

## **Minnesota Design Team visit June 9-11 could be catalyst for major changes in the greater Walker area**

Community members are encouraged to attend Friday, Saturday night gatherings

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With an air of excitement and anticipation, volunteers from the Walker Area Partners (WAP) finalized plans May 25 for the Minnesota Design Team's (MDT) June 9-11 visit to the Walker area.

Nineteen architects, landscapers, urban designers and planners, all volunteers, arrive the afternoon of June 9 and will spend the next two days in almost-constant motion in and around Walker.

They will hear from and talk with individual citizens, organizations, government officials and others, tour the city and surrounding areas, and try to learn all they can about the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, both now and in the future.

(The greater Walker area includes the city and Shingobee, Leech Lake, Turtle Lake and Pine Lake townships.)

Armed with that information and input, and using their professional skills and experience, they will spend most of Saturday developing concepts for what the greater Walker community could become; and how those goals could be accomplished.

The design team's proposals will be announced at an all-community gathering Saturday night at WHA Auditorium.

In the coming weeks and months, WAP, working with the Healthy Communities Partnership (HCP), will consider those proposals, as they work to create a long-range vision and plan for the community.

### **What's WAP? What's HCP?**

The Walker Area Partners (WAP), a group of area volunteers dedicated to creation of a healthy, prosperous and united community, has coordinated the design team visit as part of the Healthy Communities Partnership (HCP) process.

Last October, the greater Walker area received a \$10,000 HCP grant from the Initiative Foundation of Little Falls.

The Initiative Foundation's mission is "to unlock the potential of people of Central Minnesota to build and sustain healthy communities." That includes helping communities plan wisely for their future. WAP was formed to support the HCP. Over the next two years or longer, Walker and its partner townships will use the grant to create a locally-shared vision, set goals and make plans for how to reach them.

### **Area faces future challenges**

Because of the many challenges the area is facing, MDT was invited in to provide, for a minimal fee, an outside professional perspective.

Issues MDT will address include

- The changing face of tourism from resorts to seasonal homes
- Downtown revitalization
- Possible rerouting of Highway 371 from downtown to a bypass
- Proposed redevelopment of the historic Chase Hotel
- Ah-Gwah-Ching Center closure and reuse
- Integration of four state recreational trails in the community
- Diversification of the community's economic base
- Cooperation among townships, the city and Leech Lake Reservation
- Quality youth programs.

### Getting to know you

The evening of June 9, WAP welcomes design team members, who will meet their local host families. Friday morning MDT will hear a series of informational reports by various community groups and local governments.

Then MDT members will divide up for lunch at several locations with groups of invited citizens. After lunch, the afternoon is filled with tours of the area on foot, by bus and by boat.

### Free fish fry supper!

Friday night is "The Great Community Get-Together," starting at 5:30 p.m. at Moondance Fairgrounds Saloon east of the Y.

The entire community — and that means everyone — is invited to a free fish fry supper. After the fish fry, around 7 p.m., the design team will explain what they do and what they hope to accomplish for this community.

The audience will have a chance to submit their ideas, questions, concerns and hopes for this community to MDT in a confidential format. After the presentation, a social hour will give community members a chance to meet the design team one-on-one.

### MDT gets down to work

After learning as much as they can about the Walker area and its residents, MDT volunteers will spend all day Saturday in work sessions to compile, analyze and discuss that information.

Then they will create a presentation, with illustrations, of what the future Walker area could look like, and how those proposals could become realities, if the community so chooses.

### All-community presentation at WHA

Saturday evening, the entire community is invited to WHA School to hear and view MDT's presentation, followed by an informal question and answer session.

The presentation is at the WHA Auditorium at 7 p.m., with the question-and-answer period at 8:30 p.m. in the Commons area.

The complete schedule of events for the Minnesota Design Team's visit is also listed separately in this issue.

### Fish to feed the multitudes

At WAP's final planning session May 25, volunteers heard from Dan Frank of the Initiative Foundation, who commended them for their hard work to get ready for the visit.

"The most important thing you can do now to get people to come to your events is to each invite five to 10 people," he urged.

WAP chair John Fjelstul said the fish fry supper will be able to serve as many as 600 people.

"If you get that many, you'll set a new record for an MDT visit!" Frank responded.

### For more information ...

For more information about any aspect of the Minnesota Design Team visit, the Healthy Community Partnership or Walker Area Partners, contact Fjelstul at 547-1913, or at the Web site [www.walkerareapartners.com](http://www.walkerareapartners.com).

**For more information on this subject, check out these resources:**

- [Walker Area Partners](#)