

**City of Wayzata
Lakefront Improvement Taskforce
Final Report – January 2012**

Introduction:

Perseverance: the power of persistence in pursuit of an objective.

For the past thirty years, various public and private campaigns have persevered to showcase our city's greatest asset, Lake Minnetonka. Although a number of private citizens and city-led groups have researched various options for Wayzata's lakefront, no definitive city plan has ever materialized. In fact, all of these efforts failed because they could not demonstrate agreement and acceptance of an objective. In February of 2011, a new Lakefront Taskforce was chartered by the city council charged **not** to identify or develop a plan confined to bricks and mortar, but rather initiate a process that would embrace and be embraced by the community. The recommendations in this report will urge the City to engage in a well-defined community planning and visioning process, which gathers the input from residents, business owners, and other governmental jurisdictions which all have a stake in our community's lakefront. **To date, the Taskforce efforts have focused on developing a process, not recommending a specific project.** The purpose of this taskforce report is to provide residents and City policymakers with an analysis of the lessons learned from our due diligence efforts and recommendations on how to develop a meaningful community planning process to set the future direction of the City's lakefront improvement efforts for the next decade.

Perseverance by its very persistent nature is a process and when coupled by the objective of seeking and validating input from residents, business owners, and stakeholders, we are certain to see our city prosper behind a plan that will serve our great community and region for future generations.

Executive Summary:

Neighboring cities' economic developments over the last decade, plus the financial crisis of 2008-2009 have taken visitors and businesses away from Wayzata. The city faces a challenging operating environment as commercial and property tax revenue declines while costs continue to climb.

Our lakefront is the city's crown jewel and it has a lot of untapped potential. Current access is fairly limited with no bike trail lakeside, very limited public dock availability, and pedestrian and recreational use area is sparse. The permanent presence of a running railroad also demands us to fortify safety measures and balance the need for lakefront access.

Several historical assets along the lakefront are also under-utilized. New technologies for environmental lakeshore management and city rainwater discharge have revealed new innovations that can be adopted to make us better stewards of our nature and environment.

When planned and implemented properly, the lakefront will become a driver of visitor and economic growth that will help local businesses prosper. In turn that will enhance the city's tax revenue base. It may also stabilize/enhance property values and draw families to Wayzata that improve our quality of life.

As we have learned from other successful city initiatives in Minnesota, it is critical to engage different stakeholders early on to define the vision and project elements together. With a seamless approach and community engagement, we are more likely to be able to create a ten year development plan for the lakefront that will forever define its legacy for current and future generations. There are also many opportunities to tie into and align with regional and state initiatives that could provide additional funding for mutual benefits. Therefore, we recommend the city to invest in a community engagement and planning process now to kick off an important economic development milestone and begin grant writing to secure other potential financial resources.

Timing is critical as additional funding sources from the stakeholders exist now. All of the financial resources that have been identified have an expiration date, and more importantly, other cities are vying for the same funds. The better prepared we are and the sooner we act, the more likely the city can leverage these financial resources to implement the elements the community desires.

Lakefront Task Force Formation:

In February of 2011, the City Council commissioned a ten member taskforce to study the issue of lakefront improvements. The purpose of the Wayzata Lakefront Taskforce was to conduct due diligence on the various opportunities and challenges that are associated with maximizing the City’s lakefront asset. The taskforce made a conscious decision early on in their research to focus on learning as much as possible from the various governmental jurisdictions and other community stakeholders which have an impact on lakefront improvements, rather than create a specific “Project” for the City.

Task Force members include:

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|------------------|----------------|
| Bridget Anderson | Casey Rosen |
| Bryan Gadow | Jay Soule |
| Terri Huml | Sue Sorrentino |
| Andrew Mullin | Tom Tanner |
| John Nolan | Clement Wong |

Taskforce Mission Statement:

Consistently through history and still true today, whether walking, boating, driving, biking or picnicking, community members and visitors love to be near or on the lake. **The Wayzata Lakefront Task Force will be an advocate for the City of Wayzata and its lakefront, uniting its importance with the region’s character and vitality. We will develop and recommend a community planning process to engage, facilitate and communicate with residents, businesses, public and private partners to define a shared vision. Together as partners, we will commit leadership and resources to achieving this vision.**

Task Force Vision Statement:

- **We will create a vibrant, livable community with a healthy ecosystem for both people and nature that will provide exceptional lakefront parks and trails, along with an emphasis on history and culture.**
- **We will work as stewards to enhance, protect, and leverage the community’s significant lakefront amenities for future generations.**

Areas of Focus:

History has forever shaped our landscape and culture and has left our city with unrivaled amenities and challenges alike. The railroad that has separated our city from the waterfront is also the very thing that has preserved it for generations. The tension to balance our role as a regional attraction and maintain a home town charm has existed since our founding and will continue for years to come. With these thoughts in mind, the Lakefront Task Force identified three areas of focus that are in alignment with the mission and vision of the task force as well as Wayzata's Comprehensive Plan. These areas guided the parameters for the planning process overview.

3 Areas of Focus for Lakefront:

- *Access & Safety*
- *Environmental & Historical Stewardship*
- *Economic Development*

Issue Analysis:

1. Access & Safety

- *Railroad Crossings*
- *Creating more access to the lake*

Situation

Wayzata remains separated from Lake Minnetonka by an active Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line with regular traffic of approximately six freight trains per day. The railroad is at grade and there are several grade level crossings for pedestrians, raising safety concerns both for the City and the BNSF. The rail bed is slightly elevated and cuts off views of the lakefront from different community vantage points. Because there is little distance between the street and the water's edge, there are limits to commercial development in this area. For all of these reasons, Wayzata is currently unable to take full advantage of its most important natural asset. Wayzata's lakefront access challenges are not unique. There are abundant examples of cities in the US and around the world where highways and railroad tracks have made it much more difficult to reconnect cities with their waterfronts. Today's diversified waterfronts must accommodate the competing, often conflicting demands of a much broader range of constituencies from private property owners, developers, preservationists, conservationists, bicyclists, and tourists. Several that are relevant to Wayzata include:

- The City of Edina's partnership with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) for the revitalization of the Nine Mile Creek area.
- The City of Milwaukee's utilization of cultural amenities, such as the Museum of Art, as focal point of attracting people to the lakefront along Lake Michigan.
- The City of Minneapolis' recent international design competition to reimagine the waterfront along the Mississippi River.
- The City of Duluth's waterfront and canal park development projects.

Opportunity

Wayzata stands to leverage its most important natural asset, the lakefront, by enhancing connections between downtown Wayzata and the water's edge. To do so it will be important to separate the ideas of "visual accessibility" and "physical accessibility" and then concentrate on strategies to improve

both types of accessibility.

To enhance the visual experience of the lakefront will require a plan that incorporates a handful of urban design techniques to create discrete viewing areas along the lakefront, allowing for a better visual connection to the water. Important improvements would include better designed pedestrian crossings. The goal of any community driven plan will be to increase visual accessibility for those walking along the lakefront, while also improving physical accessibility to the water's edge.

2. *Environmental & Historical Stewardship:*

- *Better utilization of historical assets*
- *Improved lakefront shoreline*
- *Storm water management*

Situation

Honoring and respecting Wayzata's heritage and history is a proud aspect of the city's quality of life. Several of Wayzata's historical assets are in great need of maintenance and preserving the city's heritage such as the Wayzata Great Northern Depot and the Section Foreman's House.

The conditions of environmental elements tied to Lake Minnetonka located in Wayzata have not kept up with the expectations of the 21st century. Stormwater ponds and shoreline riprap can be improved to better the environment quality of the lakefront.

Opportunity

With the potential funding from various identified resources and stakeholders, Wayzata can partner with the Wayzata Historical Society and the Wayzata Heritage Preservation Board to address the needs of each of these organizations.

As our city ages and our community continues to evolve, we have a responsibility to manage the balance of the demand for access to the lakefront. We have a responsibility to protect and enhance our greatest natural resource. In addition to fortifying and expanding safe access to the lakefront, new technologies for environmental lakeshore management and city rainwater discharge have revealed new innovations to help our environment. Furthermore, carefully planned and funded partnerships with targeted agencies would make our city a model for environmental stewardship. The shoreline along Wayzata's greatest asset could be further enhanced with new riprap material and improved stormwater ponds.

3. *Economic Development:*

- *Boosting tourism*
- *Creating a destination*
- *Attracting commercial businesses*

Situation

Like many cities, Wayzata is not immune from economic challenges. A vicious cycle occurs when monies are not available to produce attractions to draw tourists to town as people stop coming, and local businesses suffer. And what is the impact? Businesses can't make their rents and will be forced to close, leaving empty store fronts. Fewer stores and restaurants equal fewer attractions that

draw tourists and residents from surrounding communities. Our own residents will be forced to spend their entertainment dollars outside Wayzata. Without substantial pedestrian traffic, businesses aren't interested in trying their luck and setting up shop in Wayzata.

Opportunity

Our great city has always been a regional player in attracting visitors. Now more than ever during stressful economic times, our businesses need visitors. Neighboring communities to the north like Plymouth and Maple Grove have heated the competition within the marketplace by building and integrating large retail spaces throughout their community to persuade their residents to shop within city limits. Healthy cities must have healthy businesses, and Wayzata historically has attracted consumers outside of our city limits. This intense marketplace competition demands that we fortify our solvency as a regional “go to” destination. Our city’s marketplace is not only an image that comes to mind when one thinks of Wayzata, it is a vital part of our city’s financial infrastructure, and integral in supporting the local tax structure. Promoting and sustaining our city’s economic viability by welcoming visitors and effectively shaping their visit experience by offering safe and unique amenities is vital not only to visitors, but first and foremost to our own residents.

Lakefront Background & Assets:

Since the initial plating of our great city by Oscar Garrison in 1854, Wayzata and its citizens have been stewards of one of the region’s most prized resources; Lake Minnetonka. Wayzata serves as a gateway to the state’s ninth largest lake with over 120 miles of shoreline and nearly 15,000 acres of water. Because of its ease of access and unique location, Wayzata has historically hosted the regions greatest attractions, including the 160 foot *City of St Louis*, the first inland vessel in the United States to boast electric lighting. The construction of the Wayzata Depot in 1906 was arguably one of the finest railroad facilities in the entire Great Northern Rail system. Whether arriving by rail from distant destinations thousands of miles away until 1971 or commuting a mere thirteen miles from the center of downtown Minneapolis on today’s modern roadways, visitors and residents alike have sought Wayzata as one of the regions greatest destinations for over 140 years.

Today, along our city’s 3,660 feet of shoreline, one can take in a more than 5.5 mile unobstructed view of horizon, harnessing sunsets rivaled only by the states next closest span of open water, Lake Mille Lacs, 110 miles north. One may also begin a voyage to the west as the Three Rivers Park District’s popular Dakota Rail Trail has a trailhead in our great city. Shattering initial use estimates of 70,000 trail users, in 2010 a total 364,000 people accessed the Dakota trail with the section of the trail through Wayzata alone hosting nearly 100,000 residents and visitors. The Three Rivers Park District intends to begin a Phase II expansion of the Dakota Rail Trail in the spring of 2012, which is certain to increase demand for this incredible regional resource.

Stakeholder Summary and Lessons Learned:

In order to develop a long-term process that optimizes, leverages, enhances and preserves Wayzata’s lakefront as a gateway to Lake Minnetonka, the Lakefront Taskforce conducted due diligence with several identified stakeholders. The stakeholders were chosen due to their experience with like-projects, relevance to elements of the lakefront in Wayzata or knowledge of the fiscal, contextual or procedural aspects of the Lakefront Taskforce goals. Those stakeholders are:

- Jennifer Munt, Metropolitan Council

- Jonathan Vlaming, Three Rivers Park District
- Michelle Hanson, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- State Representative Connie Doepke and State Representative Dean Urdahl
- Mary DeLaittre, Minneapolis Riverfront Development Initiative
- Brian Sweeny and Lynne Leibfried, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF)
- Eric Evenson, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD)
- Peggy Douglas, Wayzata Chamber of Commerce

Stakeholder Lessons Learned

From the various stakeholder discussions, several common lessons carried through from one stakeholder to another. Those lessons can be categorized into three buckets centered on timing, funding and synergy. The Timing bucket centers on **when** certain aspects of the process should be conducted. The Funding bucket delves into **how** the process should be conducted to optimize funding opportunities. And finally, the Synergy bucket contains **what** elements should be incorporated into the process. See a summary of the three buckets below.

Stakeholder Lessons Learned Summary:

Timing

- Stakeholders’ involvement at the frontend is opportunity vs. challenge at the backend
- Process & project should be multi-faceted
- Transparency & communication critical from beginning and throughout using traditional and innovative channels to ALL

Funding

- Utilize stakeholders’ existing relationships w/ other agencies to obtain funding
- Multiple sources (public, private, fundraising, grants)
- Utilize a consulting firm for funding aspect

Synergy

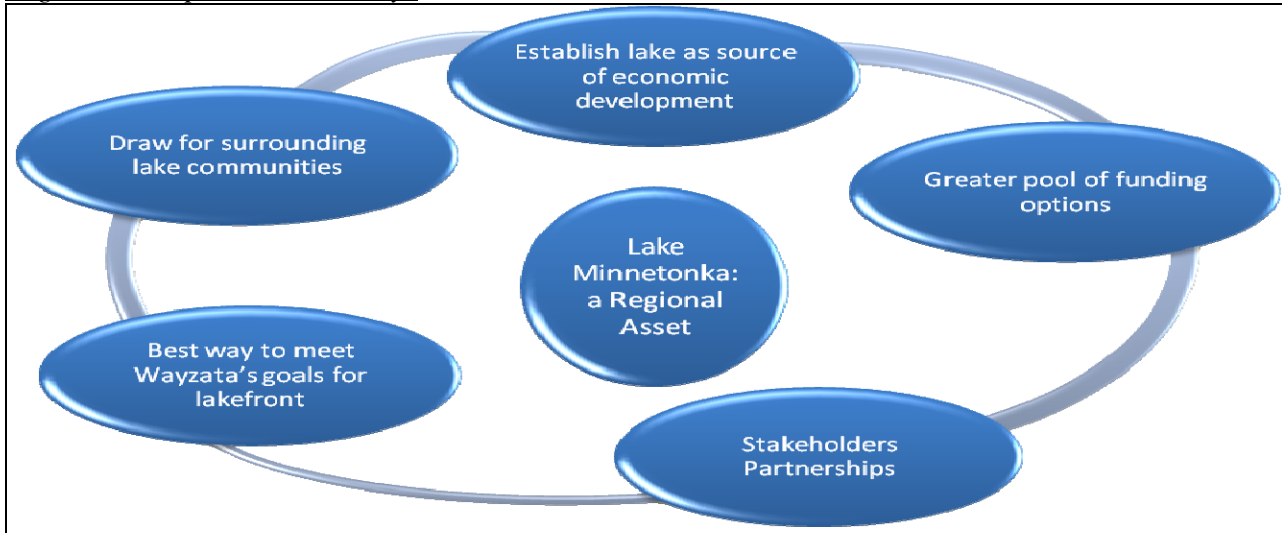
- Align with existing goals of stakeholders
- Community involvement critical to success
- Regionally focused efforts will result in cooperative relationships with common goals
- Partner w/ key players of each stakeholder
- Strong organization
- Tap surrounding cities: benefit of one, benefits all

Regional Perspective Process Benefits:

Throughout discussions within the Lakefront Taskforce, as well as with the various stakeholders, the question of whether the process benefits Wayzata only or if the focus of efforts benefits the region as a whole came up again and again. As advocates for and stewards of the Wayzata lakefront, the taskforce recognized that all improvements to the lake enhance it for all that come to utilize and share in its vitality. It would be narrow-minded of the taskforce to not incorporate a regional perspective within the planning process developed for Wayzata’s lakefront. And in turn, the benefits that are developed for the

region serve as benefits for our community. It is recognized that being a gateway to Lake Minnetonka is a gift to not be taken lightly. With this in mind, several benefits can be identified when incorporating a regional perspective into the community planning process and they are as follows:

Regional Perspective Summary:



➤ **Establish lake as source of economic development**

- ✓ Generates consumer traffic = more \$ spent in town
- ✓ Businesses have greater chance to prosper
- ✓ Quality of life for residents benefits
- ✓ Generates \$ for city

➤ **Greater pool of funding options**

- ✓ Legacy Fund
- ✓ Federal Surface Transportation Project Funds
- ✓ Various historical preservation funding sources
- ✓ Private funding and donations
- ✓ Fundraising
- ✓ Grants
- ✓ Cities around the lake through other associated projects
- ✓ Stakeholder Capital Improvement Funding (CIP) plans

➤ **Stakeholders partnerships**

- ✓ Aligning w/ stakeholder goals taps into additional resources
- ✓ Brings more clout to Wayzata Lakefront Project
- ✓ Provides additional funding resources to implement process and future project
- ✓ Benefits not only Wayzata, but all communities on the lake

➤ **Best way to meet Wayzata's goals for lakefront**

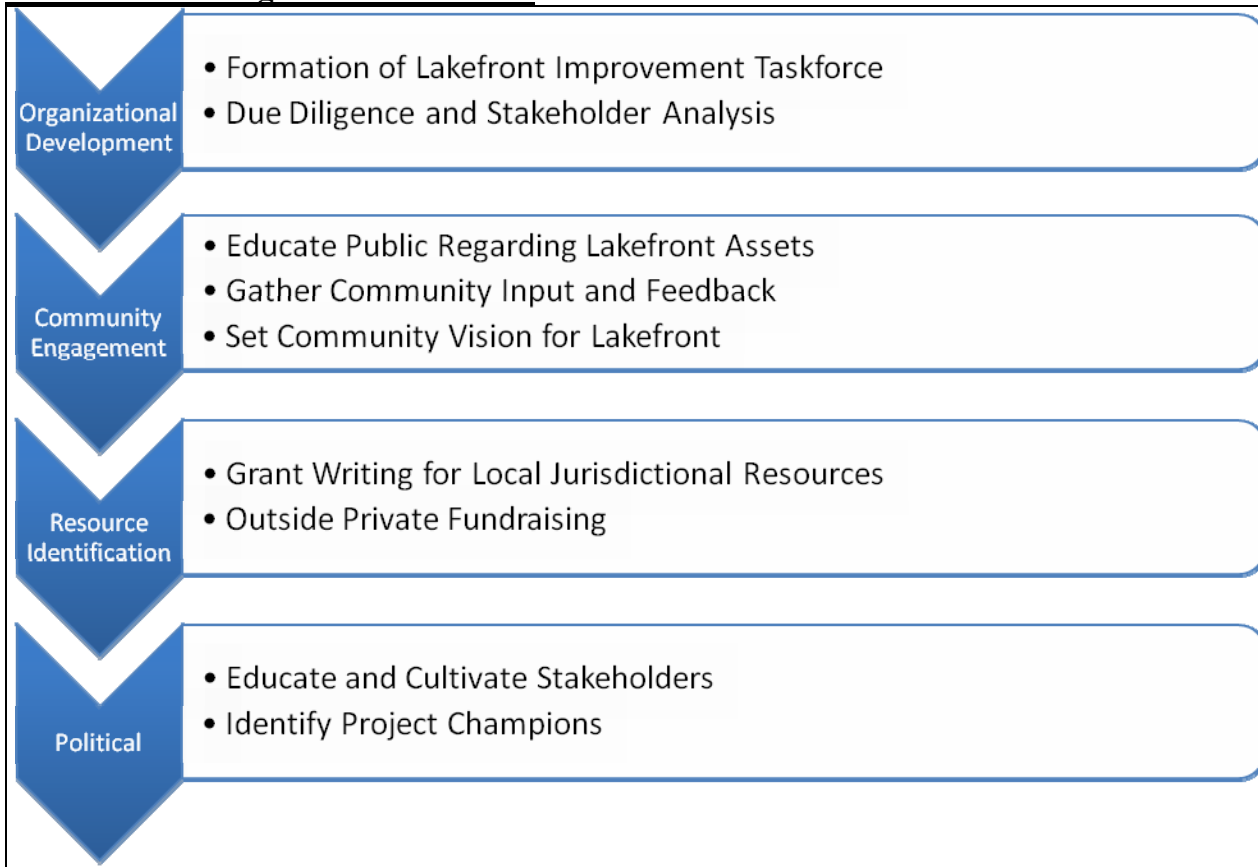
- ✓ Commercial: Improving the lake front will draw consumers to Wayzata and allow businesses to prosper. Keeping businesses healthy will ensure a strong and steady stream of tax revenue.

- ✓ Quality of Life: Improving the lake front will stabilize property values and draw families to Wayzata.
- ✓ Safety: Including the BNSF railroad as a partner and stakeholder is paramount to our community when drawing more visitors to the lakefront and our local commerce.
- ✓ Historical: Preserving the rich heritage of the community for the future.
- ✓ Environmental: Allows Wayzata to be a steward and champion in retaining the pristine quality of Lake Minnetonka, our greatest asset.

➔ **Draw from surrounding lake communities**

- ✓ Provides opportunity to promote & preserve Lake Minnetonka’s history along with individual communities
- ✓ Tie in to regional recreational elements
- ✓ Utilize Lake Minnetonka popularity as catalyst for economic prospects
- ✓ Partner with all Lake Minnetonka communities to capitalize as a whole vs. individual units

Lakefront Planning Process Overview:



Action Recommended:

Background

Planning for complex urban redevelopment projects occurs at the intersection of politics, finances, and design. For this project, however, the design solution will be the initial driver. The related issues of geography and the existing rail line will require the creation of a visionary plan that will help many different stakeholders see an alternative to the current condition - how the lakefront can look differently and become a much better place that is more integrated with the City of Wayzata. At the same time, the plan must also secure regional support— broadly defined – and it must be compelling enough to generate financial support from public (local, regional, and state) and private sources. Simply stated, help identify community priorities and connect to regional initiatives and resources.

Funding Request

Based on initial discussions with other stakeholders who have completed planning initiatives of similar nature, the initial investment required is \$100,000 for the community planning process and grant writing.

Resources Required

Based on feedback from other agencies and their advisors, putting a dedicated resource in place (Process Manager) to drive the planning cycle is an imperative. Our recommendation is that the Process Manager report to the City Planner guided by a taskforce with oversight from the Wayzata City Council and City Manager.

Below is a list of project elements that a Process Manager would drive forward:

- Organization Development
- Community Engagement and Outreach
- Stakeholder Engagement and Outreach
- Communication
- Design and Urban Planning
- Resource Identification (Public and Private)
- Grant Writing
- Navigate the Political Landscape and Process When Engaging Regional and State Agencies
 - o Metropolitan Council
 - o Minnehaha Creek Watershed District
 - o Hennepin County
 - o DNR
 - o Three Rivers Park District
 - o Private and Individual Funding
 - o Legacy Fund
 - o State Appropriations
 - o Federal Transportation Grants

Process Deliverables Summary:

1. The completion of a Ten-Year Plan, which would include a prioritization of project elements.
2. Potential funding sources are identified and vetted. The Ten Year Lakefront Plan will be aligned with other state and regional stakeholders to tap into available funding resources.
3. Identify and secure private funding sources.
4. A preliminary cost estimate for implementation of the Ten Year Lakefront Plan.

Process Timeline:

The taskforce recognizes that developing a lakefront improvement plan is a time intensive process, and will most likely need to be implemented over a longer time horizon due to availability of funding resources. The taskforce recommends that the City view lakefront improvements in a ten (10) year timeframe, to allow time to pursue other side funding opportunities and align the City's long term capital improvement funding priorities. The proposed community planning process to engage various stakeholders to develop a vision and a formalized lakefront improvements plan will take approximately twelve to eighteen months to get off the ground. The estimated timeline for the community engagement process is as follows:

Estimated Community Planning Process Timeline

- January 2012 – Lakefront Taskforce Presentation to City Council and Funding Approval
- February 2012 – A Request for Proposals (RFP) gets initiated and completed for Process Manager for community planning process
- March 2012– RFP for Process Manager is sent out to firms for response
- April 2012– Receive and review RFP responses
- June/July 2012– Hire Process Manager and develop and initiate community planning process
- August 2012– Initial community kickoff/open house meeting – explain mission, vision, and process
 - o Lay out future communication process and channels
 - Methods to communicate with stakeholders
 - Brainstorm on ideas, concepts
- September 2012 to December 2013 – Community Planning Process

The most important task to focus on is the hiring of a process manager consultant to assist the City in designing and executing a high quality and inclusive community planning process to engage residents, business owners, and other community stakeholders in developing a community based vision for the lakefront and a set of projects for implementation. This community planning process would occur over multiple months, and utilize various platforms, such as community meetings, neighborhood meetings, and social media to gather substantial community input before moving forward with any potential lakefront improvement project.

Conclusion:

With timely decision and initial investment by the City, we believe that we will have great chance of success to further maximize the potential of our lakefront that will benefit residents, businesses, visitors, our city and neighboring communities. With the vision and project elements clearly defined and well accepted by stakeholders, we could also leverage existing funding sources to optimize the regional and

state impact. We appreciate the City Council's attention to this important matter that will set the legacy of the city for current and future generations for decades to come.