

Healthy Communities Partnership moves ahead on several fronts

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The Healthy Communities Partnership (HCP) and Walker Area Partners are determined not to lose the momentum created by the Minnesota Design Team's June visit.

Meeting July 27 at Hope Lutheran Church, HCP chair John Fjelstul encouraged the 30 or so volunteers to become "people of action."

Dan Frank of the Initiative Foundation that awarded the \$10,000 HCP planning grant last fall suggested the group ask itself three questions.

- What are your priorities?
- Who's already working on these things? and
- How can you assist groups that are already working on projects?

The Walker Area Community Center (WACC) is a prime example of a project where HCP may need to be a partner, instead of the leader, Frank illustrated.

He suggested HCP invite representatives of every community group or sub-group that might be working on a project so they can share information, compare and see where projects overlap.

These could be local governments, civic or service organizations, youth groups, church groups and their committees, arts clubs and others.

"Most probably have no idea what others are doing," he said. "You need to coordinate your resources to the best of your ability!"

WACC update

In an update on the WACC project, Mitch Loomis and Lee Westfield urged HCP to help them move the project ahead. About \$2.7 million of a needed \$3.3 million needed has been raised or pledged for the 51,000 square foot, multi-purpose facility.

The center will have four major tenants: the Leech Lake Hockey program; a membership-based fitness center; a unit of the Boys and Girls Club; and the Walker Rotary.

In addition, it will provide small and large community meeting spaces, an auditorium, convention space and more.

The initial plan was for an ice hockey arena with ice seven months and a civic-convention space five months, Loomis recapped.

However the community indicated it wanted more.

"This is a much better, more comprehensive plan for the community," Loomis stated. "We need to get this up and operating for about three years, make it viable. If we do that, later we will be able to expand."

Westfield said Blandin's commitment to its \$400,000 grant requires raising all the money needed to build, about \$3 million, plus one year's operating budget, about \$300,000. However, all that doesn't have to be in cash, he pointed out. The project can support some debt, if it's built into the operating budget.

Part of the public wants the project to be guaranteed, with all cash on hand before starting, he continued. Another part wants to move ahead on faith.

"We are moving forward with the project," he declared. An architect is working on more detailed plans, and the group will meet with Blandin this fall to finalize arrangements.

Mar Loomis encouraged everyone to spread the word about the next big fund-raiser, the Aug. 5 golf tournament and dinner at Tianna.

Visitor's center, park upgrades

"It's important to keep the community in touch with what's going on," Fjelstul stressed.

Since the Design Team's visit, the two projects he's heard most about are a visitor's center for city park and park improvements.

Anyone who wants to promote those projects needs to work through the city council and its park board so they can consider them in budget planning for 2006 and beyond.

Surrounding townships also need to be contacted for their support, he added.

Fjelstul said he and Shingobee Township supervisor Orv Rosenberry would meet next week to set up time for the town board and city council to discuss areas where they could work together.

Other initiatives

In addition to WACC, other planning initiatives are already in motion in the Walker area.

- Critical Access Hospital committee
- Ah-Gwah-Ching Center site development
- Leech Lake fishing issue
- Chase Hotel renovation
- Cass County Historical Society and Museum, and AGCC Museum
- Cass County Courthouse needs
- Airport expansion

Also rumored are changes for the Lakeview Motel site.

John Grimley said a "Save our Museums" presentation will be given during Ethnic Fest.

The next HCP meeting will be Aug. 24 at noon at Hope Lutheran Church.