitioning well into adjacent low scale one or two family homes.

Groups felt that they have been presented with false choices: either big new large scale buildings that are profitable for a developer or no new development at all. There has been no middle ground. There is a strong desire to find development options that are in keeping with the scale of their surroundings that work for everyone, and can provide for housing options that help fulfill the desires in more housing options.

When specific examples of development in the area were discussed such as 50th & France or Excelsior & Grand there were objections to similar large scale development in Linden Hills. Concerns were that those examples did not relate to the context of Linden Hills- they were too long and the heights did not vary and were perhaps too high in general. Buildings could be divided into components to try to address the scale of a monotonous height and building wall and make the more reflective of the area.

There was considerable interest in not just relating to the structures of the built environment, but integrating green space that reflected the existing patterns or better than existing patterns into new projects.

Some groups talked about the need to maintain and preserve the existing building fabric that defines the character of the area. If buildings are not well kept they may become more likely to be demolished. Historic preservation was identified a tool that might help provide financial resources to property owners.

There was common interest about the redevelopment opportunities of some properties in the area- mostly near or 44th and France. This presents opportunities to help make those blocks into more of gateway to the neighborhood, better integrate green space, provide for more housing options and reintegrate some of the existing businesses.

- **Walkability, Connectivity & Traffic**

There was a common identification to enhance the streetscapes with better sidewalks, traffic calming designs (44th & Beard) , pedestrian crossings, plantings and

furnishings. This could help encourage alternative modes of transportation to cars and better connect the business area of Linden Hills as well as make it safer for everyone to use the roads.

Additional connection ideas included working to connect the nodes with re-routes of existing buses or some sort of circulator connecting Lake Harriet and the business nodes. Another idea was utilizing services like Nice Ride. The existing trolley right-of-way was identified as an asset that could be better utilized to fulfill the vision of better connections.

All these ideas were thought of ways to help reduce car traffic by making other options more appealing.

- **Parking**

Parking was a common theme discussed. It seemed that the issue was not a broadly held concern by attendees. There were sites where it is a concern and the impacts more immediate and real to those who live nearby the business nodes. 43rd and Upton experiences the most issues and a specific problematic area was the block east of the intersection of 43rd and Upton where there are a couple successful restaurants and several multi-family housing buildings.

In general there was discussion about better management strategies for parking including employee parking, shared parking, wayfinding and education about available spaces nearby. There was an interest in not growing the number of surface parking lots and encouraging alternative modes of transportation other than cars.

A couple groups discussed the cost of provided structured parking, design concerns of providing parking, and whether that was really a good thing for the business area in the long term.

There appeared to be mutual agreement that new development should be able to provide parking for its uses or tenants.

- **Sustainability**

Elements of sustainability were part of the discussion on most topics, but were not commonly mentioned on their own. Sustainability ideas ranged from better utilizing green space to manage stormwater, to encourage alternative modes of transportation to cars, to integrating more green space into developments.

In a broader sense it was discussed in the terms of providing more option for housing and a broad business mix that would make for a more diverse and potential sustainable community.

There was also an interest in building upon [LHiNC statement on global warming](#) in the elements of the plan.

Elements for a Vision

The following is a summary of the vision statements that came from the workshop. At this point the statements do not read as a cohesive vision yet and they perhaps better serve as more specific goals to fulfill a vision.

The project team will work with this material to provide a draft vision for review by the community in the upcoming community workshops

- The character of Linden Hills is largely driven by its independent businesses that serve the needs of the surrounding community. Linden Hills will strive to maintain a business mix that serves its residents' need and will foster a vibrant business community.
- Encourage housing options that increase the range in the types of units and affordability of units available within the neighborhood.
- New development will be responsive and reflective of its surrounding context by relating to the height, massing, length and patterns of the existing built environment. It will minimize impacts to surrounding lower density development and will enhance the pedestrian environment.
- Make alternatives to car use more attractive through increasing safety, improving the experience of those modes through greening and alterations to existing infrastructure, and improving accessibility of other modes of transportation.
- Better manage the supply of parking through the development strategies to improve the use of the existing supply parking, ensure that new development has sufficient parking, and explore opportunities to develop new parking.
- Better manage the demand for parking by increasing accessibility by other modes of transportation.
- Integrate sustainability elements into infrastructure and development projects. Work to retrofit existing infrastructure and procedures with sustainable principles.