The City of St. Louis Park kicked off the Historic Walker Lake District Revitalization Plan with an initial public meeting at the Central Community Center on Wednesday, November 14 from 6:30 - 8 pm. The meeting included a short presentation about the project area’s main challenges and opportunities, followed by small group discussions facilitated by the consultant team and city staff. The meeting’s goals were to inform attendees about the project, provide education about history and previous planning efforts of the area, gather feedback and public insight regarding potential strategies, and provide an opportunity for attendees to share knowledge, concerns, and desires for the area. In the small group discussion facilitators asked questions to gather community and business owner input regarding the opportunities and challenges they saw in the community and how the City of St. Louis Park can assist in revitalization of the area.

The event drew 21 community members and business owners. The presentation was recorded and is available for viewing on the City of St. Louis Park website. Common themes arose from the facilitated small group discussion regarding challenges and opportunities for the Historic Walker Lake area. These themes are summarized on the following pages.
Challenges

• Parking, both in business requirements and quality of public lots, are currently difficult to meet and could be a deterrent for future business development.
• Speed of traffic in the area creates safety concerns and hinders walkability.
• Walkability between off-street parking and businesses, and between businesses is limited.
• The neighborhood is not easily visible and would benefit from coordinated wayfinding efforts.

Opportunities

• Creation of a destination for community members to visit and be able to walk around and enjoy.
• Coordinated city events, could help activate streets, businesses, and alleys during night and weekend hours.
• Performance or art-based space to draw community members into the area with family friendly engagement.
• Restaurants, cafes, food trucks, or grocery stores allowing access to food options for businesses and their patrons.
• Allow potential for shared parking and more traditional commercial uses in industrial areas.

The City of St. Louis Park provided dinner and snacks for the group. Consultants were on hand to continue the business survey with business owners in attendance.

The presentation focused on ideas from previous planning efforts and challenges to implementing those ideas.
Community Priorities

- Accessibility – being able to park and walk to multiple destinations.
- More partnerships among businesses or businesses and city to promote attraction to the area.
- Ensure any regulation or community changes avoid displacement of existing businesses and keep the character of the area.
- Increase safety with traffic calming practices, crosswalks, and increased access to sidewalks.
- Attractive and desirable business facades and streetscapes.

Around eighteen people attended the meeting. Attendees included residents, employees, and business owners.

Small groups were formed to dive into challenges and opportunities and discuss areas on a map.
City staff and consultants led small groups to discuss their vision for the future of Historic Walker Lake. The groups discussed barriers to the implementation of both new ideas and those developed in previous planning efforts.
MEETING NOTES

Challenges

• Parking (requirements, quality of municipal lots, safety of street)
  » Are parking req. extra ordinary? Not really
    » Shared parking opportunity
    » Steele toe Brewing
    » Hamilton Street parking, on street OK
    » More education and awareness about parking for new and existing businesses
• Create a special parking district? Permits and/or only in lots? Changes could push some current businesses out
• Traffic (speed) around bend in Lake
  » Low traffic area, ok to close streets
  » 8th is biking/ped district
  » Speed on Hamilton/Wooddale
• 4 way stop at Brownlow
• Train noise
• Connection problems/access/traffic (SW corner of Walker)
  » Wayfinding – communication problem – what is there, how to get there, what is there to do once you’re there
  » Connection to Walker through school
  » Sidewalk on Gorham
  » Walking connections – straight, direct, wayfinding

Opportunities

• Community
• Business events, markets, urban design supporting businesses
• Food trucks? Family friendly, walkable, parking?
• Bike share at transit stops
• LRT
• More evening activity (art gallery, theater, etc)
• Healthy food, grocery
• Alley
  » Must have a use/activation
  » Nest’s opening party
  » Sota, Maestoso music?
  » Step Alley
• Example communities: east lake, NE, artery?
  » Hopkins DT
• Former bakery – Palm’s
• Variety of personal service businesses
• New restaurants (trivia night events)
• Re-open school path
• Theater
• Transitional uses in industrial area
• Financial help with small businesses – giving back to the neighborhood
• Desire to feel safe
• Create a destination – reason for people to come, and to stay, walkable
• Façade repair, more attractive businesses, better mix of store fronts

Discussion

• Maybe 1 district v. 2 (east/west)
• More foot traffic and infrastructure to encourage that
• More visibility
• Ease of access
• Forthcoming land use proposal at school
• PRIORITIES
  » Attractive – façade improvements, not 36th (struggling, not invested in businesses, sent mixed messages)
  » Accessible – park and walk to multiple destinations, walkable!
• PARTNERSHIPS
  » STEP, Perspectives, football field, insurance building
  » Monkey arts?
  » School partnerships – internships with businesses
• Bike connection to LRT trail
• Community orientated spaces
• Avoid displacement or pricing out, must do something, can’t expect great change – expectations and regulations don’t match, rents already starting to increase
  » Concerns around changes in reg/zoning will force businesses to leave
  » Do NOT want a high-end district – must match existing businesses, keep character of area
• Have compatible businesses
• Assistance with streetscape
• Crosswalks and more safe crossing
• Mixed-use alley
• Location of school problematic for liquor licenses

Observations
• Business district – too different? It will get neighbors to collaborate and know each other
• City could assist with more collaborative events to get community out, businesses could provide support needed and would attract more evening/weekend hours
• If obstacles are removed, businesses will come
• Zoning needs to match ideas/desires
• Questions around liquor license?
• Must be sure to respect residential parking with any changes to ‘nightlife’
• Zoning and dating regulations seem to be uncovering why we aren’t seeing development we want
• Industrial has its own restrictions, may not have the same needs as West side of district
• Food trucks could activate area by Nest during football and off hours
• Set up policies in a way that will encourage and allow for new uses, even if not seen right away
• Wayfinding is crucial
• Alley activation for outdoor events and businesses – walkability, destination
• Attractive businesses, signs of investment
  » Most people pass through, must make more inviting
  » Aesthetics of buildings matter, show investments
  » Streetscape improvements with no business investment is not worth it
• Accessible – be able to arrive by car, walk to multiple places
• Can we incentivize certain types of new businesses or developments to encourage what types of businesses go in?
• Parking requirements currently are a huge deterrent
• Feels like it could be NE (Sota clothing), doesn’t want it to feel like NE (Rob? Resident?)
• Explore shared parking possibility – Block
• Add sidewalk and crosswalk between stadium, parking lot, and businesses
• Lilacs – restore history of the area
• Impact of historical society to utilize this space
• Permit only parking behind Lake businesses to prevent school parking
• Business association provides accountability for façade upkeep/improvement
• What can you see from 7? If ped bridge with LRT, what would draw people?
• Concerns regarding lengthy construction with changes
• Walker realigned for visibility (?)
• Need sense of community – city highlight businesses with sponsored run
• Is there connection between industrial and ‘destination’ retail area?
  » Concern of not fitting with identity
• Currently missing evening activities, performance space, keeping people from engaging with the area