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Finding a balance between UMore vision and Rosemount small town feel

BY ERICA CHRISTOFFER - SUN NEWSPAPERS

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What does a community of the future look like? Does it fit in Rosemount? And, how can Rosemount retain its small town feel?

Those are the questions Rosemount City Council members are asking as the University of Minnesota announced its vision for the future of UMore Park.

"There are many unknowns at this time," said Mayor Bill Droste. "But, to add a significant development like this, it could create opportunities for us."

UMore Park is a 7,500-acre property owned by the University of Minnesota off County Road 42 in Rosemount. The University traded 2,840 acres to the state to help build a new Gopher's stadium at the main campus in Minneapolis. The remainder of the land, nearly 5,000 acres, has been at the center of a strategic planning process over the past year.

University officials, including Charles Muscoplat, vice president for agriculture policy at the U, presented the guiding principals to the City Council Wednesday, Nov. 15, which would turn the 12-square-mile site into a sustainable, vital community rooted in education for all ages.

"It's definitely significant how they're looking at that land compared to past plans," Droste said.

The three core elements the University would provide are education, health and energy themes, which would be integrated into the fabric on the community.

"The health component would be significant," said Droste.

With housing, shopping, jobs and parks that could support as many as 30,000 residents, the plan calls for a market-driven partnership between developers and the University to construct the community over the next 20-30 years. The proposal is expected to be finalized by the University's UMore Park Steering Committee with the help of consultant Sasaki Associates by 2008.

Healthy living and sustainable environment would be a cornerstone in the UMore development. Amenities would include parks and green spaces, as well as a learning center or community center. Roads, buildings, water and sewer systems would be build with attention to ecological systems.

But for Rosemount, the key factor will be working the University's proposal into its 2030 Comprehensive Guide Plan update, which is due September 2008.

"It will take a significant amount of work," said Droste. "We'll have to see how fits in the city while managing growth and traffic."

Economics, demographics, regional trends in transportation, housing and development and land use will factor into the 21st century community.

In 1942 and 1943, the U.S. War Department acquired about 12,000 acres of farmland in Dakota County for the construction of the Gopher Ordnance Works (GOW). The GOW facility was designed to manufacture smokeless gunpowder and related products, assisting the war effort by producing a propellant for American military ordnance.

Production got under way in January 1945 and ended only 10 months later, in October 1945.

Title to 8,000 acres of the property was transferred to the University of Minnesota in two stages.

Approximately 4,700 acres in August 1947 and another 3,320 acres in March 1948. The 1947 parcel includes the land south of 170th Street and the west third of the land north of 170th Street. The 1948 parcel includes the east two-thirds of the land north of 170th Street.

University research, including aeronautical, medical and agricultural projects, began on sections of the land immediately, frequently making use of some of the remaining 298 GOW buildings for studies and storage.

However, University officials said they are unsure about the condition of the property, whether it is contaminated from the GOW, and what impact that will play in future development.

For more information about the plans at UMore Park, visit www.umorepark.umn.edu.

Timeline:

1942-1943: The U.S. War Department acquired about 12,000 acres of farmland in Dakota County for construction of the Gopher Ordnance Works, a facility designed to manufacture smokeless gunpowder and related products.

January-August 1945: Smokeless powder was manufactured at Gopher Ordnance Works.

1947-1948: The Gopher Ordnance Works property was deeded over to the University of Minnesota by the U.S. Government.

1948-1949: The Rosemount Agricultural Experiment Station was established, joining five others across the state to engage University researchers in regional agricultural projects.

June 1962: Longtime research projects of the University's aeronautical engineering department ended.

March 1963: Groundbreaking commences for the U.S. Navy's pioneer global positioning satellite system on 18 acres of land rented from the University.

1973-1976: The legislatively requested report "Rosemount Property Long Range Planning Framework" concluded that there would be "no significant development pressure or potential until the 1990-2000 decade."

December 2000: "UMore Park: Cultivating a Landscape for Knowledge," a management plan for the property, was submitted by Urban Strategies Inc. of Toronto, in conjunction with the work of a University task force.

December 2001: The University's 7,686-acre Rosemount property was formally named the University of Minnesota Outreach, Research and Education (UMore) Park.

July 2004: A comprehensive resources inventory of UMore Park was completed by the University's Center for Rural Design. The inventory described land use, land resources and facilities, research, environmental stewardship and other attributes.

September 2005: The University's UMore Park Executive Committee submitted its report "Creating a Lasting Legacy for UMore Park: Advancing the University of Minnesota's Academic Mission," and recommended immediate planning actions to realize regional opportunities on the 7,686-acre property and to ultimately provide resources for a legacy endowment that supports the academic mission.

November 2005: Board of Regents presentation and discussion focused on UMore Park as a key element in realizing the University's goal of becoming among the top three public research institutions in the world.

December 2005: UMore Park's 11-mile Lone Rock Trail opened to cross country skiers.

February 2006: The Board of Regents approved Sasaki Associates, Inc., of Boston, as the University's consultant for strategic planning to explore the potential for the UMore Park property.

March 2006: The Board of Regents, in a special meeting, approved by an 11-1 vote a plan that would provide increased state funding for a Gopher football stadium in exchange for a parcel of University-

owned land on the UMore Park property. Future use of the parcel remains consistent with the University's vision of open space and environmental amenities.

April 2006: The University published "A Historical Interpretation and Preservation Plan for UMore Park," which begins with the story of explorations of the property as early as 1680.

May 2006: The Minnesota state legislature approved legislation for a Gopher football stadium and the transfer of a 2,840-acre parcel of UMore Park land to the state following 25 years of joint University-Department of Natural Resources oversight of the land.

October 2006: The Sasaki team of strategic planning consultants submitted a comprehensive report to the UMore Park strategic planning Steering Committee.

November 2006: Strategic planning vision and recommendations were presented to the Board of Regents by the Steering Committee.

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