

WAP members focus on goal-setting, community updates, long-range issues at monthly meeting

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Keeping the public updated on the Healthy Communities Partnership project and setting short-and long-term goals were major topics at the Oct. 19 meeting of the Walker Area Partners (WAP).

At a brief "keep in touch" session, WAP Chair John Fjelstul stressed the need to assure those who attended June's community visioning and input sessions that their time was well spent.

WAP's Web site, www.walkerareapartners.com, is currently being improved, and a new brochure is being composed. This not only will keep people informed but may help membership grow. A public annual meeting has been suggested to give area residents an opportunity to voice input and concerns. A WAP newsletter will be ready for distribution by late November, media committee member Kristin Chitwood announced.

WAP's executive committee also is working on expanding its mission statement, "Unlocking the potential of the Leech Lake area through progressive partnerships."

Since the Minnesota Design Team's visit to the Leech Lake area in June and its recommendations for community improvement, WAP has focused mostly on short-term goals that can be accomplished with limited funds: e.g., city beautification, better signage and connecting existing bike trails.

Fjelstul cautioned that WAP also needs to set long-term goals and revisit past issues, such as Minnesota Department of Transportation's (Mn/DOT) future plans for Highway 371 in the Walker area that could include a bypass for through traffic.

"Issues like this tend to be pushed aside if action isn't imminent," he stated. "Even though a bypass may be years off, we need to start talking about it now. We don't want to usher in significant development, only to find it conflicts with future plans [like a highway reroute]."

Scott Bruns said that several years ago, after Mn/DOT announced Highway 371's four-lane expansion north to Pine River, Walker asked Mn/DOT to present its long-range plans and options for the highway in the Leech Lake area.

Others who attended those sessions also recalled that Mn/DOT was open to including community priorities and ideas into its plans.

WAP will try to arrange for Mn/DOT officials to attend an upcoming WAP meeting, possibly as early as November, to review long-range plans for Highway 371 in the Walker-Leech Lake area.