

The CDI way: Helping communities plan better development

More and more communities in the region are discovering how Twin Cities LISC’s proactive planning process—called the [Corridor Development Initiative](#)—can reduce costs, overall planning time, and the number of public hearing conflicts for major development projects. It also ensures that the community’s voice is heard before key decisions are made.

As anyone who’s been involved can testify, big development proposals can be difficult, contentious, and take forever to get through public approval channels. The Corridor Development Initiative (CDI) offers planners, citizens, and developers a better way, by fundamentally changing the way communities approach development opportunities.

Early public input speeds process

CDI is designed as an interactive process that can be customized to serve a variety of needs. Typically it’s used to engage a community around a project area that has potential development waiting in the wings. In this format, CDI brings together all the interested parties—governing agencies, developers, neighborhood residents, and other interested parties—right at the beginning. They all participate in a hands-on planning process that helps everyone understand the market realities that face a particular development site—before any proposal is submitted to a governing agency. The process yields a set of recommendations to developers and city officials that shape a better development proposal.

As a result, proposals move more efficiently through the public review system. Neighborhoods have the chance to make sure proposed projects meet their community vision, and developers reduce the amount of time between making a proposal and breaking ground. As one developer put it, “What would have taken two years was done in four months.”

CDI has also been used as a mini-workshop for elected and appointed officials to explore development options on key sites, or to get community input for an RFP to guide development on a publicly owned parcel. Some of the many communities that have used the CDI process include Minnetonka, Fridley, Coon Rapids, Brooklyn Park, and multiple neighborhoods in the Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Recently CDI assisted the City of Richfield to engage the community around a priority redevelopment site: The Lyndale Garden Center.



What to do now? Redeveloping the Lyndale Garden Center site

It's been five years since the giant Lyndale Garden Center closed in Richfield, but finally this crumbling vacant lot has excited a new redevelopment vision driven by not only the City of Richfield and the real estate developer who's purchasing the property, but by neighborhood residents and open space protection advocates.

The Cornerstone Group, the real estate company that will redevelop the site, enlisted CDI and Embrace Open Space, an open space advocacy collaborative, to facilitate a series of community workshops to explore what's possible.

Over the summer, participants gathered for three workshops. First, they explored the wide range of options for redeveloping the site, which could be a major asset for the neighborhood. Next, with experts on hand to offer ideas and insights, they created design scenarios for the site. Lastly, they framed a set of recommendations to the Cornerstone Group and city officials.



Right now, it's envisioned that the property will be mixed use and include commercial, retail, and community spaces as well as housing. The idea is to create a "town center" for Richfield. Among the things being talked about for the community space portion are: a gateway to Richfield Lake, linkages to 35W BRT station area and bus transit, a gazebo or outside amphitheater for public events and gatherings, and indoor park/recreation spaces as part of a community conservatory.

Few people know that the site is right in front of the difficult-to-access Richfield Lake, which has a new paved walking path around it. The redevelopment would make that lake easier to reach and would also hopefully link via a bike path to the nearby Wood Lake Nature Center.

"We want to tie in the whole idea of active living," said Cornerstone President Colleen Carey. "Our plan is to use this as a place for people to live and play and shop and gather." CDI helped to connect the developer's vision with community values, under the frame of financial viability. "People want something good to happen here, and now they see a pathway for that to happen. That's the value of CDI," Says Gretchen Nicholls, program officer at Twin Cities LISC.

Here's more information about the [Richfield /Lyndale Garden Center site CDI process and final recommendations](#). For more information about the [Corridor Development Initiative](#), contact [Gretchen Nicholls](mailto:Gretchen.Nicholls@lisc.org) at 651-265-2280 or gnicholls@lisc.org.

Photos of the CDI Lyndale Garden Center site planning workshops in summer 2011: Katie Thering Berger