

Minnesota Design Team will visit Walker in June

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The Minnesota Design Team (MDT) is coming to Walker June 9-11 as part of the Healthy Communities Partnership's (HCP) ongoing efforts to plan for positive future development in the greater Walker area.

HCP Executive Committee member John Fjelstul announced at a Feb. 9 lunch meeting at Hope Lutheran Church that the design team has verbally committed to the visit. He expects to receive written confirmation and more details soon.

Last October Walker was awarded a \$10,000 HCP grant from the Initiative Foundation of Little Falls. The grant will be used to help citizens create a locally-shared vision and plan for the future of the greater Walker area and to mobilize local and regional assets to implement that plan.

Volunteers from Walker and Shingobee, Leech Lake, Turtle Lake and Pine Lake townships have already formed a steering committee that has participated in several HCP leadership training sessions. Many other area residents also have joined HCP.

At the suggestion of the Initiative Foundation, the Steering Committee also applied for the services of MDT.

MDT is composed of 15 to 20 professional architects, landscapers, urban designers and planners from the Twin Cities area who periodically offer their skills and professional expertise free to rural communities to help develop a vision for the future.

The design team will arrive in Walker the evening of June 9. Each person will stay in a private home so they can interact with, talk to and get feedback from local families.

The weekend's tentative schedule begins June 10 with breakfast with community leaders. Local presenters will briefly talk to the design team about various aspects of life in and around Walker. HCP volunteers then will lead the team on a tour of the area to see the good, the bad and the in-between.

Friday evening, the public will be invited to a free supper, followed by a visioning session where MDT will ask for comments and input from area residents on the community's strengths, needs and future direction.

The morning of June 11 the team will convene to analyze what they've seen and heard, and to draw up preliminary proposals, designs and ideas for what they think might be done in and around Walker. Those ideas will be presented at a community-wide meeting Saturday night that Fjelstul predicted "should be very exciting."

HCP members have begun planning for the design team's visit. Volunteers are working on four areas: hospitality, housing, transportation (for the community tour) and town meetings.

The hospitality committee is chaired by Steph Freeman; housing, Mary Nordeen; transportation, Steve Bilben; and town meetings, Pam Worth.

Once MDT provides more details on the visit, those committees will finalize plans and arrangements. According to its mission statement, MDT strives for three objective when it works with a community.

- It tries to increase awareness of the benefits of quality design in the development of communities;
- It works to preserve a community's identity; and
- It commits to participatory democracy and grass-roots initiatives.

However, the design team's visit will be just the starting point. Next will come consideration and possible implementation of proposals. That will require the participation of the entire community, not for just a few weeks or months, but perhaps for years.

"We need to spread the word about the design team's visit," Fjelstul urged. "This could be the best thing that's ever happened to the Leech Lake area. But it all will be no good if we don't decide to move forward with what they recommend."

To join the Healthy Communities Partnership or to learn more about the MDT visit, contact an HCP executive committee member: Char Moore, 547-2528; Bill Bieloh, 836-2598; Wally Brunsvold, 547-1968; Scott Bruns, 547-1292; Duane Ommen, 547-2858; Nordeen, 836-2499; or Fjelstul, 547-1913.