



# *White Bear Lake*

Economic  
Development  
Corporation

## **MAY 2018 PRESS RELEASE RE: County Road E Corridor History (including Bellaire Ave.)**

The White Bear Lake Economic Development Corporation was created to serve in an independent advisory capacity to the City of White Bear Lake regarding economic development. Members are local citizens and business owners who **volunteer** their time and expertise.

The WBLEDC formed a County Road E subcommittee in 2014 to address the commercial property at and near the intersection of County Road E & Bellaire Ave. The community, residents and area businesses had expressed concern about the vacant properties projecting a poor image of our City.

The committee reached out to property owners, potential owners and tenants to start that conversation. On June 24, 2014 a meeting was held with City Staff and property owners/tenants at or near County Road E & Bellaire Ave.

The purpose of the meeting was to gather information and learn more about intentions and visions for the properties in the commercial zone and was intended to generate ideas and help identify strategies to bridge the gap between the present reality and future opportunities. The commercial real estate market was beginning to heat up and we desired to be part of a proactive conversation in what role we can play in helping achieve redevelopment of these sites. We were interested in learning from them what would be most beneficial to stimulate redevelopment. Participation by owners/tenants at 3 corners, the EDC & City staff made it a productive conversation.

In 2015, the scope of the committee broadened to the entire County Road E corridor with a focus on how to attract new investment and maintain/increase home values in the south White Bear Lake area. This is a highly mixed residential and commercial corridor.

During 2016 we hosted three meetings:

- April – we met with businesses on County Road E, interested residents and city representatives for input and reflections of the status & future needs along the corridor.
- July – we invited new businesses and newer residents to talk about what attracted them to invest in the area.
- October – commercial and residential realtors attended to discuss what potential businesses and residents were saying about the area.

Some of the themes we repeatedly heard include:

- Introducing improved signage to direct residents and visitors to community amenities throughout the area.
- Continuing conversation with development industry representatives about redevelopment of underutilized properties.
- Maintaining/increasing home values and population in south White Bear Lake to draw business to this area.
- Beautification and exploring the rebranding of the County Road E corridor.

The WBLEDC made a presentation to the WBL City Council on 3/14/17 about the information from the focus groups. In April 2017, focus group attendees were invited to be a part of the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan Open House.

In August of 2017, the subcommittee toured redevelopment sites in similar communities.

There have been a number of revitalization efforts along County Road E over the last few years including, White Bear Animal Hospital, Tumble Fresh, Northeast Residence, Bruggeman Bldg. (formerly Allina) and improvements to local shopping centers. Retail market analyses to identify potential development have been ongoing.

### **A brief history & facts about County Road E & Bellaire Avenue intersection:**

Most of the sites developed in the late 1960's when the gas stations were much different than they are today, serving what was a very different market. The gas stations remained viable throughout the 80's and 90's. However, as that gas station

model shifted, the businesses struggled to remain competitive.

- The northeast site has been vacant for 8 years.
- The northwest site has been vacant for approx. 14 years when Super America decided to locate their business to the Sunrise Shopping Center and established deed restrictions prohibiting another gas station from reoccupying the space.
- The southeast site has been vacant for 8 years.
- The southwest site became a dry cleaner/landscape business in 2000. The property was put on the market in late 2017.
- The sites range from 0.48 acres to 0.74 acres which present unique challenges.

Locally owned ventures have showed interest in the sites, however have not had the financial capacity to acquire, renovate or rebuild on any of these sites. National retailers have not expressed interest in these sites. Not one site redevelopment has materialized in last 10 years at the intersection.

In the fall of 2016, a "Substandard Building Analysis" was completed by LHB Architects, commissioned by the City of White Bear Lake. The study found that all 5 buildings on the corner (including 2 on the SW corner) were deemed to be "structurally substandard" meaning the cost to bring it into compliance with current code exceeds 15% of the cost of new construction (a threshold established by State statute) of a similar sized replacement building.

The City, through its Housing and Redevelopment Authority, purchased the northeast site in 2016. The price was so low, and the private market had little interest in the site besides reopening the property as a gas station. The City feared if the property were to reopen as a gas station, any future reinvestment opportunity in the rest of the intersection could be prolonged. There were no plans to use the property for public use, but to make the site more attractive for future private development. The site cleanup was complete, tanks removed, and the building torn down in hopes of making the site more attractive for future development.

In 2016, Auto Owners Insurance, located just east of the intersection of County Road E and Bellaire Avenue, announced they would be moving their 100+ employees to Lake Elmo, citing the need for more space and concern with the condition of the properties at the neighboring intersection. In 2017 Northeast Residence purchased the building to serve as their administration office and expanded adult day care operations.

The EDC looks forward to learning about and discussing potential commercial and residential opportunities along the corridor to maintain a vital business and residential community. We are most thankful to be a part of a close-knit and engaged community. Working with businesses, schools, residents and the city of WBL we will continue to be a dynamic and economically thriving place to live, work and play.

If anyone has questions about the redevelopment process, please contact Anne Kane, Community Development Director, City of White Bear Lake, at 651-429-8562 or [akane@whitebearlake.org](mailto:akane@whitebearlake.org).

Respectfully submitted,

Carol McFarlane

President, White Bear Lake Economic Development Corporation & Co-Chair, County Road E Subcommittee

E:mail: [wbledc@whitebearlake.org](mailto:wbledc@whitebearlake.org)

*The mission of the WBLEDC is:*

*Change is inevitable as infrastructure and residential and commercial development age and the White Bear Lake Community transitions through an aging and diversifying population. The White Bear Lake Economic Development Corporation was created in 2011 to:*

- *Champion economic development, stabilization and transition to future trends for White Bear Lake*
- *Coordinate private industry and commerce, local government and community needs in order to develop a vibrant economy that enhances community well-being, stability, and services.*