Activating Hopkins:
A Healthy Community Case Study

How small steps, a big vision and partnerships advanced economic vitality and livability in downtown Hopkins

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by

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Activating Hopkins: A Healthy Community Case Study

How small steps, a big vision and partnerships advanced economic vitality and livability in downtown Hopkins

Executive Summary

In what ways have the policies, systems and environmental changes that the City of Hopkins has implemented led to outcomes that improve livability, economic vitality and access to active living opportunities over time? This case study identifies and explores the ways that policies, projects, programs and partnerships have had a positive impact on these aspects of the Hopkins community.

The story of active living and livability in Hopkins can be traced as far back as the original founding of Hopkins in the 19th Century. Hopkins developed much earlier than its neighboring communities, and the historic development pattern it followed established a compact street grid and walkable Mainstreet that has been preserved over time. Since then, Mainstreet has consistently served as a useful focal point for a number of strategic initiatives that the City has employed. These initiatives include establishing downtown Hopkins as an arts and entertainment destination as well as supporting Mainstreet businesses by bringing more residents downtown.

In more recent years, the City has effectively engaged the community to develop strategies aimed at improving livability and expanding access to active living opportunities. Having learned that the Hopkins community is interested in expanding opportunities for alternative modes of transportation, the City officially adopted a Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan in 2013. This Plan offers recommendations for building on the Hopkins’ strong foundation for active transportation by enhancing the connectivity of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and integrating multimodal facilities into the station area plans for the City’s future light rail stops.

The station area planning process also led to the development of two major projects that the City and has undertaken in recent years. The Artery streetscape improvement project and The Moline luxury apartment development have substantially transformed the area surrounding the future Downtown Hopkins Station into a multimodal corridor featuring public art, community gathering spaces, and sustainable stormwater treatment techniques.
Complementing these large initiatives, a series of smaller aesthetic improvement and placemaking strategies have been employed around the downtown area. The City has worked to activate Mainstreet with programs such as sidewalk cafes, façade improvement grant programs, and placemaking micro-grants for businesses.

A number of themes and principles have guided the City in the completion of this work. This case study will demonstrate how the City’s commitment to authentic community engagement, comfort with experimentation, and inclination for demonstration has guided the City’s work in improving livability, economic vitality, and access to active living opportunities.

History

Origins of the Urban Form of Hopkins

In a number of important ways, access to active living opportunities in the City of Hopkins can be traced through history to the 19th century. These factors may seem incidental today, however, they provide relevant context that enhances an understanding of how the physical, social and political infrastructure for active living and livability have been maintained to benefit community members today.

From the time Hopkins was settled in 1852 until the 1870s, Hopkins was primarily an agricultural town. However, big changes took place between 1871 and 1881 which would come to define the community’s character in ways that continue to reverberate today. Three railroads were constructed through the area which opened it up to industrial growth. Soon, Excelsior Avenue (modern-day Mainstreet) became a thriving main street and the primary market hub for the neighboring communities of Eden Prairie, Edina, St. Louis Park and Minnetonka. Until about 1950, Hopkins was the largest city in the western suburbs and its downtown was the area’s major shopping district. By the mid-1950’s, the pastures and prairies were covered by modern dwellings and the modern businesses that served the new inhabitants.

This history makes Hopkins unique among its suburban peers. While the post-war auto-oriented development patterns that define traditional suburbs can still clearly be seen in the urban fabric of other suburban communities, Hopkins retains the historic, compact street grid that makes it so walkable today. Furthermore, its location at the hub of multiple railroad right of ways has translated into a high degree of connectivity to the network of shared-use trails that are now an integral part of the City’s identity. Finally, the City’s legacy as an early
industrial center continues to be honored by its community, with homage continually being paid to the Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company and Moline Tractor Factory through the themes and motifs of artworks, window displays and even the name of its recently completed Moline luxury apartment development.

**Unique Handling of Urban Renewal**

It is important to note, however, that the mere creation of downtown Hopkins’s historic urban fabric by no means guaranteed that contemporary residents and visitors to Hopkins would so readily be able to connect with the City’s history when they take a walk down Mainstreet. For many cities across the country, deliberately ahistoric approaches to redevelopment effectively erased whatever historical character their urban fabric originally developed. This trend could be seen most clearly during the post-World War II period of Urban Renewal. This period brought the destruction of many historic buildings and irreversibly changed the characters of cities in ways which many communities have now come to regret.

In the City of Hopkins, however, this trend played out differently. Rather than pursuing the most dramatic change possible by targeting the core of the City, leaders in the City of Hopkins left their central business district untouched. Instead, urban renewal efforts focused on the elimination of structurally substandard buildings and improper land uses in the area just south of Mainstreet. This approach led to the construction of such amenities as Downtown Park, and municipal buildings like City Hall, the library and the Post Office which were designed to support the continued success of existing businesses on Mainstreet. Records of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of the City of Hopkins show that renewal efforts were also deliberately invested in the improvement of the existing street network, alleyways, sidewalks and walkways to “improve traffic and pedestrian circulation and comforts”.

As a growing sea-change in lifestyle preferences towards more walkable urban environments that promote active living and livability continues to be recognized, it is striking to consider how well the history of Hopkins has situated its present community to capture the value of these cultural changes. However, this positive situation cannot accurately be interpreted as sheer co-incidence or chance. Throughout the years, City officials, business leaders and community members alike have played instrumental roles as stewards of this historic character which continues to generate benefits for the community. This stewardship continues today in the form of the many incremental planning activities, projects and partnerships that advance health, equity and livability in the downtown Hopkins and across the City as a whole.
Mainstreet as a Focal Point for Strategic Initiatives

The Rationale for and Construction of the Municipal Parking Ramp
In the late 1980s, a municipal parking ramp was constructed on 11th Avenue. The rationale for this investment on the part of the City hinged on a couple of key factors. First, the presence of the ramp would help promote the feasibility of the proposed Wells Fargo office building located on the corner of 11th Avenue and 1st Street South, which was being discussed at the time. The City had articulated an interest in bringing jobs into downtown Hopkins, and its investment in the parking ramp helped to supply much of the parking demand that the large employment center would produce. By investing in the municipal ramp and making it available for use by employees, the City’s efforts aided the construction of the office building and achieved its goal of concentrating employment additional in downtown Hopkins.

The City’s investment in the municipal ramp was also justified as an economic development tool. In line with the predominantly automobile oriented thinking of the time, it was believed that simply supplying parking would increase demand for Hopkins’ attractions, and generate an increased number of visitors to downtown Hopkins each year. While the auto-centric logic of this justification may seem questionable by the standards of contemporary transportation planners, many indirect benefits that the municipal ramp produced in downtown Hopkins are quite striking from an active living perspective.

The Downtown Parking District
The municipal parking ramp’s role as the backbone of the City’s downtown parking district constitutes another contribution to active living. The downtown parking district eliminates minimum parking requirements for businesses located within the footprint of downtown Hopkins, which reduces the regulatory hurdles that a business must clear before setting up shop in the area. This can be particularly helpful to smaller, independently owned businesses, for whom parking requirements would otherwise make it impossible to do business in the area. By eliminating this requirement, the downtown parking district helps reduce vacant commercial space in downtown Hopkins, helping to ensure an activated corridor filled with vibrant businesses. More information on Hopkins’ downtown parking district can be found here: http://www.hopkinsmn.com/transportation/parking.php
The downtown parking system also produces valuable benefits to the urban design of the built environment. By concentrating large supplies of parking in the structured parking ramp, the City preserves the walkable scale of downtown, especially on Mainstreet itself. This creates an urban form along Mainstreet where a pedestrian can walk the span of the core of Mainstreet without encountering anything besides business frontage with limited setbacks and attractive window displays. Walks throughout Mainstreet, and the downtown area as a whole, remain both interesting and useful for the pedestrian, who is never forced to traverse the large, desolate and isolating expanses of surface parking that have come to plague some suburban commercial areas.

One potential drawback to concentrating the supply of parking to only a few locations throughout downtown is that patrons of businesses who rely on automobiles for transportation may not be able to park immediately in front of their destination. This matter of accessibility is of the utmost importance to business owners, and surely enters into the cost/benefit analysis of the downtown parking system. In an interview, Councilmember Jason Gadd recounts the many individualized discussions that have taken place with business owners to reach an acceptable agreement regarding parking. Gadd explains that “In nearly all cases, the downtown parking system works quite well. However, the City is always happy to entertain discussions with particular business owners about their individualized need for parking and to accommodate those needs as best as possible.” One example of this approach is the agreement the City made with Transtech Mobility on Mainstreet. Specializing in assistive technology products, such as electric wheel chairs, power scooters and chair lifts, the accessibility of the store is uniquely important for Transtech’s clientele. For this reason, the City agreed to provide a special handicap on-street parking spot directly in front of their store. Thanks to the City’s willingness to complement their downtown parking district with individualized agreements, Transtech has been able to operate on Mainstreet with great success.

In general, however, the challenges of having parking located at some distance from destinations may also produce active living and economic development advantages that affect businesses more indirectly. Provided that the walk from the parking space to the destination is not prohibitively long, downtown Hopkins is arranged in such a way that the walk promises to be comfortable, safe and interesting. The innumerable short walks generated by this arrangement provides enhanced visibility for businesses located in the district. Visitors to the area might walk by and inadvertently discover their next new favorite restaurant, shop or salon. While the ultimate effect may be difficult to calculate or estimate, it seems clear that businesses located in areas that elevate walkability stand to benefit from this arrangement. In all of these ways, the City’s establishment of the downtown parking district advances active living and economic development goals by enhancing the feasibility
of development, preserving the walkable scale of Mainstreet, and activating the street with an increased supply of pedestrians.

**Provision of Parking Supporting Future Strategic Developments**

In addition to the positive impact that it generated for the development of the Wells Fargo office building, providing abundant parking also helped to implement the City’s strategic vision of establishing downtown Hopkins as destination for arts and entertainment. In the beginning, this vision most notably took shape in the construction of two regional destinations in downtown Hopkins: the Hopkins Center of the Arts and the Mann Hopkins Cinema 6.

The current sites of the Hopkins Center for the Arts and the movie theater, which sit on the north and south sides of Mainstreet at 12th Avenue, had been previously occupied by an auto dealership. When the dealership notified the City of their intent to leave the sites, the ample supply of parking existing within the municipal parking ramp helped reduce barriers to the big picture thinking that was necessary to achieve the City’s vision. The City swiftly seized the opportunity by putting together a purchase agreement and using tax increment financing to build the projects. Today, the Center for the Arts and the movie theater activate Mainstreet by attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year and effectively “bookend” the core of Mainstreet on the west side. From an economic development perspective, the positive spillover effect that this activation of Mainstreet produces for surrounding businesses is hard to overstate.

**Artstreet**

The construction of the Hopkins Center for the Arts in 1997 marked a significant step in achieving the City’s goal of strengthening the community’s identity as a destination for arts and entertainment. In the years that followed, the HCA’s success in attracting visitors gradually started to spill over into the surrounding downtown area. This caused staff at the City and the HCA to recognize an opportunity to extend the presence of the arts throughout the greater whole of downtown Hopkins. In 2010, an excellent chance to capitalize on this opportunity arrived in the form of a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, which funded the first year of the HCA’s Artstreet program.

Developed jointly between the City, the Hopkins Business and Civic Association (HBCA) and the Friends of the Hopkins Center for the Arts, Artstreet is a juried public art display centered on Mainstreet. Artists working in all outdoor-tolerant media are invited to apply to have their artwork displayed in downtown Hopkins for
approximately one full year. Applications are reviewed by curators within the HCA organization and selected according to a wide variety of criteria. The program also includes provisions for the City to purchase artworks from artists to be included in a permanent collection. Altogether, the Artstreet program contributes to a long-term vision for incorporating public art into Hopkins and enriching the lives of its residents by building a collection of permanent and rotating public artworks. Over time, these artworks combine to celebrate the diverse community and vitality of Hopkins by showcasing original artworks in an accessible setting.

The HCA puts out an annual call to all established and emerging artists working in media that can withstand outdoor public display. The submitted artworks are then evaluated by a jury of HCA curators whose goal is to achieve a diverse selection of artwork that is of high quality in both concept and construction, and is appropriate for display in a public, outdoor environment. Artists that are selected are offered a $1,000 stipend to offset the cost of transportation of the artwork and any other incurred travel or hotel expenses. It is required that the artist be present at the installation of their work.

The temporary nature of Artstreet was developed based on existing knowledge readily available within the HCA’s artist community. Artstreet planners learned that sculptors and other large-format artists without a venue to sell their artworks are often willing to loan their artworks on a temporary basis so that they may have greater exposure and generate sales. In light of this finding, Artstreet was organized on a primarily temporary basis, so that selected artworks would be displayed for a period of one year. The temporary nature of this arrangement helped to keep the artworks fresh in eyes of the viewer, which to keep the artworks interesting even for the most frequent passerby. Just two pieces to date have been donated to the City by community groups and are now included in the City’s permanent collection of public art. More information on the Artstreet program can be accessed here: http://www.hopkinsartscenter.com/tickets-events/exhibitions/hopkins-artstreet/

The experience of engaging and partnering with the artist community that the City gained through the Artstreet program would prove to be instrumental as the City explored new opportunities to elevate the arts in the public realm. After years of producing stock images to display on the banners that line Mainstreet, the City realized the banners presented a great opportunity to engage local visual artists by displaying their original work on the
banners instead. These banners help maintain interest as one walks down Mainstreet and has also contributed to a culture of art-consciousness among residents and businesses in downtown Hopkins. The close relationship with artists has also contributed to a general awareness of and reverence for art among downtown businesses and residents.

The recent addition of the “world’s largest raspberry” statue to downtown Hopkins exemplifies this unique culture quite well. In the summer of 2017, Dr. Pete L’Allier of Hopkins Health and Wellness commissioned design and construction of the sculpture, which currently resides on 8th Avenue next to the Lake Minnetonka Regional trail, less than a block off Mainstreet. L’Allier had no trouble enlisting the help of the local community to support the addition of the sculpture. Hopkins Health and Wellness partnered with other downtown businesses to organize a unique, Pamplona, Spain-inspired “running of the bulls” 1k fund-raiser race down Mainstreet to officially unveil the raspberry sculpture and kick off the 83rd annual Hopkins Raspberry Festival. The event was well-attended and went a long way in building excitement and generating financial support for the latest addition to downtown Hopkins’ public art offerings.

Hopkins’ commitment to the arts also produces benefits to the City in more conventional ways. The art-focused culture of Mainstreet has been effective in attracting a number of art-focused and creativity-focused businesses to set up shop in downtown Hopkins. In recent years, Mainstreet has added businesses like Bongo’s and Bud’s Music Center, Mill City Sound, kiddywampus, Projects in Person, Royal Comedy Club and Zeller Studio. The growth of this creative energy appears primed to continue, as a recently completed feasibility study by Artspace indicates that Hopkins is a suitable candidate to host the kind of artist live/work space in which they specialize.

Adding Density to Downtown

In the early 2000s, the City pursued another strategy that was centered on Mainstreet. In response to a challenging period of time for Mainstreet businesses, the City Council and staff devised a strategy to support Mainstreet by bringing more residents to downtown Hopkins. The City started pursuing this strategy by initiating a conversation with the owner of the property on the southeast corner of 8th Avenue and Mainstreet. The site was occupied by a paint store which had
put very little investment into the maintenance of the existing building and frequently created nuisances such as spilled paint in the alley. The City successfully negotiated the purchase of the property and proceeded to aggressively work towards assembling the entire block.

The City then put out a request for proposals (RFP) for mid-density, for-sale multi-family housing. Specifying a preference for for-sale multi-family housing allowed the City to test out the market for that type of housing, which had never before been built in Hopkins. This was advantageous, as the Twin Cities was experiencing a boom in the construction of condominiums and townhomes at the time. The Cornerstone Group’s proposal for the Marketplace Lofts was ultimately selected. The four-story, multi-use building with retail on the ground floor and underground parking was completed in 2003.

Building on the success of the Marketplace Lofts project, the City set its sights on the north side of the same block, which was the site of Hopkins Honda auto dealership. The dealership had expressed interest in a City-owned piece of land outside of downtown on the south side of Excelsior, and a land swap between the dealership and the City was arranged. With the help of a Livable Communities grant from the Metropolitan Council, the City was able to subsidize the development of The Beard Group’s Marketplace & Main apartments, which contained 53 units and 6,000 square feet of retail on the ground floor.

In addition to bringing more residents downtown and supporting Mainstreet businesses, these two projects generated many additional benefits. Compared to the previously existing, single-use properties, these compact, mixed-use buildings greatly improved the walkable character of Mainstreet by increasing the number of destinations in the area and uplifting its aesthetic appearance. The developments also anchored the east side of Mainstreet, such that the core of Mainstreet was effectively bookended with the Marketplace Lofts and Marketplace & Main apartments on the east and the Hopkins Center for the Arts and Hopkins Movie Theater on the west. Additionally, the experience the City gained with applying for and securing grant funds through the Metropolitan Council Livable Communities program would go a long way in familiarizing elected officials and City staff with the process of leveraging grant dollars for future redevelopments. Finally, the location of these dense, pedestrian-supportive projects on or near the corner of 8th Avenue and Mainstreet would prove to be helpful years later when the City started planning to accommodate light rail through its future Artery corridor project.
Community Engagement

Over the years, the Hopkins community has played a very valuable role in the process of setting the City’s various strategic initiatives. In interviews with City officials and community members, a number of central themes and principles for community engagement emerged. Councilmember Jason Gadd described the value in conducting authentic engagement and outreach efforts. According to Gadd, engaging the community on a topic at a single meeting cannot be considered authentic engagement. “Engagement is a two-way street. When done right, engagement is an ongoing process that allows the City to gather input from the community, and also allows the community to know how they can influence the process beyond participating in a single meeting. It can’t just be a one-off thing.”

One of the ways in which the City seeks to establish this two-way dialogue is with its “Take It To Em’” approach. The Take It To Em’ approach recognizes that rather than asking community members to provide input on the City’s terms, City staff and officials should be committed to taking engagement activities out into the community at the times and places that are the most comfortable and convenient for community members. A variety of meeting formats should also be employed to cater to the varied level of familiarity, interest and comfort which stakeholders possess about local planning issues. Finally, recognizing that good ideas tend to come from situations where people feel at ease, the Take It To Em’ approach strives to make engagement as fun as possible.

In recent years, the Take It To Em’ approach has been on full display in a number of engagement activities. In the process of updating the comprehensive plan, one of the steering committee meetings took the form of a “policy and a pint” discussion, which was hosted at Mainstreet Bar and Grill. During a visioning process for Mainstreet in 2014, the City hosted a “pecha kucha” presentation at the Hopkins Center for the Arts. “Pecha kucha” refers to a style of presentation in which 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each, which enables a number of speakers to deliver presentations that remain concise, interesting and informative. In this particular case, the City made an open call for presenters and invited community members to share their ideas in this fun and unique format. These factors combined to make the pecha kucha both well-attended and a great deal of fun.

The City’s decision to issue an open call for the community to come and present their ideas about the vision for Mainstreet exemplifies another defining characteristic of Hopkins’ approach to community engagement. “Keeping It Real” refers to a strategic planning approach that brings together residents, business leaders, community leaders, City staff and
elected officials to ensure the mid- to long-range commercial and social success of
downtown Hopkins. The approach strives to make sure that the unique hometown feel of
Hopkins is preserved as the community seeks to address future challenges and
opportunities. Director of Planning and Economic Development Kersten Elverum describes
how “the Keeping It Real” format is based on our belief that you don’t have to hire a
consultant to get ideas or buy-in. In many cases, you get better ideas if you use the assets
that exist naturally in your community.”

In 2016, a “Keeping It Real” task force was assembled for the purpose of leveraging the
momentum of recent revitalization that Mainstreet had been experiencing, as well as
preparing for the completion of the Artery. The goal was to devise a new economic
development strategy to replace the acting economic development strategy, which had not
been updated since 1995. To inform this strategy, the task force would meet four times over
the summer of 2016 to hear a variety of speakers address the topic of the meeting. After the
speaker presented and offered recommendations, the task force broke into small groups to
discuss, and then returned to the large group to report on themes, ideas and answers to
questions posed by the speaker. Each meeting would then conclude with a vote on the
favorite ideas and recommendations of the night.

The input gathered from the Keeping It Real task force was valuable for a number of key
reasons. First, the succession of four meetings over the course of the summer offered
continuity that gave participants a chance to get to know each other and allowed ideas to
gestate over time. Secondly, the varied format of the meetings, which involved a
presentation, small group discussion, large group discussion and voting provided a variety of
contexts in which participants could share their ideas. Finally, the task force was engaged
early on in the process of developing the City’s economic development strategy. This aspect
of the focus group created great potential for the ideas and input expressed by participants
to influence the end result, and also went a long way in creating community buy-in for and
ownership of the ideas that came out of the task force.

A third guiding principle of the City’s approach to community engagement is the value of
demonstration, experimentation, and incrementalism. Rather than waiting until an idea
becomes implemented permanently, the City has developed an approach that favors
temporary installation of the idea, followed by careful observation and reflection. This
philosophy is clearly exemplified by staff’s decision to install a temporary “parklet” as a
means of preparing for the Artery Experiment in 2015. Director of Planning and Economic
Development describes the logic of the Parklet Experiment and the value of starting small.
“We knew we wanted to engage the community around plans for the Artery with some kind
of temporary installation, but we had never tried anything like that before. So instead, we
decided to try out our ideas on a smaller scale by installing a temporary parklet for a
weekend. The observations and insights we got out of that experience helped us feel much

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more comfortable and confident as we moved forward with plans for the larger Artery Experiment the following summer."

The specifics of each of those installations are discussed in greater depth in a later section of this report, but their relevance to the City’s approach to engagement makes them worth mentioning here. The value of starting small and trying ideas out on a temporary basis is a central part of the way the City handles the uncertainty associated with trying new things. Developing a comfort level with that uncertainty has been an integral part of the innovative strategies Hopkins has implemented over the years.

The Blake Road Corridor Collaborative

One compelling story that highlights community engagement in Hopkins is the story of the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative. The area known as the Blake Road Corridor is a neighborhood on the eastern side of Hopkins. Bordered by Highway 7 to the north, Excelsior Boulevard to the south, Saint Louis Park to the east and Highway 169 to the west, this one mile by half-mile area consists of over 1,400 housing units and a variety of local businesses. The Blake Road Corridor is home to a diverse group of residents. In recent decades, the area has seen significant growth in the Somali and Hispanic/Latino communities as well as Russian, South Asian and other cultural groups. A total of 46 different languages are spoken within the local school district. Additionally, the neighborhood has a large youth population, with nearly 25% of households containing children under 18 (Transportation Study, 2012). Due to the neighborhood’s situation within the surrounding network of highways and high-volume roadways, as well as a general lack of infrastructure for non-motorized travel, the Blake Road Corridor was highly isolated from the rest of the City and its amenities.

In 2005, an uptick in reported crimes caused concerns about safety. The Hopkins Police Chief turned to the community for assistance in addressing some of the issues that the neighborhood faced. The discussions that followed produced a number of outcomes. A community assessment was conducted to better understand the existing conditions in the neighborhood and inform the subsequent community action plan, which was intended to address crime, the need for activities and the need for infrastructure, which was so clearly missing from the neighborhood.

From these conversations, the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative (BRCC) emerged. Initially funded through a three-year grant from the Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC), the BRCC is a cross-sector partnership of governmental and community organizations that builds relationships and creates connections among residents and community partners to address community concerns in the Blake Road Corridor. The work of the BRCC is defined by its comprehensive approach, rooted in what neighbors want for themselves, their families and their neighborhood. Partners involved in the BRCC, include Hopkins Public Schools Community Education, Hopkins Police Department, City of Hopkins, Hopkins-Minnetonka Recreation Services, Hennepin County, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, ICA Food Shelf,

One early project supported by the BRCC was a community garden. The Cottageville Park Neighborhood Garden originated in conversations with residents, which then evolved into group meetings, before finally turning into a formal request to the Park Board in 2011 to build a community garden within Cottageville Park, which is located in the Blake Road Corridor. The request was approved, though initially on a temporary basis as the park was expected to undergo construction in the near future. The garden was then built with help from neighbors, a volunteer garden mentor, the BRCC Coordinator, BRCC partners, and the Public Works department which tilled the land and provided a source of water. After collectively tending the garden throughout the summer, residents and community partners celebrated a successful first year in the fall of 2011.

With the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District having purchased and demolished several buildings on land adjacent to the park in early 2011, the City of Hopkins, the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, and community members and partners began preparing for the expansion and renovation of the park in late 2011 as well.

Early in the planning process, former Community Development Coordinator Tara Beard, the BRCC Coordinator, and BRCC members such as Hopkins Public Schools Community Education partnered to conduct a series of map engagement activities. Among the strong preferences expressed by the community through this process was the preservation and expansion of the Cottageville Park Neighborhood Garden. The community’s clearly articulated affinity for the garden came through so strongly that a permanent garden was included in the final plans for the renovated park. The process through which the idea for the community garden took shape demonstrates the value of community connections that allow individuals to pool their support for an idea and ultimately gain formal approval. Additionally, the process through which the garden became permanent, once again points to the value of demonstrating a project temporarily before pursuing permanent implementation. Although the City Council only felt comfortable enough to approve the community garden on a temporary basis in 2011, that comfort level was enough to give the program a try and ultimately to demonstrate the value that a permanent garden would provide. By all accounts, the Cottageville Park expansion has been a great success, and the engagement of the community was a significant factor in achieving that outcome.

Another activity coordinated by the BRCC and initiated in collaboration with the city, is a series of bicycle instruction classes. In the spring of 2015, an opportunity to organize and host bike repair classes arose when the City of Hopkins received an Active Living grant from Hennepin County. Through this grant, the organization Cycles for Change would offer a series of Build-a-Bike classes in which participants would learn about the parts of a bike, practice basic maintenance, and receive a refurbished, donated bike upon completion of the class. The BRCC partnered with Cycles for Change to offer three sessions of classes; – two for
youth (also in partnership with The Depot) and one for adults – in Oakes Park, which is located in the Blake Road neighborhood. Hennepin County later reached out to the BRCC and Cycles for Change to offer another adult Build-a-Bike class and an adult Learn-to-Ride class in the fall of 2015.

As classes in the spring concluded, participants expressed an interest in continuing to meet and in having opportunities to go for rides. Building upon this interest, the BRCC helped to organize a Biking with Friends’ bike riding group, which has continued to meet each summer since. Through this activity, a group of neighbors meet to go for communal bike rides, finding routes and exploring the robust network connectivity of nearby trails. Biking with Friends has made trips to destinations such as Shady Oak Beach, Lake Bde Maka Ska/Lake Calhoun, and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District’s recently completed remeandering of the creek near Methodist Hospital.

With residents expressing interest in ongoing bike activities, the BRCC looked for ways to provide additional opportunities, including through Allina Health Neighborhood Health Connection Grants, which support communities in building social connections within a consistent group of adults through healthy eating and physical activity. The approach is based on research indicating that people are more likely to stick with healthy activities if they are done with a group of people that feel connected to one another. In this manner, and with support from BRCC partners, community members and volunteers, and others, Biking with Friends continues to provide opportunities both for group rides and learn to ride classes.

Cottageville Park Before and After Redesign

Bicycle and Pedestrian Connections

The City’s strong reputation for community involvement has been helpful in setting priorities. Over time, one of the most significant priorities that has emerged is the goal of continuing to create opportunities for walking and biking in the community. According to US Census data, the share of Hopkins residents that drive to work alone has been steadily declining since the 1990s. Compared to the 7-County Metro as a whole, the number of
vehicle miles traveled in Hopkins is 13% less than the 7-County Metro. Hopkins residents are less likely to own a car and more likely to carpool or walk to work than residents in neighboring communities. Engagement activities and US Census data paint a picture of a Hopkins community that is eager to expand opportunities for active transportation. Although more than 70% of Hopkins residents were shown to drive alone, most residents polled indicated that they would be interested in using other modes, such as transit, walking and, most of all, biking.

Thanks to the historic development pattern that characterizes the City’s street grid, Hopkins is already quite well-suited for biking and walking. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s “compact neighborhood score” Hopkins ranks 7.6 out of 10, where ten represents the most compact neighborhood. The 7-County Metro, by contrast, ranks 2.6 out of 10. This compact character translates to a greater number of manageable and useful non-motorized trips that can be taken by members of the Hopkins community.

In addition to the density of Hopkins’ urban fabric, the City is very well-connected to the world-class network of off-street, multi-use trails that connect the metro for non-motorized travelers. Four regional trails travel through the City’s borders: the North Cedar Lake Regional Trail, the Cedar Lake LRT Regional Trail, Minnesota River Bluffs LRT Regional Trail and the Lake Minnetonka LRT Regional Trail. Hopkins is also very well-connected by local bus service and will be served by the future METRO Green Line LRT extension at three station areas within the City.

Finally, the concerted effort on the part of the Public Works Department to keep facilities maintained is another critically important contributor to Hopkins’ identity as a multimodal community. When asked about the mission of Public Works, Streets and Parks Superintendent Jay Strachota said “These days, that aspect of the mission kind of comes with the territory. The expected level of service around trails and connections has been much higher in recent years. It’s no longer just about clearing streets and leaving property owners to clear the area in front their properties. The trail connections and street corners are all equally important.” Strachota also described the sense of the pride that he and his staff derive from being at the hub of the regional trail system. “Once in a while we’ll hear from bike commuters headed to downtown Minneapolis from the west that Hopkins is the stretch of the trail that has been cleared the most adequately. We take pride in hearing comments like that and it motivates our work going forward.”

Between its infrastructure and its maintenance, Hopkins identity as a walkable and bikeable environment contributes to a number of community benefits. These include offering mobility options for children, the elderly, and low-income population, as well as creating livelier
neighborhoods with a stronger sense of community. Walkable and bikeable communities also benefit from a health perspective, with reduced rates of heart disease, reduced adult onset diabetes and reduced obesity.

Recognizing this strong foundation for biking and walking, as well as the opportunities to build on it, the City hired the Community Design Group to create a Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan which was funded by Hennepin County. The Plan, which was formally adopted in March of 2013, presents recommendations for gradual, implementable improvements that achieve a vision for a more walking- and bicycling-friendly city. The Plan is based on Hennepin County’s Active Living approach which seeks to create conditions that invite more Hopkins residents to choose to walk or bike to their destinations, and include physical activity as part of their daily routines. The full Hopkins Pedestrian and Bike Plan can be accessed here: [http://www.hopkinsmn.com/transportation/pedestrian-and-bike-plan.php](http://www.hopkinsmn.com/transportation/pedestrian-and-bike-plan.php)

The Plan was informed by a series of engagement activities conducted by the City and the Community Design Group. Booths with maps and surveys were set up at the downtown farmers market and Depot Coffeehouse. A meeting was held with the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative to engage the Blake Road community. Public Surveys were made available for members of the public starting in early fall of 2012, while the project website was used to publicize workshop events and share information about the Plan. In addition, several social media and web news outlet contacts were completed, including dissemination of workshop information through the Depot Coffeehouse’s Facebook page and Hopkins Patch news site.

The results of the engagement identified a number of significant findings. Engagement participants indicated that the environment for biking and walking in Hopkins was generally good, but that safer crossings of major roadways and more wayfinding, lighting, and access to drinking fountains represented opportunities for improvement. Meetings with the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative indicated that the absence of a sidewalk on the East side of Blake Road was a challenge for residents, particularly considering the absence of a safe pedestrian crossing opportunity.

These and other findings were integrated into the Plan’s recommendations. One major focus of the Plan is the opportunity that the future light rail extension presents to create better connections and expand opportunities to comfortably and conveniently incorporate active living and economical, sustainable transportation into the daily routines of residents. These opportunities can be capitalized upon by creating more routes and connecting the missing links between the many off-street, multi-use trails that converge in Hopkins. Additionally, the Plan recommends adopting a general set of treatments and approaches to improve connectivity and circulation, such as adopting a Complete Streets policy, decreasing the width of automobile lanes and decreasing automobile travel speeds.
Downtown Bike Parking Plan

The increased focus on bicycle connections motivated by the Pedestrian and Bike Plan brought attention to the lack of adequate bike parking in downtown Hopkins, which had been noted by visitors and residents alike. Additionally, the Public Works Department had frequently expressed concern over the commonly observed practice of bikes being locked to trees, benches and sign posts which were not designed for that use and can be damaged by coming in contact with bikes and locks. As a response to this issue, City staff began working with a company called Parkitect to develop a bike parking plan for downtown Hopkins that would identify the appropriate quantity and location of additional bike parking. This plan would be based on best industry standards as well as census data describing the continued growth in the number of people who use a bicycle to get to work in the Twin Cities metro.

To determine the appropriate number of bike parking spaces, Parkitect applied the standard established by the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals (APBP), which is based on the amount of off-parking lots and garages available to the general public. In North America, the APBP suggests that the number of bike parking spaces be no less than 5% of the number of public off-street parking spaces. With a total of 1,324 public off-street automobile parking spaces existing in Hopkins, it was recommended that a total of 66 bike parking spaces and one bike shelter be provided in downtown Hopkins. Taking the existing supply of downtown bike parking into account, this meant that the City would only need an additional 50 bike parking racks to meet this projected need. However, the City decided to purchase 13 additional bike racks to accommodate future demand for bike parking that would be generated by the Artery upon its completion.

Parkitect worked with the designers of the Artery to create a cohesive design and color scheme for the racks that would work throughout downtown and the Artery itself. This design would be applied to all of the new bike racks except for the two in front of Munkabean’s Coffee Shop, which opted to have their two bike racks customized with their own logo.

In addition to determining the appropriate number of bike parking spaces, Parkitect also helped the City determine the most advantageous location of bike parking throughout the downtown area. Industry best practices indicate that cyclists are less likely to use dedicated bike parking if

![Downtown Bike Parking Plan](image-url)
It is located more than 100 feet from their destination. Locating corrals along Mainstreet would also make the corrals easier to find and generally reduce the distance between bike parking and the entrances to destinations. Street corners were also identified as optimal locations for bike racks as they provide greater visibility benefits and improve access for cyclists. Finally, Parkitect indicated that there tends to be a greater need for bike parking near grocery stores and other food oriented businesses. With this criteria in mind, Parkitect worked with the City’s Public Works and Planning and Economic Development Departments to locate its 63 bike racks throughout downtown.

In an interview, Superintendent of Public Works Jay Strachota reflected on his initial impression of the newly implemented bike parking plan. “It was satisfying to see the instant reaction. The bike racks got delivered and installed in the morning, and by the evening you could already see bikes chained up to them.” Beyond the satisfaction of the initial outcome, Strachota also reflected on the benefits of implementing a formal solution compared to the haphazard, informal solutions that cyclists are forced to come up with in the absence of dedicated bike parking. In his eyes, when bike parking is done right, it stays out of the way while adequately meeting demand. In the absence of a formal solution, people locking bikes to light poles, trees, benches and sign posts cuts of access and risks damage to the anchoring structure or the bike itself.

Integrating Walking and Biking into Station Area Plans

The recommendations made in the City’s Pedestrian and Bike Plan also played an important role in guiding the station area planning process. At the Blake Road Station, a new sidewalk was built on the east side of Blake Road. This replaced the dirt path that had formed from so many people walking along this important pedestrian connection without the benefit of necessary dedicated pedestrian infrastructure. Plans for an upcoming reconstruction of Blake Road include a vegetated boulevard between the roadway and off-street pedestrian and bicycle facilities, which was another central recommendation made in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. Finally, the Plan calls for an enhanced crossing across Blake Road at the site of the Cedar Lake Trail. Plans for the Green Line light rail extension include a below-grade tunnel that will allow trail users to cross underneath Blake Road without disruption from automobile traffic above. One notable recommendation from the plan that did not make it into the redesign of Blake Road, however, is the recommendation that a four- to three-lane conversion be implemented on the roadway. The redesign calls for Blake Road to remain a four-lane road. However, the plan will narrow the lanes and introduce a median. Together, these modifications will work to
slow traffic and provide a pedestrian refuge for crossings taking place at locations other than the below-grade tunnel crossing.

Recommendations for the Shady Oak Station area are also in the process of being implemented. A feasibility study for constructing a dedicated bike facility, such as a cycle track or on-street bike lane along 17th avenue between Excelsior Blvd and Highway 7 is currently underway. Once the study is completed, the City plans to evaluate the options presented in the study and move forward with one of its recommendations. Once completed, the resulting cycle track or on-street bike lane will greatly enhance the connectivity of the City’s bicycle infrastructure by establishing a crossing at Excelsior Boulevard and providing uninterrupted connection between the Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail and Shady Oak Station to the south. The Shady Oak Station Area Development Strategy plan, commissioned by the Cities of Hopkins and Minnetonka and completed by Crandall Arambula, also calls for a number of measures that align with the recommendations of Hopkins’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. The development strategy calls for the City to work closely with potential development projects in the station area to ensure that development prioritizes access to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that is safe and accommodating. The development strategy also envisions a bicycle connection that will run from the planned extension of 17th Avenue, along 5th Street, and ultimately connecting to the existing trail on 11th Avenue.

Like the other two station areas, plans for the Downtown Station Area incorporate many of the specific recommendations made in the City of Hopkins’ Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. However, the Downtown Station Area is unique in its status as the City’s primary redevelopment and streetscape improvement priority. In the years leading up to and following the adoption of the City’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan in 2013, the area would be transformed. It would change from a somewhat unremarkable street housing a couple of underutilized properties to a world-class streetscape that would host two major multi-family housing redevelopments, a public park and ride, the City’s first cycle track, a collection of public art and other innovative public realm improvements that would come to be known as “The Artery”.

Redevelopment of 8th Avenue and the Artery

Introduction
Since the 1980s, the potential for Hopkins to one day be served by light rail was a well-known possibility. The way that existing railroads, highways and regional roadways pass through the City also allowed Hopkins to make fairly accurate predictions about how a potential light rail line would be aligned and where its stations would be located. Closely related to the City’s awareness of the potential for light rail was the recognition that Hopkins needed to establish a stronger connection between Mainstreet and Excelsior Boulevard. With
the completion of the Alternatives Analysis for the Southwest Light Rail project in 2006, the City suddenly received an impetus to give this priority significantly more attention. However, despite the City’s strong determination to establish such a connection, the question of where it should be located was still far from clear.

Two key factors helped the City determine the proper location of the enhanced connection between Mainstreet and Excelsior Boulevard. First, plans for the Downtown Hopkins Station on the south side of Excelsior helped the City to recognize the importance of the north/south connection across Excelsior in attracting visitors from the future station. The City began prioritizing ways to make the crossing more manageable and inviting. Central to this goal was the task of reducing the “sea of asphalt” character that defined the existing intersections and created a negative impression for pedestrians. Secondly, key sites along the important north/south connection between Mainstreet and Excelsior Blvd were underutilized and failed to produce the pedestrian-oriented atmosphere that would be necessary to motivate light rail riders to visit and explore the downtown area.

In an interview, former Community Development Coordinator Tara Beard described how a small strip of City-owned right of way located at the northwest corner of Excelsior and 8th Avenue provided an early opportunity. “We knew we had to reduce the sea-of-asphalt impression that intersections along Excelsior Boulevard created. The small strip of city-owned right of way adjacent to 8th Avenue represented a way for us to automatically reduce the actual and perceived crossing distance. Compared to the scale of the final plans for the Artery, this sounds like a minor detail. But it was an important factor in our decision to select 8th Avenue as the site for the project and get the ball rolling.” Furthermore, 8th Avenue housed the site of a recently vacated Park Nicollet medical clinic. The availability of this site presented a big opportunity for the City to gain site control on a property that could play a large role in transforming the corridor into a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Setting its sights squarely on 8th Avenue as the site of the future pedestrian connection between Downtown Hopkins Station and Mainstreet, the City successfully negotiated the purchase of the site.

The City’s experience with leveraging grant dollars in the Marketplace Lofts project helped it identify a number of opportunities to fund the preparation of the site for redevelopment. Furthermore, the City’s performance on grant applications changed with the advent of planning for light rail. The anticipation of light rail in Hopkins reflected very favorably on the City’s applications opening up a number of opportunities for funding through TOD grants. This helped the City secure $875,000 from Hennepin County’s TOD fund, which was allocated for the purchase of the former Park Nicollet clinic site. At the direction of the City Council, staff followed up on this initial victory by pursuing grant funds for environmental remediation of the site from sources such as Hennepin County’s Environmental Response Fund (ERF), the Metropolitan Council’s Tax Base Revitalization Account (TBRA), the
Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), as well as federal sources of funding.

The City simultaneously began developing its request for proposals (RFP) on the site that would deliver on the active use, FAR, density, automobile, and bicycle parking requirements of the Hennepin County TOD grant and the City’s goals. The RFP produced 3 proposals. Klodt Incorporated’s proposal for “The Gallery Flats”, which incorporated three separate buildings between four and five stories totaling 196 market rate units and underground parking, was ultimately selected. Klodt’s proposal for the site offered more for the land, meaning the proposal would require less public assistance. Additionally, the City was able to secure commitments from Klodt to devote the first floor of the development to active flex-space. The development would also provide attractive public open space between the proposal’s three buildings. These concessions combined to serve the vision for active living shared between the City’s goals and Hennepin County’s TOD grant program.

**Improving the Public Realm**

In 2006, IBI Group was selected jointly by Hennepin County and the City of Hopkins to undertake a preliminary planning exercise for the three light rail transit station areas identified in the Southwest Alternatives Analysis Study. Hoisington Koegler Group Inc. (HKGi) served as a sub-consultant to provide local knowledge to IBI’s planning team. The results of this study were Stations Area Plans for the Shady Oak, Downtown and Blake Road LRT stations, which provided a road map to guide future integrated transportation and land use planning within the City of Hopkins. Among its many contributions, the report inspired visionary thinking about how Downtown Hopkins Station could most effectively invite transit riders to walk along 8th Avenue, connect to regional and local bikeways, and enjoy the well-designed development in the historic downtown. Recognizing that every transit passenger is a pedestrian or cyclist at some point on their trip, the report laid added to the City’s vision for a “pedestrian seductive” corridor. It was according to this vision that the concept for the Artery would begin to be developed.

One key component of the Artery would be creating a safe and accessible pedestrian environment that is inviting for residents and visitors. Ideas about how this could be accomplished included custom concrete paving and unit pavers within the sidewalks, ADA compliant pedestrian ramps, artist-designed crosswalks at intersections, lighting armatures that are unique to the Artery and the history of Hopkins, site furnishings including planter pots, bike racks, benches, refuse receptacles, and public art installations. To encourage
bicyclists to explore Hopkins and make the connection between the Lake Minnetonka Regional Trail and the Cedar Lake Regional Trail, a two-way cycle track spanning the missing link between the two trails was integrated into the initial concept. In collaboration with the Hopkins Center for the Arts, the City began to integrate public art as a focal as a theme throughout the Artery. Having learned from the Artstreet program that sculpture artists without a venue to sell their work are often willing to loan their sculptures to be displayed in public spaces, a supply of rotating sculptures was envisioned throughout the Artery to complement the permanent artwork installations that were planned to be commissioned. To accommodate the City’s many street festivals and block parties, an “Artery Plaza” community gathering space was envisioned, with an artist designed and fabricated street closure gate that could be used during community events. Finally, pursuant to the City’s commitment to sustainability, stormwater best management practices were integrated into the concept, including bio-filtration opportunities.

Engaging the Public through the Artery Experiment
Despite grand visions such as this, governments are often unable to produce community projects that truly reflect the preferences and needs of the community. Wishing to avoid falling victim to such circumstances when planning the Artery, the City wanted to actively ensure that the money invested in this project would be well spent, and that the project itself would be beneficial to and desired by the community. With the concepts for the main components of the Artery in place, the City was then ready to “Take It To Em”. On Saturday, July 11, 2015, the City hosted the “Artery Experiment”. This well-attended one-day even was designed to introduce to Hopkins residents and visitors the plans for the Artery. The event involved a temporary installation of the main components of the Artery concept on 8th Avenue as a means to mimic the permanent components included in initial plans. This would provide guests with an opportunity to experience what was proposed and influence what would actually be built.

The event was a substantial endeavor involving the energy and expertise of many different people from many different areas, including artists, planners, Public Works employees, government agency staff, elected officials, volunteers, engineers, bicycle advocates, supporters of the arts, health professionals, musicians, as well as many other members of the community. Having drawn on the many insights
provided through the City’s temporary parklet installation one year prior, the Artery Experiment was successful in engaging the community in the planning process, and gathering input to be integrated into the final design of the Artery. This input was instrumental in not only earning the up-front buy-in of the community, but also in solidifying in the minds of elected officials and other project stakeholders the value of what the Artery was designed to accomplish. One example of the impact that the Artery Experiment generated was the decision of Three Rivers Park District to contribute $400,000 in support for the project. Three Rivers Park District manages the regional trail network for which the Artery would provide a strategic connection. In an interview, Regional Trail Systems Manager Danny McCullough described the value of the Artery project from the perspective of Three Rivers Park District, saying “There were three main things that we loved about the project. First, it closed the gap between two existing trails and enhanced the connectivity of our trail network. Secondly, the cycle track component was exciting because it added something new and unique to our network. Finally, we liked the Artery’s connection to the arts and active living and were happy to have an opportunity to support it.” With the enhanced buy-in of stakeholders secured, project planners knew they were on the right track with their concept and moved toward finalizing the concept for implementation. The full Artery Experiment Final Report can be accessed here: http://www.hopkinsmn.com/events/artery/TheArteryExperiment08052015.pdf

The Moline Joins the Conversation
Despite the excitement and buy-in generated by the Artery Experiment, the success of the Artery would still hinge on a safe, manageable, and inviting crossing from the south side of Excelsior to the north. City planners figured that beyond infrastructure, one potential way to accomplish this task would be to establish a critical mass of daily pedestrian crossings. Operating under the understanding that there is safety in numbers, the City began to devise strategies to increase the number of daily crossings at Excelsior Blvd.

It was determined that one way to establish this safety in numbers would be to centralize the parking that was required to meet LRT’s increased demand in a park and ride facility on the north side of Excelsior. Locating this structure on the north side of Excelsior would dramatically increase the daily number of pedestrian crossings and help motorized traffic become accustomed to the presence of pedestrian traffic at that intersection. In pursuit of this strategy, the City sought funding from sources such as Metropolitan Council’s Livable Communities Demonstration Account (LCDA) TOD program and the Hennepin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority’s TOD program. The City also applied for and received $6 million in Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds through the regional Transportation Advisory Board.

As these funding sources continued to come together, discussions emerged between the City and the Southwest Light Rail Project Office to explore ways that the two entities could
partner to use the CMAQ funds for a transit-supportive public park and ride facility. These discussions originally imagined a stand-alone structure on a part of the property located at 8th Avenue and Excelsior Blvd. However, while discussions were still in preliminary stages, Doran Companies purchased the site. A conversation between the City, Metro Transit and Doran promptly unfolded, and it became clear that there was a significant amount of overlap between Doran’s plans for the site the City’s vision for a pedestrian-supportive corridor.

In an interview, Kelly Doran described the reason for his interest in that site. “The first and foremost reason for choosing to develop that site is an important ingredient in all of our developments. We really look for walkable communities. We want to invest in areas where there’s an opportunity for our residents to walk to nearby destinations. Hopkins has an abundance of that with its historic downtown, and we viewed this site as being connected to that.”

As the dialogue between the City, Metro Transit and Doran Companies progressed, the idea of incorporating a park and ride inside of the development emerged. This idea promised to deliver on a number of shared goals, but also involved a number of practical considerations. It was determined that if the park and ride were to be constructed within Doran’s project, Doran would design, finance and build it, and that it would ultimately be owned and operated by Metro Transit. However, Metro Transit would not have the authority to purchase the ramp until the light rail project secured a full-funding grant agreement. In order for Doran to secure financing for the project, the City had to provide assurance that regardless of the fate of the full-funding grant agreement, the ramp would be purchased by either Metro Transit or the City.

Through close partnership, and by distributing the risk between partners, the project was able to move forward. In addition to the wrapped park and ride, the City was able to negotiate the construction of a bicycle lobby inside the building. The amenities in this bicycle lobby include bicycle storage, drinking fountains, a fix-it station and a vending machine that dispenses bike parts and tools. This lobby would offer a nice place to stop and rest for cyclists riding on the Artery’s cycle track or the regional trail network that surrounds the project. Metro Transit was able to negotiate the construction of a transit operator lounge within the building, which offers restrooms and a break room for its employees.

Another remarkable feature of the project is the antique tractor gallery located in the lobby of the project. Doran Companies commonly bases the names of their projects on the history of the property.
of the place where they are located and decided to name this project “The Moline” after The Moline Tractor Factory which played such an important role in the founding of the City of Hopkins. Building on this nod to history and the identity of The Moline, Kelly Doran looked into the potential of purchasing an antique tractor to display within the project as a public art piece. When all was said and done, he ended up purchasing not one, but seven antique Moline tractors, which are now displayed in The Moline’s public lobby.

The completion of this project in the summer of 2017 marked the culmination of a unique public-private partnership which successfully produced a number of mutually beneficial outcomes. The limited setback of the building from the street corner helps reduce the perceived crossing distance across Excelsior Blvd from the future Downtown Hopkins Station. The incorporation of the park and ride facility within the building will help generate pedestrian traffic while preserving the pedestrian scale of the area. Integrating the bicycle lobby and transit operator lounge within the building help promote the multimodal character of the area, while the antique tractor gallery helps reflect the public art components of the Artery located outside. While The Moline constitutes something quite novel in the City of Hopkins, it was accomplished with the same principles of shared visioning and partnership that has defined much of its work over time.

The Revitalization of Mainstreet and Related Strategies

In many ways, the process of planning the Artery and witnessing successful redevelopment projects has instilled the Hopkins community with a level of comfort with innovative thinking and experimentation. This thinking is often directed at strategies that enhance the public realm and strengthen the identity of Hopkins as a compact urban environment with abundant opportunities for active living and a high degree of livability.

Mainstreet Reconstruction

In the summer of 2015, the City undertook a project to reconstruct Mainstreet. The project was originally initiated to upsize the City’s sewer and water system to accommodate recent and future development. As with any major construction project in a relatively dense urban environment, this project would prove to be quite disruptive to Mainstreet businesses and downtown businesses as a whole. Nonetheless, the upgrade to the sewer and water system were a necessity, and the City decided to capitalize on the opportunity by integrating a number of additional enhancements into the project as well. In addition to the sewer and water work, the City upgraded all of the Mainstreet’s intersections to ADA standards, gave the sidewalks and its street furniture a facelift.
To mitigate the impact that this heavy construction project would have on adjacent businesses, the City employed a number of supportive tactics. The City reached out to the business community to educate and inform them of the details of the project and how long it was expected to last. In an interview, Councilmember Jason Gadd recalled how these outreach efforts informed an optimized phasing of construction. “Originally, the block-by-block phasing of the construction had been planned one way, which we thought would work well. However, in the process of reaching out to adjacent property owners, we learned from one business that we had made an incorrect assumption about when their busy season is. We were able to change the phasing of construction to avoid tearing up the street in front of that business during their busiest time of the year. The adjustment made virtually no difference to the progress of the project, but it made a big difference to that business owner.”

Another component of the City’s outreach effort was a rear door micro-grant program. In recognition of the fact that the front doors of Mainstreet businesses would be out of commission, the City quickly developed a program that offered $500 micro-grants to businesses to improve their back doors to help attract customers. The administration of the grants was made as simple as possible, with businesses only being required to submit a photocopy of eligible purchases to receive reimbursement. Feedback from businesses was very positive, and staff noticed benefits that outlasted the short-term impact of the program. Once the construction was finished and front door access to businesses was restored, the backdoors and the adjacent alleyway retained a notable aesthetic improvement which has helped business owners recognize the asset that the backdoor to their business represents.

The Parklet Experiment

In September of 2014, the City of Hopkins partnered with local businesses to participate in national Park(ing) Day. Originally conceived by San Francisco-based Rebar Art & Design, Park(ing) Day is a day in which artists, citizens and communities in cities across the globe transform on-street parking spaces into temporary public parks and other social spaces for the purpose of “challenging the way we think about the urban landscape and public space”.

However, as mentioned previously, the City’s interest in participating in Park(ing) Day was motivated by more than just the philosophy behind the event. Knowing that the City would
one day like to host a demonstration of the Artery project, the City used Park(ing) Day as an opportunity to try out a temporary parklet installation and gain experience with temporary, tactical-urbanist installations. The resulting installation repurposed two on-street parking spaces in downtown Hopkins on the corner of Mainstreet and 8th Avenue into public space to be used for socializing and activities. The resulting parklet was made available for use over the entire weekend of September 19th to the 24th.

Interdepartmental coordination was a key factor to making the parklet experiment a success. The Public Works department was instrumental in setting up the parklet, setting up the barrier of cones and developing practical design specifications. The parklet was designed to enter into the street no more than 12 feet from the curb, with a two-foot traffic cone buffer to ensure that the parklet would not pose a threat to traffic in the area. The Parks and Recreation Department supported the initiative by providing supplies for activities such as jump roping, hula hoops and sidewalk chalk. Finally, the Planning and Economic Development Department donated plants, chairs, a giant Jenga game set, and also helped develop strategic aspects of the parklet’s location and design. For instance, the parklet was purposefully designed with “loud” colors that contrasted with its surroundings to help the parklet announce its presence to the surrounding area. The parklet was also designed to incorporate active and passive space such that the parklet could be used for a variety of purposes from casually sitting, chatting, and relaxing to playing an intense match of tether ball or a raucous round of giant Jenga.

The local business community also played a vital role in the initiative. The City promoted the parklet experiment as an opportunity for local businesses to promote their business by sponsoring a demonstration, activity, or product samples in the parklet throughout the weekend, and the response from the business community was robust. The Music Barn and Judi Dotcom responded by furnishing the parklet with a table and plants. Munkabeans Coffee Shop sponsored periodic free coffee samples and a bench, while HealthSource Chiropractic sponsored a number of mini-chair massages and chiropractic consultations. Other businesses located immediately adjacent to the parklet contributed to the maintenance of the parklet by bringing materials in overnight, tidying up the parklet periodically and advertising and encouraging its use.

All in all, the parklet experiment was considered a success by the City, business community and residents alike. As the days went on, the parklet attracted more and more visitors, who commonly expressed curiosity as to why there weren’t more parklets like it in the City. When Public Works started to tear down the parklet its last day, a group of professionals out on their lunch break were disappointed to discover that the parklet was not a permanent fixture because they were on their way to spend their lunch break outside at the parklet. Two businesses also approach the City and asked about the possibility of having something similar in front of their businesses for a longer period of time. Other businesses asked to have the parklet in front of their store if the temporary installation were to be repeated.
In addition to the positive feedback received from residents and interest expressed by businesses, the City gained a few insights from the experiment. First, luck and experimentation are important. When trying something like a parklet experiment for the first time, there is naturally a great deal of uncertainty involved. In the eyes of the City, developing a comfort level with the uncertainty that accompanies experimentation is an important ingredient to getting successful initiatives off the ground. Relatedly, the City reflected on the value of starting small. The desire to host a larger-scale Artery Experiment had always been in the back of the minds of planning and economic development staff. However, by starting with something small and inexpensive (the Parklet Experiment cost just over $500 to implement), the City was able to demonstrate the value of temporary installations and move plans for the Artery Experiment forward with a greater degree of experience and confidence. Finally, the Parklet Experiment also proved that the inherent uncertainty associated with experimentation can often pay off in ways that were entirely unexpected. City staff had previously brought the idea of a longer-term Sidewalk Café policy before the Council, but the idea generated little traction. In an interview, Hopkins City Councilmember Jason Gadd described the great amount of credit that is due to City staff for helping the Council come around to the idea of approving a longer-term Sidewalk Café permit program through the Parklet Experiment. “Other members of the Council and I were skeptical at first. It was hard to imagine the benefit of creating a seating that’s essentially in the street. But then staff did a quick temporary demonstration off of Mainstreet, and seeing the impact that it had made the Council more willing the try a Sidewalk Café program.”

Sidewalk Cafes

In the late winter of 2015, the Hopkins City Council directed staff to research different types of Sidewalk Café programs to build on the interest in streetscape improvements generated by the temporary parklet experiment as well as address the growing lack of outdoor gathering space for restaurants on Mainstreet. Two different concepts were explored. The first was a semi-permanent City-owned parklet. The Hopkins Rotary Club has expressed interest in designing and constructing a parklet that would be mobile, with potential to stay in place for several weeks at a time, with the business in front of whom the parklet would be located would be responsible for maintenance. The mobile aspect of this type of sidewalk café program had special appeal at the time of consideration, as the City was preparing to undertake its Mainstreet Reconstruction project the following summer. The City was interested in the ability of the parklet to bring attention to Mainstreet during construction and generate positive publicity to balance out the public relations challenges that the reconstruction of Mainstreet would bring.

The second concept was based on the City of Portland Oregon’s Street Seats program, which allows businesses to encroach into the right of way to create additional sidewalk seating. Twin Cities metro cities such as Minneapolis, Edina and Wayzata all had similar programs at
the time, but Wayzata’s was the only existing program that allowed encroachment beyond the curb line in the same way that was intended by Hopkins’ program.

After developing the preliminary concepts for these two schemes, staff continued having internal discussion with Public Works, Planning and the Police Department to ensure that any resulting policy would properly balance the needs of the businesses with the needs of the City and public safety. Staff also promptly reached out to the businesses that expressed interest in the parklet experiment to get feedback on the idea. Multiple businesses expressed interest in participating in a program similar to Portland’s Street Seats program, and that concept moved forward for further consideration.

During discussions at City Council meetings and work sessions, the program was evaluated on its ability to meet five goals. First, the ability to support local businesses by attracting the attention of pedestrians and encouraging them to increase their stay in Hopkins was one of the central goals of the program. Outdoor seating not only promotes the business in front of whom the business is located, but it also increases the visibility of neighboring businesses when customers choose to sit outside. Second, the potential for Sidewalk Cafes to foster the creative and innovative spirit that furthers the identity of Hopkins as an Art destination was identified as another benefit. Thirdly, the aesthetically pleasing and non-traditional setting was expected to provide an additional space for relaxation that encourages human interaction among community members. Fourth, the program addressed the need for additional public space on Mainstreet while promoting and reinventing new perspectives on the urban landscape. Finally, the potential for Sidewalk Cafes to encourage walking and pedestrian activity by livening up the street, generating interest, and enhancing the ostensible vitality of businesses constituted a fifth benefit.

These perceived advantages were accompanied by a number of concerns. Plans for the program would need to address potential issues such as smoking, hours of operations, the loss of on-street parking, sight lines and liability. A number of conditions were integrated into the permit approval process during discussions at work sessions and with business stakeholders. After discussions with several businesses that expressed interest in the program, staff included as a condition of approval of the Sidewalk Café permit that businesses would not allow smoking in the Sidewalk Café area. The hours of operation for the Sidewalk Cafes would be limited to between 10am and 11pm daily. To address concerns over the loss of on-street parking, the size of any bump out Sidewalk Café would be limited to 40 feet in width, the equivalent to two on-street parking spaces. Eligibility for the program would also be restricted to restaurants and brew pubs on Mainstreet or fronting right of way within a half-block of Mainstreet between 8th and 11th avenues. Only six businesses would be eligible for the program under this criteria for eligibility. Between these design requirements and eligibility requirements, it was determined that the number of possible lost parking stalls would be capped at 12. After an inspection was conducted by the City Engineer to determine the impact of Sidewalk Cafes on sight lines, it was determined that it
would be possible to safely locate outdoor seating at each of the six eligible businesses, though each site would require additional review upon submission of an application. Finally, with the help of the City Attorney, provisions were added to the permit that require the applicant to maintain comprehensive general liability insurance in the amount of at least $2 million which names the City as an additional insured party. With a certificate proving insurance coverage required as a part of the permit application, the City Attorney believe that this would adequately protect the City from liability concerns.

Once these specific concerns were addressed in the formulation of the permit application process, more general provisions for the process were developed. In order to get a Sidewalk Café permit, a business would need to apply for the permit, submit a layout, landscaping plan, insurance information and a permit fee of $350 to the City Clerk. The City Clerk would then process the application and route it to the Police Department, Fire Department, Engineering, and planning for review and approval. The application process would include an amendment to the business’ liquor license if necessary. Permits would automatically expire at the end of the season and the business owner would be responsible for removing all materials related to the Sidewalk Café. The application process would then repeated each successive year.

On April 21st, 2015, the Hopkins City Council made approved a motion to the creation of a seasonal Sidewalk Café permit program that would allow restaurants and brew pubs in the downtown area to encroach into the City right of way in front of their store front to create additional outdoor seating.

Since its implementation, reactions to the program have been overwhelmingly positive. On a given day when the Sidewalk Cafes are in season, diners can be seen enjoying the outdoor seating that they provide. Chance interactions between neighbors and community members are commonplace, and the positive impacts on local businesses and walkability are clear. Councilmember Jason Gadd recounts a positive review of the Sidewalk Cafes from a coworker who frequently visited downtown Hopkins to shop at Northstar Lacrosse on Mainstreet to pick up gear and supplies with her son. She described her previous practice of wondering where to eat after their routine visits to the store. Under the impression that downtown Hopkins didn’t have many dining options, she would always end up leaving the area and eating elsewhere. That all changed after the Sidewalk Cafes were implemented. The next time she visited the Lacrosse store and took a cursory scan down the street, she was surprised to see a lively gathering of people at the Sidewalk Cafes outside of Mainstreet Bar and Grill and Pub 819. This compelled her and her son to explore Mainstreet and ultimately discover the robust selection of stores and restaurants that it has to offer. Her once singular visits to Northstar Lacrosse have now been
transformed into a more complete experience of Mainstreet, and she and her son now look forward to getting a bite to eat after their routine visits. This testimonial demonstrates the credibility of the notion that people attract more people. The presence of a lively pedestrian scene on a given streetscape appears to have a profoundly positive effect on a person’s perception of interest in exploring that street, which subsequently generates additional active living and economic development benefits.

This individual experience corroborates with the general observations of the owner of Mainstreet Bar and Grill, Bob Byers. Located on the 900 block of Mainstreet, Mainstreet Bar and Grill had previously had outdoor seating on the sidewalk in front of the building, but seating was right up against the wall and somehow seemed more constrained than outdoor seating should. Once the Sidewalk Café program was established, Mr. Byers decided to apply for a Sidewalk Café permit. He was pleased with the ease of the permit application process, and even more pleased with the impact that his Sidewalk Café had on his bottom line.

Mr. Byers found that Mainstreet Bar and Grill’s outdoor seating was not only increased in terms of capacity, but the aesthetic appeal of the seating area now seemed to be much more effective in attracting the attention and interest of the casual pedestrian.

The attractive appearance and welcoming activity of the Sidewalk Café was generating new business from casual passersby by connecting the restaurant to the surrounding atmosphere of Mainstreet. In an industry that’s as competitive as the restaurant business, it’s difficult to overstate how important it is to capitalize on any competitive edge that’s available. In the experience of Mr. Byers and Mainstreet Bar and Grill, the Sidewalk Café policy helped to leverage the unique atmosphere of Mainstreet as a distinct competitive advantage compared to other offerings such as chain franchises and drive thru restaurants.

**Prioritizing Economic Development Strategies**

Throughout the summer of 2016, the City of Hopkins gathered business leaders, residents, Planning Commissioners, and Council members to convene over several meetings and discuss economic development strategies for downtown Hopkins. The results of that work were summarized in the Mainstreet – Keeping It Real 2016 Final Report. One of the goals of the process was to get feedback from the community on the many projects that had been in discussion over time and identify which were of the highest priority. After spending time putting together a package of strategies staff presented a few areas of focus that would best support the Council’s vision for downtown Hopkins. The Façade Improvement Program and the Friendly (Store) Fronts program emerged as two prominent favorites for their ability to advance the aesthetic appeal and walkability of Mainstreet.

**Façade Improvement Program**

The Façade Improvement Program had originally been piloted in the summer of 2015, when the City received $100,000 from the McKnight Foundation via Hennepin County. Drawing on
the success of programs employed along University Avenue to prepare businesses in the Central Corridor to be successful amid the introduction of light rail, the Façade Improvement program sought to provide assistance to businesses in downtown Hopkins for façade improvements. Grants would be made available to businesses located within the core of downtown Hopkins, which was defined as the area between 7th and 11th Avenues and 1st Street North and 1st Street South. Eligible business owners were invited to apply for matching grant assistance up to $30,000. The goal of this program was to strengthen the vitality of Mainstreet by improving the pedestrian experience, increasing building transparency, and beautifying buildings through façade revitalization that would have a lasting impact on downtown Hopkins. In addition to financial assistance, the program would provide technical assistance through design consulting services provided by Wilkus Architects.

After a request for applications was issued to the downtown business community, staff received a great deal of interest in the program. Four buildings were selected to participate, and improvements took place over the course of the next year.

Due to the success of the 2015 Façade Improvement Program and the interest expressed by the community through the Keeping It Real task force, staff recommended that the City independently fund another round of façade improvements in the summer of 2017. The second iteration of the program would be funded with $100,000 in City funds for another 4-5 properties to participate in the program. Having had the opportunity to see the success of the first iteration of the program with only nominal financial investment, the City Council readily approved the funding of its own Façade Improvement in 2017.

The framework for the 2017 Façade Improvement was virtually identical to that of the 2015 program. One notable difference was that eligible building and business owners were allowed to apply for grant assistance up to 50% of the cost of improvements up to $25,000, rather than the $30,000 cutoff that applied to the 2015 program. The success of the 2015 program carried over to the 2017 program quite well. Once again, the response from the business community was robust, with the City receiving 8 applications and ultimately funding 4 projects at $25,000 apiece. The design phase of the projects was underway throughout the fall of 2017, and completion of the projects is anticipated sometime in the spring of 2018.
Friendly Fronts Placemaking Initiative
The Friendly (Store) Fronts program was the other strategy that was prioritized at the conclusion of the summer of 2016’s Keeping It Real task force meetings. Staff asked the Musicant Group to adapt their neighborhood Friendly Fronts program, which had been implemented in other residential communities, to the commercial setting in downtown Hopkins. The program would provide consulting services for up to 20 businesses in Hopkins to implement placemaking using the “Friendly Fronts toolkit”. The goals of the program would be to strengthen the commercial and social vibrancy of downtown Hopkins through dynamic business-led storefront activations and merchandising, and to build visibility and brand awareness for downtown Hopkins as the “friendliest downtown”.

The program would offer micro-grants to businesses to improve their storefronts with the goal of increasing the interest and welcoming character of downtown businesses, and would culminate in an Open Streets event to showcase the improvements. The program could also offer opportunities to test out placemaking strategies that may increase the vibrancy of properties on the west end of Mainstreet, as well as around businesses off Mainstreet. Accomplishing these goals would provide unique social experiences to visitors in addition to the goods and services that downtown Hopkins has to offer.

The cost of the program totaled $45,000 which covered a $30,000 fee to the Musicant Group to implement the program, $10,000 for the micro-grants, and $5,000 to put on the Open Streets event. To help cover the costs, City staff applied for and received a $30,000 grant from Hennepin County’s Business District Improvement program, which provides funding to suburban municipalities within Hennepin County to support the economic vitality of priority business districts and main streets. Downtown Hopkins matched the stated eligibility criteria of the program well, which seeks locations that are suburban Hennepin County business districts with concentrations of neighborhood-serving retail, office, restaurant and/or entertainment uses that offer a variety of goods and services in a walkable environment. The entirety of this $30,000 grant was allocated to cover the consulting fee, while the remaining $15,000 was funded from the City’s Economic Development Fund. The City reached out to the downtown business community and selected 20 businesses to participate in the program. These businesses each received $500 micro-grants as well as free consulting services from the Musicant Group to create spaces and entrances that effectively welcome downtown visitors.

The impacts of these respective programs go a long way towards promoting active living, livability, and economic vitality. By shaping spaces in downtown Hopkins that enhance the visual interest of the environment, these programs help send the message to pedestrians that they belong in the area that they currently inhabit, and that travelling on foot is indeed an advisable mode of transportation. Furthermore, as much as pedestrians need to feel safe and comfortable on their walking route, they also need to be entertained. The impacts of these programs are supported by schools of thought that predict that how far a person will
walk is dependent, to a significant degree, by what that person encounters along the way. Stores and businesses with attractive facades and interesting street-level windows help increase that distance by holding up their end of the dialogue with the pedestrian and convincing them to stroll another block or two until they unexpectedly discover their new favorite restaurant or shop.

Conclusion

A number of guiding principles and themes have guided the City’s work in improving livability, cultivating economic vitality and expanding access to active living. Chief among these is the City’s commitment to establishing broad strategic visions. In cases such as establishment of Mainstreet as an arts and entertainment destination in the 1990s, supporting businesses by bringing residents to downtown Hopkins, and using streetscape improvements to attract pedestrians from future light rail stations, the City has exercised a high degree of foresight and planning to achieve its goals. In nearly all cases however, these broad, overarching visions have been implemented through small, incremental activities.

When planning for the Artery, the City focused on manageable chunks, such as leveraging the small strip of city-owned right of way adjacent to 8th Avenue and acquiring the former Park Nicollet site to begin working towards the realization of their vision. In its efforts to establish itself as a destination for arts and entertainment, the City took a big step in building the Hopkins Center for the Arts. However, the City also continued to look for ways to engage the artist community to build on the success of the HCA and extend its energy throughout downtown as a whole. This interaction between big picture visioning and short-term action has been instrumental as the City has delivered on a number of its goals.

Closely related to this point is the large role that temporary demonstrations, experimentation, and a general comfort level with unexpected outcomes has played. Without a clear idea of how to host a demonstration event for the Artery project, the City developed the Parklet Experiment to try out the idea on a small and inexpensive scale. The lessons learned from this experience were integrated into the plans for the Artery Experiment, which contributed to the success of the event. Another somewhat unexpected outcome of the Parklet Experiment was the seasonal Sidewalk Café program, which has gone a long way towards activating Mainstreet. Similarly, when the Blake Road community expressed an interest in establishing a community garden, the idea was approved on a temporary basis. The success of the temporary implementation of the program helped to demonstrate its value so that it would secure a permanent place in the Cottageville Park redesign.

Finally the role of partnership in advancing the City’s work cannot be understated. The public-private partnership that was formed between Metro Transit and Doran Companies to complete The Moline project is one notable example of what can be accomplished when
different agencies strive to identify shared goals and develop collaborative solutions. Relatedly, the City has consistently sought out opportunities to gain support for projects through various grant programs offered throughout the region, such as Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council. Lastly, much of the City’s success can be attributed to tapping into the resources that exist within the community itself. The City’s ability to effectively involve the artist community, establish relationships with its business community, and authentically engage the community has been an invaluable contributor to the City’s work. In all of these ways, the implementation of incremental planning activities in the City of Hopkins has effectively advanced livability, economic vitality and opportunities for active living.