

UMore may be sustainable model for world



Thursday, 19 June 2008

Site could include eco-industrial park

by Laura Adelman
Thisweek Newspapers

Under an option that University of Minnesota officials say has the most benefits for the development of UMore Park, sustainability is a place.

Featuring parks, neighborhood centers, a lifelong learning campus and an energy production facility, the development scenario would be home to 30,000 people and 10,900 housing units in about 30 years.



University of Minnesota Vice President Charles Muscoplat on June 17 presented to Dakota County commissioners the four top potential development scenarios for the eight-square-mile Rosemount property that includes the former munitions plant site.

Whittled from 30 development themes, the top contenders are a traditional master plan, a new urban center, a lifestyle center and a new sustainable community.

Last week, draft conceptual master plans were presented to the Rosemount City Council, and Empire Township supervisors will receive a presentation June 24.

ILLUSTRATION: This is an artist's mock rendition of a community that could be established on the UMore property in Rosemount.

Another public forum regarding the scenarios is set for 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. June 24 at the Rosemount Community Center.

While university officials say the sustainable community scenario offers the most benefits, the concepts won't be finalized until early 2009, after more public comment can be received.

The sustainable-community option offers the greatest opportunity for meeting the University's mission in developing the community by integrating research, education and public engagement to benefit the community, according to Muscoplat.

The scenario also achieves higher goals for transit and residential density, job creation and

bus development and overall open space; plus economic development and maximum potential for public and private partnership, he said.

The development proposes the creation of an eco-industrial park located on lands polluted by the former munitions plant but cleaned up to an industrial standard.

What's next?

- Community discussion of four concept land scenarios;
- gravel mining environmental studies begin;
- remediation work plan for property contamination cleanup;
- preferred scenario selected, fall 2008;
- public meetings for gravel environmental study completed by fall 2009;
- concept master plan, pattern and vision books finalized and approved by winter 2008;
- development partners selected 2009-2010;
- development to begin by 2011.

The industrial park would be dedicated to businesses that want to cooperate with each other and the community to reduce pollution. Eco-industrial park businesses would also share resources in order to save money and reduce waste. In addition, through them university researchers would have opportunities to put their projects into real-life applications.

Housing in the community, which includes the Dakota County Technical College, would be mixed, incorporating both multi- and single-family housing with transit access.

Alternative energy sources, including the use of windmills and geothermal (heat from within the earth) would help provide energy for power in the community.

Pros and cons

The pros and cons of each scenario were outlined in a draft report from the university's consultant, Design Workshop Inc.

With the traditional master-planned community option, the development would be home to 23,000 people, a closer match to other Rosemount developments, likely be more accepted by other communities and require less infrastructure.

But, it lacked sustainability innovation and had a limited mix of housing options.

The new urban center design, which could accommodate 30,000 people, would not be transit friendly.

"We think it's interesting, but it might be challenging," Muscoplat said.

A lifestyle community features an upscale design, includes golf courses, parks and amenities and was included in the top contenders because it is one every developer would propose, Muscoplat said.

One of its downfalls is that the area would not allow for economic or social diversity.

Scenario 4, the new sustainable community, offered numerous advantages, including that it would allow greater density, multiple transportation modes, optimized jobs and housing balance and had a mix of housing prices and products.

Muscoplat said, in developing the scenarios, the sustainable community received the greatest amount of attention.

"We think it has the greatest opportunity for integrating research, education and public

engagement,” Muscoplat said, citing a university goal in creating the development.

Envisioned is a community of parks, greenways, schools, ponds, transit stops, mixed-use centers and neighborhood retail areas designed so people can live, work and play within the city.

“People who work who are in the police department or are teachers can find affordable housing ... we think over time we can bring transit to the site. It will be a favorable alternative to sprawl,” Muscoplat said.

The community will take decades to become reality.

Major environmental studies and areas of contaminated property cleanup must be completed, tons of gravel mined and alternative transportation modes provided as it is anticipated there will be challenges obtaining funding for rail.

County Commissioner Joe Harris, who represents the area, said he was previously critical of the plan, in part because university officials appeared to expect the project would be completed in a few years.

Now, he said, there is a more realistic 25- to 30-year outlook that anticipates the breadth of the work needed to transform the site.

Harris also credited the university for incorporating its agricultural research projects into the development.

No matter which development scenario is adopted by the university this winter, consideration will also be given to the adjacent Vermillion Highlands, part county park and part Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Management Area.

County Parks director Steve Sullivan said park development plans include creating a network of trails for activities, including hiking, cross-country skiing and horse trails as well as paved biking trails.

The DNR property also has areas for hunting.

County Commissioner Will Branning urged Muscoplat to get city officials involved in the project.

Questions were also raised about governance and tax base.

“Are you thinking of a free-standing community on its own?” Commissioner Tom Egan asked.

“I think that would be a mistake,” Muscoplat said, adding that the university wants to integrate the community into the greater community of Rosemount, Empire Township and Apple Valley.

While Muscoplat said the university wants to work with local officials, he did not answer County Administrator Brandt Richardson, who asked whether the property will come back on the tax rolls, noting a community of the proposed size will require about \$30,000 to \$50,000 in property taxes for things such as schools, public safety and roads.

"I'm not prepared to answer that at this time," Muscoplat said.

While many issues remain to be determined, the university's design team is continuing with its planning for the community.

The UMore Park management team, including university officials and alumni, will soon be presented recommendations of options intended to differentiate the community.

"We want to leave a legacy of public good," Muscoplat said, and described the community as a model of sustainability for the region, nation and world.

Kurt Culbertson with Design Workshop Inc. wrote in the draft report, "UMore Park will light a path to the 21st century."

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written by Eric James, June 20, 2008



We must herald the University for trying such an ambitious plan, to create a new Jonathan, MN or Celebration, FL. But let us not be too unrealistic. This "sustainable model" is purely about the physical environment. The University would never allow its prized project to have a mix of income levels--fester crime, and neither would you. But with no means of alternative transportation, far off MVTA's own bus routes, can we expect people of middle to upper incomes (and if we're talking Professors, then upper elite incomes) to just shop and play where they are? Of course they will drive to access the services and schools of Dakota County. These people will shop at Cub and Target with you and probably send their kids to Rosemount or Farmington. So this is not really a new twist on anything. Be real, master planned communities are really akin to building a resort or a gated community like Bear Path. It's just that much, a beautiful and lush place, quite far off the beaten path. But innovative? Sustainable? Not so much.

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Last Updated (Thursday, 19 June 2008)

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