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U of M will unveil UMore plans next week

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UMore Park is about to take the next step in its transformation to a new University of Minnesota-sponsored community.

The U of M has finished several of its concept designs for what the UMore park property could look like 25 years from now. They will be shown to the public June 19 and 23 with presentations starting at 6 p.m. each day at the Rosemount Community Center. Concept designs and plans are on the UMore Park web site.

“Those will be great opportunities to get public comment for people to say what’s important to them,” said Carla Carlson, assistant vice president of the university’s statewide strategic resource development office.

Carlson said these concepts are by no means final. The concepts are a culmination of input from many organizations. The university’s board of regents hopes to approve a final plan later this fall.

The UMore Park property was deeded over to the U of M in 1947 by the U.S. government for \$1. For the next several decades, the property was used for university research, including agricultural and aeronautical engineering projects.

The board of regents recognized the UMore park property as a “key element” in supporting the university’s mission to become one of the top three research institutes in the nation in November of 2005, according to university reports. In February of 2006 the board approved Sasaki Associates Inc. as a consultant in planning how to use the property. The board passed a resolution in December 2006 to plan for the property, undertake concept master planning and make the land ready for development, instead of holding onto the land or selling it off piecemeal to developers.

The university brought together task forces composed of university faculty, staff, students, and others to address community planning issues for education, environment, renewable energy, health, transportation, and interdisciplinary opportunities. They also held a series of open forums in Rosemount in the fall of 2007. In January of 2008, the U of M published several reports summarizing the ideas that appeared in the task forces, the open forums and developer-planning consultants Design Workshop Inc., a firm the university hired in July of 2007.

A few things need to be done before the board of regents can approve a final plan. University officials expect a report sometime this summer from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over possible soil contamination in parts of the park property where the Gopher Ordnance Works, a U.S. government factory which produced smokeless gun powder in 1945, once stood. The U is also in the process of awarding a contract to complete an environmental impact statement, which will help determine whether or not to mine gravel from the property.

Substantial amounts of gravel exist on the property according to university reports, and selling off the gravel could help to offset planning costs. Several other assessments of the property need to be done as well. Eventually the U of M will determine whether the community will be a part of Rosemount, Empire Township, or a separate community.

However, the university has several years to figure everything out.

“Any kind of development is a long term process,” Carlson said. “It’s going to be a long process, but a very exciting one.”

Anyone interested in attending one of the public sessions should RSVP at umorepark.umn.edu.