

BTTTask Force Minutes – 11/9/16

Ice breaker – rose, bud and thorn for each person.

Presentation on the history of the Highwood Plan by Dan McGuniness

After WWII this area was still predominantly farmland. Point Douglas Road was the oldest road in the area, connecting Ft. Snelling with Prescott WI. There was also a railroad along the base of the bluffs with a Highwood Station near Lower Afton and Point Douglas.

Planning process began in 1988 but in 1968 the Metropolitan Council had designated Highwood as only partially developed (Met Council had only been created in 1967 around septic system leakages). In 1970 the Citizens' League had begun working on protected status for the river bluffs – developing the “Critical Area Designation” for Mississippi River Bluffs through the Twin Cities – out of this came the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA).

Pigs Eye Lake was an issue in the 1970s (the contamination of the lake had taken place of decades prior to this time).

Highwood started to develop and began worrying about infrastructure – streets, sewers, water, etc. There has always been a tension between whether infrastructure follows development or drives it.

1976 Governor Anderson designated the Mississippi Critical Area as unique and in need of a variety of protections.

1980 the question was what land was suitable for development? An 18% slope was set as the slope at and above which the land is unsuitable for development. Between 12% and 18% slopes is questionable and requires special consideration (NOTE – these slopes are coded in city code as well as in the Critical Area considerations.).

The area has some native oak savannah (a mix of oak forest with open understory – common on steep slopes, for example).

1988 MNRRA was actually established and the original Highwood Task Force (HTF) got underway.

The HTF began looking at the vacant lots and greenspace and assessing whether it could be developed. The HTF divided the area into North and South Highwood.

1990 the Highwood Development Policies were adopted (the full lengthy report with supporting documents). It established large lots to accommodate the septic systems that were in place and were needed along the bluffs since the sewer and waterline construction would have disrupted the critical slopes. This was a large plan for the whole character of the area.

1995 The City adopted the summary of the Development Policies – these are called the Guidelines for Development.

The entire process during this development and since then has involved balancing human needs in the neighborhood (both public and private land) with the built and natural environment. Especially looking at where streets could be and where sewer and water lines were and were not possible.

In 1997 the City adopted the Saint Paul on the Riverfront Development plans.

2009 The Highwood Plan was recertified (NOTE: recertification should normally mean that a community review would take place – this did NOT happen in 2009. All portions of the plan were incorporated into the 2016 D1 Community Plan with one modification – should BTT be abandoned, a thorough community review process take place. We had asked for a development moratorium while that was going on – this request was denied. But the County has assured D1 that it will not sell the land until the process is complete. When the City recently discussed its framework for dealing with the probability that BTT would leave the district, it told D1 that the Highwood Plan will be reviewed as a part of the 2017 planning process for BTT and the results of that review would be incorporated into the small area plan for the site. At such time, the Highwood Plan would be decertified. Decertification does NOT mean that it will be voided. It means that what the current plan covers, the new plan will cover...)

End of presentation....

Questions raised focused on what would/could change when the Highwood Plan is re-examined/decertified. 1st the decision to leave the site by the County has to be finalized (while this is a virtual certainty, it has not occurred yet). Then the City starts its process of reviewing the zoning of the site and gathering input on desired uses. IT IS IMPORTANT to remember that all Highwood Plan guidelines that have already been incorporated into city code will remain – these will NOT change (tree preservation, slope restrictions, etc...).

The focus of concern is on how Guideline 8 will be interpreted. It currently states that should the site be vacated, it will become public open space. Much discussion about assumptions people have about this guideline took place.

Members have many detailed questions about what will happen if the County leaves. Most of these questions cannot be answered.

A community meeting will take place on either Monday, January 9 or Wednesday January 11 from 6-8 p when this task force will take input from community members.

The next Task Force Meeting will take place Dec 14 at 6:30p. Location tbd.