

Published: November 10, 2006
Edition: METRO
Section: NEWS
Page#: 1A

**The U sows utopian vision for its open land
Regents are considering a recommendation to make some Dakota County property a laboratory town for ideal 21st-century living.**

By Norman Draper

Staff Writer

University of Minnesota officials Thursday unveiled an almost utopian vision for a community of 20,000 to 30,000 residents, to be built from scratch and serve as a laboratory for 21st-century living.

It would be a place where the latest advances in agriculture, nonpolluting energy and transportation would coexist with the arts, recreation and resources for lifelong education.

The site would be the university-owned UMore Park, a 7,800-acre tract in Dakota County most recently known for its part in a U stadium deal. It has been described as the largest contiguous piece of property owned by any land grant university in the United States.

The community plan was presented as a recommendation to the U's governing Board of Regents, which took no action Thursday. The regents were also offered two other options for the site: simply holding on to it, or selling it at wholesale prices.

"I find this to be exciting and inspiring, and it offers us an opportunity to think creatively not only about the property, but about the future of the university," said University President Robert Bruininks about the development idea.

The UMore site was deeded to the university by the U.S. War Department in the 1940s for \$1. Almost 3,000 acres of it were traded last spring to the state of Minnesota in return for funding to help build a new Gophers football stadium on the Minneapolis campus. The remaining 5,000 acres would be the site of the new community.

Pending approval by the regents, U officials would like to have a master plan for the site completed by the end of 2007.

Change would take 30 years

The development would bring about such a metamorphosis in the site that it was characterized as "a Monarch caterpillar transformed into a butterfly" by U Vice President Charles Muscoplat.

Such a community would take 25 to 30 years to develop, Bruininks said. He characterized the plan as a way to further the education mission of the university and create an unparalleled opportunity: to construct a prototype living space designed for the benefit of humankind.

The plan would be financed initially by mining gravel on the site and the sale of recycled concrete left there, then by the sale of development rights to builders. According to Muscoplat and Bruininks, public funds would not be used to develop the site.

Muscoplat, who presented the recommendation to the regents, said the gravel deposits are worth between \$14 million and \$21 million, while sale of the recycled concrete could

StarTribune Archives

[About the archives](#)

[Archives fees](#)

[Archives search form](#)

[Archives search tips](#)

[Archives help and feedback](#)

[Search for recent articles](#)

More resources

[Back copies](#)

[Photo reprints](#)

[Reprint requests](#)

[Special projects](#)

[Site map](#)

earn an additional \$2 million to \$3 million. Muscoplat did not disclose the value of the property.

Details about the proposed development have yet to be worked out. But university officials plainly envision a community that the knowledge and resources of the university could turn into a prototype for living in the 21st century.

The latest in agricultural advances could be used to produce disease-preventing food for the community. Solar cells, wind and renewable fuels would provide the energy. Buildings would be constructed of materials that represent the cutting edge of energy efficiency. A "health and wellness center" would serve the community, and particular attention would be paid to controlling such diet-related conditions as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. A "futuristic" library and technology-based learning center would be at the center of the community.

As part of their research, U officials visited similar planned communities in Denver and at the University of British Columbia, among other places.

Several regents posed hard questions about the concept: Would the U be competing with surrounding communities' development interests? Would the U's goal of using the community as a research site conflict with another goal - making money from the property? If private developers are brought in, how much will their own plans conflict with the U's master plan? How would such a site be governed? And since the site was once used by the U.S. Army to produce gunpowder, is it contaminated?

"The challenge is we don't really know what the environmental impacts are," Muscoplat said. "The site might be contaminated, and it might not be contaminated. ... If it is, the answer is, we clean it up."

The concerns were tempered by enthusiasm for the concept.

"I think people will look at this in 30 to 40 years and say this is the most important decision that the university has made," Regent David Metzen said.

Bruininks said outside pressures to develop the site make it important for the U to work out a master plan to control the property's destiny.

"We are being surrounded by development," he said. "Development in the area is inexorable. We need to be part of it, or get out of it."

.
Norman Draper - 612-673-4547

.
U PROTOTYPE FOR 21ST CENTURY LIVING

A visionary plan would transform UMore Park in Dakota County into a community:

- Fed by disease-preventing food grown on the site.
- Powered by solar cells, wind power and renewable fuels.
- Sheltered in homes built with cutting-edge materials for energy efficiency.
- In 25 to 30 years.