

and community goals. It also establishes clear channels of communication among residents, businesses, and potential developers. The goal is to spark community conversations that explore “a whole menu of options for each site that responds to the communities’ values and needs,” Nicholls explains. “Before a developer submits a proposal to the City, the community and City work together to set the stage for redevelopment, informed by the market realities of what’s possible.” By knowing what the City and community want, developers can better assess the likelihood of success, assuring that the work won’t be stalled or cancelled by lawsuits, protests, and other community opposition.

An innovative element of the CDI approach is the block exercise—in which people study a three-dimensional model of the development site and then use blocks representing housing units or commercial space to offer their own scenarios for what could be built. Participants are encouraged to be mindful of economic realities affecting development projects and to consider ways to leverage community values, such as green space, mixed uses, and site lines. For example, property values of land near a rail stop typically are too high to make building single family homes feasible. Nicholls notes that the CDI block exercise has proven valuable in community discussions about development in both urban and suburban communities.



Site for the Beltline Boulevard light rail station

Meg McMonigal, planning and zoning supervisor for St. Louis Park, says, “The CDI process can help us determine realistic possibilities for redevelopment, and possibly plan for a signature project in the station area.” Over the next six months, an advisory committee of residents, businesses, and property owners will discuss how to better connect the Beltline LRT station area to the commercial district on Excelsior Boulevard; how to prioritize biking and pedestrian access to the station; and how potential redesign of some of the roadways could better serve the area around the station.

At the west end of the line in Eden Prairie, the light rail stop planned for Eden Prairie Town Center provides a chance to better serve immigrant communities, small businesses, and the community’s own aims to create a walkable community with more locally owned businesses and a downtown feel, says Eden Prairie Community Development Director Janet Jeremiah. “We like the LISC CDI process,” she says. “It will help us in locating the best site for the station and involve the community more. We’ve already heard a lot from our Somali new Americans who are interested in entrepreneurial possibilities.”

At the east end of the Green Line in St. Paul, the CDI process is getting underway around the Capitol/Rice Street station with a focus on the former Saxon Ford site on the North side of University Avenue. Cecile Bedor, St. Paul’s director of planning and economic development, sees the CDI community engagement process as critical to developing the site in a way that will serve the whole neighborhood. “We want to make sure this becomes a place for everyone in the community,” she stresses. “We want to create a place and not just a project. But the city can only do so much. We need the private market to step up and make a difference.”

Jay Walljasper specializes in writing about cities, travel, and social issues. He is author of The Great Neighborhood Book and All That We Share: A Field Guide to the Commons, and is editor of www.OnTheCommons.org. His website: www.JayWalljasper.com.