

February 14, 2011

Dear January 29th Roundtable Workshop Participant,

Thank you again for taking time on a Saturday morning and giving so generously of your ideas and insights during our exploration of the potential for the 5th Street and Highway 3 gateway and adjacent neighborhoods.

We gathered *many* useful ideas and suggestions for implementation. The summary below is just that, a *very* brief summary of a rich discussion among ourselves and with urban designer Bill Johnson. We welcome additional comments, edits and ideas from you, based on what you heard that morning and have thought about since then.

We anticipate another workshop at the end of April to explore and knit together planning for the entire length of Highway 3 from the viaduct on the north to Woodley Street. More on that as we know it.

Bill Johnson's prelude:

We have **three major themes or principles** to keep in mind while planning:

1. **Greater connectivity** between the west and east sides of Highway 3 and the river with a **clear vision** of the physical layout of the downtown and surrounding areas;
2. The **Cannon River** is our life blood, the main artery of our natural and cultural history; "tell the river's story" and you hear Northfield's history and future;
3. The **primary intersections** of 2nd and 5th Streets and Highway 3 "sew the community together;" they should be highly accessible and beautiful; streets should connect people, not separate them.

Discussions about the **5th Street and Highway 3 intersection and adjacent areas** included these major ideas:

1. This intersection is most people's **first impression of Northfield** – What does it say, how do we want to welcome newcomers, passersby and folks coming home? What could we tell them about our community-on-the-river as they drive by or come-on-in?
2. Removal of the current Safety Center expands the **"picture window"** into the historic downtown that Ames Park now provides; the entire arc of the river becomes visible, showcasing the buildings and parks on the east side of the river and inviting passersby to stop and explore; a Welcome Center on the east side of the river, possibly at 5th and Water Streets could make that invitation explicit;
3. Highway 3 could become much more beautiful with strategic plantings as part of the **"green corridor"** (railroad, highway and river) and more accessible with a strategic **pedestrian crossing** structure connected to paths, sidewalks and trails on both sides of the green corridor;
4. Completion of an **unbroken set of bikeways and walkways loops** that provide continuous access around both sides of the river, thereby stitching together the east and west sides of the community.

Discussions about the **5th and Water Streets neighborhood** included these ideas:

1. **Connectivity** is key to developing this area; connection to the river by orienting buildings west of Water toward the river, and improved consistent pedestrian access from Water to Division Street;
2. The **mixed uses** of this neighborhood are an asset to build upon; higher density housing close to downtown, a blended edge between residential and commercial uses, park land, trails and easy access to the river, with increased recreational possibilities, and the potential of an "Eat Street" capitalizing on the presence of the food co-op, farmer's market, Riverside Market Faire, etc.;
3. Redeveloping the **River Park Mall site** to bring the store fronts closer to Water Street and redefine the west side of the site toward the river, extending 6th Street

toward the river, and adding lighting and appropriate plantings along the river paths – all could add energy and connectivity to the area “where the river bends.”

Bill’s postlude:

1. **Finish the connections** that are underway and/or identified (2nd and Hwy 3, 3rd and Hwy 3, 5th and Hwy 3, 5th and Water, 6th and Water, etc.) – “they are the game board” on which public and private developers will plan and build;
2. **Extend the river’s influence** laterally 3-4 blocks in every direction through streets, paths, trails, plantings, etc. – “the river is your ace in the hole.”
3. **Create a feeling of transparency and invitation** around Highway 3 by greening the highway and adjacent areas with strategic (read, *not* mass) plantings and installing lights along the river walkways that will highlight the river even at night;
4. Include the depot plan in the plans for **increased connectivity**, working with private and public landowners; could make the 2nd Street and Hwy 3 area a destination point and transit hub.
5. Develop a **comprehensive parking plan** for all of downtown, including tiered parking and parking in “alley” spaces mid-block, so that the magnetism of downtown is matched by convenience and accessibility to businesses and events.

Preliminary thoughts During and after the Jan. 29th, 2011 Workshop - WJJ



Greening of the Commons is enhanced by keeping these two areas open for views to the downtown edge along the river - the open space can be programmed for recreation events and celebrations.

Water Street could become a more effective mixed use avenue if in the long term buildings could come to the street. Parking then could go behind the shops/apartments and serve river park at the same time.

A downtown walkway circuit to be developed with a number of sub-loops - it could be tagged as a fitness and wellness network. The sidewalks along 5th Street would be lined with columnar trees and special pedestrian scaled lighting (in the same manner as 2nd Street) to make them distinctive cross-routes between the 2 sides of the downtown core.

6th Street might then continue through to loop back to Spring Street providing a distinctive overlook promenade.

DRAFT
February 7, 2011