

SAVAGE Pacer



Parking lot mixes function, flair

By Nancy Huddleston, Editor

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A concept plan drawn up by URS shows how the town square parking lot could be fixed up to provide parking and a place for the old Savage Depot.

A concept plan to upgrade the town square parking lot is designed to create an inviting urban space with function and flair. The function: 92 parking spots that are needed as the downtown area redevelops. The flair: a small corner of the lot to site the old Savage Depot.

Todd Halunem of URS designed the town square parking lot and detailed that plan for the Savage City Council on Monday night (April 18). The design plays upon many of the themes of the Hamilton Redevelopment plan, which Halunem also worked on

seven years ago.

The depot would be situated on the southeast corner of the lot and include green space, a gazebo, a place for a sculpture and a walking path that emulates the shape of the oval of Dan Patch's race track.

City Councilwoman Janet Williams said the plan looks good and addresses the parking issues in downtown and the sense of place needed in the community.

"I particularly appreciate your use of the word 'vibrant' in describing this project because there are lots of things going on down there," she said, "It may not look nice, but there's lots going on that people don't even realize."

The concept plan aims to upgrade the look of the town square lot with plenty of landscaping and other features, such as special street lights and planting areas.

Since the parking lot is located between Highway 13 and 123rd Street, Halunem built in green space along the northern edge of the lot to help buffer the town square lot from the highway. There would be a small retaining wall on the northern edge to elevate the lot slightly from the highway and that edge would be heavily landscaped.

"This would help create a separation from the highway to downtown," Halunem explained. And although the buffer would not block the highway noise, it would create a visual barrier, he said.

The other three sides of the parking lot are also heavily landscaped and incorporate the streetscape elements already present along 123rd Street into the overall design.

Other changes

Besides the parking lot upgrade, the concept plan lays out some possible street adjustments to the area – most notably to a portion of Ottawa Avenue.

The idea is to vacate Ottawa Avenue from Highway 13 to 123rd Street. That would allow for more parking spaces to be created and open up the possibility for El Loro, which is located to the east, to expand and make an outdoor eating area.

City Administrator Barry Stock cautioned the council not to get “too hung up” on the changes to Ottawa Avenue at this point. “This is not a foregone conclusion – in fact we can leave it off if you want and provide off-street parking in that area,” he said.

He urged the council to weigh the pros and cons of that part of the concept plan, asking them what they wanted – more parking or a greater sense of place.

Another street change proposed in the town square plan is to the access at Princeton Avenue from full turning in both directions to only right-turn motion both in and out from Highway 13.

Stock said any street changes in the area would need to be discussed with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). The hope is that MnDOT will allow a signalized intersection at Quentin Avenue, which would help with traffic flow in and out of the town square area.

Savage Depot

Bringing the Savage Depot back to town from its current location at Murphy’s Landing in Shakopee has been talked about during visioning meetings and at city council work sessions.

Will Williams of the Dan Patch Historical Society said the organization is financially committed to bringing the depot back, but wanted some assurances from the city council.

“There are a lot of reasons to do it, such as the history of place,” Williams said.

What’s more, once back in Savage, the depot could be used as a focus for the city’s history – from Dan Patch’s oval race track and ornate barn located across the highway from the town square lot, to the significance of the railroad itself to the city’s heritage.

Williams said the society is concerned that anything less than the original would not convey the same message. “We’re not interested in replicas or anything like that,” he said, “The idea isn’t to take an 1880 building and make it modern; we want to preserve it. The cost to the city will be minimal.”

Stock said the council has discussed having a proforma completed on the building to find out exactly what needs to be done to bring it up to code.

City Councilman Craig Chamberlain said the city needs to do its due diligence on the depot relocation, noting the city cannot exclude it from code just because it’s a historical building.

But Williams said the council could pass an ordinance specifically for historical buildings. What's more, he pointed out, the depot has been open to the public at Murphy's Landing village for years, so it is functioning right now and may not be as bad off as the building inspector has made it out to be.

Chamberlain said he's not trying to be a "wet blanket" against the depot relocation; rather, he's trying to look at the project realistically.

Councilman Kevin Lienau said if the depot is going to be used, it would need some upgrades. For instance, there has been talk about turning it into a coffee shop, which would require some building modifications.

"That's why we do a proforma, to come to a conclusion about the end use of a structure," he said. "To have it here as a building is one thing; but having it here as a building that functions is something different."

Williams said he understands the city council's concerns, but also said the historical society needs some sort of formal action approval to bring the depot back to town.

The depot needs to be moved from Murphy's Landing by 2006, so Chamberlain suggested the city take that deadline and work backward on the town square lot upgrade.

To that end, the city council approved a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to solicit engineering services to complete final plans and specifications for the town square lot. Project bidding would take about 60 days and construction on the parking lot upgrades could start in September.

The rough estimate to upgrade the parking lot is \$350,000. The 2005 Capital Improvement Project (CIP) budget has set aside \$500,000 for the project.

The council also passed a motion supporting the Dan Patch Historical Society's efforts to move the depot back to the city.

Other issues

In conjunction with the concept plan for the town square lot, Halunem also took a look at other transportation functions in the downtown area.

At issue is the different kinds of traffic for downtown, which includes motorists who want to get to a specific downtown location and others who just want to get onto Highway 13 on their way to work or other nearby cities.

Halunem's plan shows Quentin Avenue and a new north/south street that starts in Burnsville at Chowen Avenue and winds up to the County Road 16/Glenhurst intersection. These routes could be used by local traffic and pass-through traffic.

The lynch pin to these upgrades is upgrading the railroad bridges that go over Lynn and Quentin avenues, which are very expensive projects.

Stock said the Quentin Avenue bridge upgrade is the first priority. The idea to build a new road from Chowen to Glendale is more complicated, as it would involve working with Burnsville, Scott and Dakota counties and the railroad.

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Anyone who is interested in helping to fund the Dan Patch Historical Society's efforts to bring the old Savage Depot back to Savage can go to the society's Web site at www.danpatch.com, where they can make a donation online or learn about where to send in donations via U.S. mail.