



COUNTY ROAD E CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN

Between Centerville Road and Highway 120

November 2022

What is this document? These recommendations serve as a summary of the input and reflections shared by community members from the cities of Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, and White Bear Lake through a four-part workshop series convened by LISC Twin Cities to inform future development and improvements through a County Road E Corridor action plan. The action plan will be a living document to help activate deeper collaboration among jurisdiction partners and allow for greater flexibility to accommodate changing trends and technologies. The plan will be used as a tool to attract private investment through development as well as seek regional, state and federal funding for infrastructure improvements which increase the vitality of the corridor. The action plan findings will be submitted to the cities of White Bear Lake, Gem Lake, Vadnais Heights, and Ramsey County for their consideration.





Shopping center at County Rd E and I-35E

INTRODUCTION

The County Road E Corridor between Centerville Road and Highway 120 has significant potential for revitalization, place-making¹ and serves as a catalyst for future development in the area. In partnership and with a grant from Ramsey County, the cities of Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake and White Bear Lake are working collaboratively to identify ways to create a more cohesive and connected corridor along County Road E and to guide future development of key opportunity sites located in each city. The geographic definition of the corridor includes a half-mile radius to the north and south of County Road E.

County Road E currently offers a mix of uses including multi-family residential, single family detached and attached residential, retail, industrial, educational, service, public and agricultural. The corridor serves as a direct access point to major traffic arteries including Interstate 35E, U.S. Highway 61 and Century Avenue North (MN State Highway 120), and provides access nearby Interstate 694. According to 2020 Decennial Census, approximately 26,100 people reside in the census tracts abutting County Road E.

To invite community input and build consensus around key strategies the cities hosted a series of six community engagement workshops to inform a County Road E Corridor Action Plan designed to include near, medium- and long-term strategies. The partnering cities and Ramsey County will consider the action plan recommendations and determine what can be advanced for implementation, some of which will be executed by individual communities and others in partnership. The action plan will be a living document to help activate deeper collaboration among jurisdiction partners and allow for greater flexibility to accommodate changing trends and technologies. The plan will be used as a tool to attract private investment through development and revitalization of existing properties and businesses as well as seek regional, state and federal funding for infrastructure improvements which increase the vitality of the corridor.

¹ Place-making options include an outdoor plaza or park which might include walkable amenity retail and some activated outdoor space that could include patio seating for restaurants other engaging features, and programmed activities or events, or a community center



Gem Lake opportunity site south of County Rd E

KEY SITES

The following key sites were used to explore opportunities for future development within the three cities (highlight parcels):

Vadnais Heights

Site A: Vacant site in the southwest quadrant at 35E and County Road E (12-acre parcel)

Site B: Vacant site in the northeast quadrant at 35E and County Road E (44-acre parcel)

Gem Lake

Site C: Parcel east of Daniels Farm Road and north of County Road E (18-acres)

Site D: South of County Road E and west of Highway 61 along Hoffman Road (12-acres)

White Bear Lake

Site E: Four corners at the intersection of Bellaire and County Road E (the northeast corner site is owned by the City of White Bear Lake)





Vadnais Heights opportunity site in the southwest quadrant at 35E and County Road E

Some of the key themes that emerged through the community engagement process include:

1. Explore ways to create an overall identity and sense of place throughout the corridor to encourage travelers to frequent local shops and businesses
2. Strong desire for more comfortable, safer crossings of County Road E along the corridor at both signalized crossings and unsignalized crossings to serve people of all ages and abilities
 - concern about pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile safety at the County Road E crossing of Highway 61 and the barrier this highway poses to travelers along the corridor, and in general to the community (especially in regard to crossings near schools)
3. Implement traffic calming measures to:
 - Improve safety
 - Reduce the speed of traffic that is in excess of the speed limit
 - Reduce the perception of the corridor as a drive-through area
 - Guard against shifting traffic to adjoining neighborhood streets
 - Acknowledge the lack of lane continuity issues east and west of Highway 61
4. Support for continuous connections and enhancements to the active transportation network along the corridor that promote walkability, safety, livability, and pedestrian and bicycle access
 - Build public/private partnerships to enhance walkability, both within larger parcels or districts, and to connect with other areas nearby (especially when new development occurs)
 - Improve lighting
5. Residential development
 - A mix of housing formats that meets the needs of the community including affordability, ADA accessible housing, housing for seniors, people who work in the area, and younger households
 - On large sites, a mix of housing types is preferred on the same site



Coffee/ice cream shop in White Bear Lake at County Rd E and Bellaire Ave

6. Commercial development

- Where feasible, retail businesses are desired to support community needs for goods and services, as well as “experience retail” destinations such as restaurants, bars and cafes
- Additional restaurant options are a particular interest
- Although it is understood that local businesses can’t always afford new construction rents, there is support for providing retail space for unique local businesses
- On compatible larger sites, there would be support for a pedestrian-oriented, storefront-style retail element

7. Mixed use development

- On larger sites a mix of land uses would be supported or preferred if feasible—such as a mix of residential and retail, or of residential and industrial
- Horizontal mixed-use (adjacent uses) verses vertical mixed-use (stacked) development is preferred by developers due to financing and property management challenges

8. Site anchors

- On well-located larger sites, there is support for anchoring the new development with a placemaking element (i.e., an outdoor plaza or park which might include walkable amenity retail and some activated outdoor space that could include patio seating for restaurants other engaging features, and programmed activities or events, or a community center)
- Consider ways to create community within a larger site, enhancing the area as a destination and/or improved walkability
- In locations with wetlands, respect those as site constraints by not encroaching on them and leverage them as natural assets that can be enhanced for neighboring development

9. Compatibility

- In locations with neighboring single dwelling homes, site development closest to those homes should be at a compatible scale and provide high quality landscaping or other buffering



Retail destination center at County Rd E & Hwy 120

- 10 Family friendly gathering places that help to foster a sense of community
 - Create destinations that preserve the small town feel and connectedness within the community
 - More green space and connections with planned amenities such as the Bruce Vento Trail
11. A mix of residential and commercial uses that enhance the vitality and market strength of the area
 - Incorporate design features to buffer smaller scale uses from larger scale uses (e.g., open space, setbacks, tiered buildings, etc.)
12. Industrial buildings that serve businesses that want to be closer to the metro
 - Potential for additional well-paying jobs in the area
13. The partner cities and county to coordinate efforts to attract private and public investments that will benefit the broader community
 - Offer public resources to achieve community goals (e.g., revolving loan funds, tax increment financing, down-payment assistance, environmental clean-up, etc.)



White Bear Lake High School located just south of County Rd E (transitioning to middle school, fall 2024)

EXPLORING DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

Community members participated in three different interactive block exercise to explore different development options for sites in each of the three cities. The scenarios were run through a financial tool to assess their financial viability. Through the exercise participants gained a greater understanding about the tradeoffs that developers face to create a viable project. They also heard from a panel of developers and specialists in place-making. They received feedback on their initial development thoughts, recommendation for consideration going forward, and strong support for continuing the process.

Based on the input from the community workshops, the following recommendations are proposed for the County Road E Corridor Action Plan:

OBJECTIVE: CREATE A COHESIVE THEME AND OVERALL SENSE OF PLACE FOR THE CORRIDOR

- 1. Pursue corridor improvements** that meet multiple objectives, including slowing traffic, improving safety, supporting bike and pedestrian movement, building a cohesive and attractive corridor identity, and improving the area to attract high quality housing and business development
- 2. Attract high quality development** to the identified opportunity sites, which enhance the community by providing additional housing and local business options, and special places and amenities
- 3. Address the east/west divide of Highway 61** by reconfiguring the intersection of County Road E and Highway 61 transforming the barrier into an asset and community gateway that enhances safety, connectivity and placemaking at the County Road E node

These goals will be pursued through the following strategies:



TCO Sports Garden located in Vadnais Heights

Near Term Strategies

Fostering a sense of place and purpose

1. Form a coalition among the three cities (similar to the Rice Larpenteur Alliance) to pursue these recommendations
2. Initiate a working group to build out programmed events and activities that give character or personality to the County Road E corridor
3. Work with developers to incorporate privately owned public spaces into larger project sites
4. Coordinate streetscape elements (e.g., trees, banners, street light designs, flower planters or baskets, etc.) to signify connectivity and individuality among the cities
5. Create family friendly programming and events in each of the three cities along County Road E corridor
6. Align zoning regulations in each community to match their comprehensive plans and accomplish these recommendations
7. Continue to engage community members to inform and strengthen the County Road E Corridor action plan (especially those who were not able to participate in this series of workshops)

Safety – Coordination with Ramsey County and/or MnDOT to study and address potential safety issues along the corridor and consider the traffic calming tool kit

1. Participate in the new planning process for the Ramsey County Multimodal Transportation Plan which should soon be linked [here](#), to communicate the goals set forward in these recommendations and inform decisions surrounding the future of transportation in Ramsey County
2. Compare County Road E safety history with similar roads and gather information on actions cities have taken to address safety issues



County Road E at Highway 61 is not comfortable for people walking, rolling and biking.

3. Complete a speed study at select locations along County Road E to learn the current speeds, trends, and other strategies from the traffic calming tool kit based on study results
4. Identify, study and implement temporary or demonstration projects at select locations along County Road E for crossing improvements to provide pedestrian refuges, two stage crossings, and reduce exposure of pedestrians to motor vehicle traffic when crossing the street
5. Consider implementing flexible delineators to tighten curb radius to slow turning motorists and reduce exposure of pedestrians to motor vehicle traffic when crossing the street
6. Begin discussions with MnDOT to address safety concerns and potential improvements at the intersection at County Road E and Highway 61 – specifically addressing the potential to modify or remove the channelized right turn lanes, long pedestrian crossings, intersection pedestrian connections and traffic signal operation
7. Consider the implementation of Flashing Yellow Arrow Left-turn Arrows at signalized intersections where appropriate
8. Add pedestrian countdown timers to the signalized intersections of County Road E at Highway 61, Linden Avenue and Century Avenue/120
9. Stripe all crosswalks at signalized intersections and mid-block crossings with international markings (zebra markings)
10. Conduct an ADA walk audit to identify opportunities to improve accessibility along and crossing of County Road E
11. Review existing photometrics and recommend lighting improvements where necessary to improve safety and comfort for all travelers

Connectivity – Strengthen and promote convenient, comfortable and safe walking, rolling and biking along, across and near the corridor

1. Consider ways that development guidelines can include traffic calming measures (e.g., reducing setbacks)
2. Add projects to capital planning to address gaps in the existing sidewalk and trail network to facilitate



The Barnum located on County Rd E in White Bear Lake

- movement along the corridor and to desired destinations within the corridor
- 3. Apply for grants such as Regional Solicitation, Highway Safety Improvement Project, Safe Routes to School, Safe Streets 4 All and RAISE Grants
- 4. Find opportunities to pair trail gap projects with current projects to begin filling existing gaps
- 5. Work with existing property owners to add on-site pedestrian facilities to connect within the site and to the public sidewalks and trails through striping or small sidewalk projects to encourage park once opportunities

Development Sites

- 1. Market the development opportunities
 - a. Create a marketing plan for the County Road E corridor that showcases local amenities and market features, and identifies key opportunity sites for investment
 - b. Create site-specific informational materials for each site that include an area map, a site map with neighboring land uses and known site constraints, and development objectives
 - c. Pursue a range of approaches to making developers aware of the development opportunities along the County Road E corridor, as well as the specific development opportunity sites
- 2. Create site-specific development objectives for each site which respond to the unique characteristics of each site and are informed by the community and developer input from this process and community planning best practices
 - a. Promote site designs that support active transportation goals of the community
 - b. At each site, review opportunities to transform barriers – such as Highway 61, Transit, Regional Trails, Wetlands – into assets for the site, including enhanced greenspace, water features, and improved connectivity opportunities for roadways, transit and trails
 - c. Encourage and promote shared parking practices between adjacent developments. Balance parking requirements and development demands to avoid building excessive amounts of surface parking



Electric vehicle charging stations provide customers with more sustainable options to access local businesses.

- d. Include on-site bike racks for customers and secure (indoor/locked) bike parking for employees and renters/owners
 - e. Consider future on-site shared and regulated mobility options such as bike share, scooter share and car share
 - f. Consider mini-roundabouts that facilitate traffic interior to development sites
 - g. Integrate electric vehicle charging stations into sites
 - h. Integrate sidewalks and bicycle paths throughout new developments and connections to public trails and sidewalks
 - i. Include lighting, art and landscaping elements that support unique programming and placemaking to enhance the viability of long-term neighborhood destinations for the surrounding community
 - j. Promote on-site landscaping that utilizes Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) treatments to effectively integrate water quality improvements while aesthetically connecting the natural environment with its community
 - k. Consider options such as community land trusts for long term affordability for commercial or homeownership
 - l. “Swapping uses”: Work with businesses to right-size their locations (e.g., relocate businesses from low- occupancy strip malls to other sites, repurpose strip malls)
 - m. Explore mixed-use options that include industrial uses that help to locate services closer to the metro (job opportunities)
 - n. Promote the Shafer Richardson Phase 2 out-lot as a space to support access to the Vento trail and biking
3. For sites with special redevelopment challenges related to site conditions, size constraints, etc, consider additional implementation related research that explores additional public sector actions which can position sites for high quality redevelopment



Median treatment to facilitate two-stage crossing and provide pedestrian refuge on a four-to-three lane conversion of Maryland Avenue at Greenbriar Street in Saint Paul, MN.

Medium Term Strategies

Fostering a sense of place and purpose

1. Sustain placemaking activities and events through local organizations and business associations
2. Strengthen landscaping efforts through small grant programs or collaborations with local nurseries
3. Partner with local schools to engage youth with community-service projects
4. Consider conducting market studies for residential and commercial needs

Safety – Coordination with Ramsey County and/or MnDOT to address more permanently the areas of the greatest safety need along the corridor as an interim measure prior to reconstruction

1. Build on the Ramsey County Multimodal Transportation Plan study to understand existing and future conditions to identify feasible improvement opportunities for all modes of travel
 - a. Study to include safety, future growth, active transportation facilities, lane and corridor geometry, signal timings, public engagement and corridor visioning
2. Provide enhanced crossings of County Road E at key locations based on best practices as defined by Ramsey County Crossing Policy, [Minnesota's Best Practices for Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety](#) and [FHWA Guide for Improving Pedestrian Safety at Uncontrolled Crossing Locations](#) such as but not limited to:
 - a. Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons
 - b. High Visibility Marked Crosswalks – International Markings
 - c. Medians
 - d. Curb Extensions
 - e. Street lighting

3. Consider the full range of traffic calming techniques along the corridor (e.g., roadway narrowing with striping to physical treatments such as medians and curb extensions)
4. Implement multimodal safety improvements at the intersection of County Road E and Highway 61 and address lane needs based on review of current signal operations

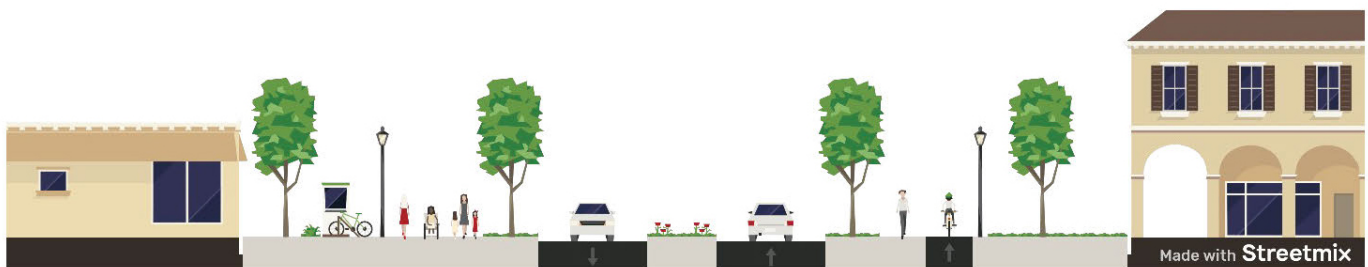
Long Term Strategies

Fostering a sense of place and purpose

1. Engage the businesses to identify opportunities for joint marketing and promotions
2. Assess the impact of programming activities and events and make adjustments as needed

Safety – Coordination with Ramsey County and/or MnDOT to plan for major improvements as part of their capital planning processes

1. Based on results of the corridor study completed during the medium term, transform County Road E into an All-Abilities Street that includes:
 - a. The appropriate number and width of motor vehicle travel lanes based on anticipated growth – initial review suggests this results in similar lane arrangement to existing
 - b. Continuous shared-use paths along both sides to provide low-stress mobility along the corridor for people of all ages and abilities to comfortably walk, roll and bicycle
 - c. Pedestrian scale lighting for personal safety and comfort along shared-use path
 - d. Tree-lined boulevards between the path and street utilizing Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) treatments to provide shade for shared use path, stormwater treatment and reduce heat island effect
 - e. Medians at locations where possible to provide opportunities for people to cross one direction of travel at a time with space for refuge, additional areas for landscaping and GSI treatments and traffic calming
 - f. Enhanced streetscaping to create corridor identity with unique and cohesive gateway elements for partner communities along County Road E



Complete street concept for County Road E – three lane cross section with center left-turn lane and medians between intersections east of Highway 61.

g. Enhanced crossing treatments at key unsignalized crossings based on best practices as defined by Ramsey County Crossing Policy, Minnesota’s Best Practices for Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and FHWA Guide for Improving Pedestrian Safety at Uncontrolled Crossing Locations, including but not limited to consideration of (as identified in medium term strategies - Safety #2):

- a. Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons
- b. High Visibility Marked Crosswalks – International Markings
- c. Medians
- d. Curb Extensions
- e. Street lighting

2. Reconfigure the intersection of County Road E and Highway 61 transforming the barrier into an asset and community gateway that enhances safety, connectivity and placemaking at the County Road E node