

## MEMO

**To: Mayor Sipma and City Council**  
**From: Alderman Wolsky**  
**August 27, 2019**  
**RE: GATHERING SPACE GUIDANCE**

Minot's downtown gathering space project was birthed with enormous public support, energy, and enthusiasm. In the 20 months since our formal site selection, the project has become one that is feeding a growing public cynicism. Even the most ardent supporters of the project are beginning to lose faith. The responsibility for our current circumstances rests with us -- we the City Council and our administration. In more pointed terms, it is our fault that we are where we are, and we should no longer abdicate responsibility for the future of this project to 'HUD requirements'.

To summarize, the current state of affairs including the progress of the project, recent questions about the location, the uncertain footprint, the uncertain design, uncertain partners, unknown operational aspects, concerns about the budget, Council actions predicated on funding fears, and the public attitude toward it is not acceptable to this Alderman. These circumstances are not the foundation on which sound decisions are made.

**In reaction to our current circumstance I propose the following:**

**1. We make a renewed commitment to Site #2. My reasons are as follows:**

- **The public input process -- both in-person at our public meetings and online -- was so overwhelmingly in support of site #2 that it warrants an adjustment to the site selection process. Our community's greater faith and trust in government cannot withstand another bait and switch which is how a move to an alternate location would be interpreted.**
- **The extraordinary investment by the private sector near Site #2 since our formal site selection is a hoped-for-but-unexpected-at-this-point development. That the private-sector support has developed so quickly and is investing so significantly is a circumstance that deserves reverence and -- I believe -- must be met with integrity and follow-through at the current location.**

**2. Over the next 90 days and at our expense (not NDR), we evaluate the project footprint and design elements we want to include.** I would suggest informing this process with the following goals, values, and findings:

- **Ensure public safety from traffic and railroad.**

- Minimize acquisitions and acquisition costs.
- Maximize property redevelopment opportunities and property tax revenue growth
- Where practical, maintain and leverage historic streetscapes, facades, buildings, and open spaces.
- Maximize partnerships both public and private to enhance visitor experience, minimize operational costs, and expand opportunities in adjacent vicinities.
- Maximize 4-season enjoyment and gathering opportunities.
- Evaluate findings of IEDC Economic Development Strategic Planning work and identify projects and opportunities complementary to the gathering space investment.
- Review and consider public comment from the summer 2018 public input meeting that was held at Oak Park.
- Where applicable and appropriate, develop a project that adheres to the requirements and spirit of what was set forth in the NDR application and action plan in whole or in part.

**3. Over the next 90 days and at our expense (not NDR), we conduct a feasibility study and develop an operational business plan for the space**

Operation and costs to maintain the facility are primary among the public concerns. Due diligence should be undertaken now -- prior to committing to a funding vehicle (NDR or otherwise) -- to ensure operating models and revenue sources deliver sustainability.

Other elements that might be included in this work:

- Identification of potential revenue sources.
- Identification of a primary operating entity and potential structures.
- Evaluation of operational considerations that may intersect with the development of a BID.
- Identification of restrictions associated with NDR/HUD involvement in the project.

**4. Evaluate project delivery and funding models that allow us to realize our vision.**

**These might include:**

- Where and to what degree NDR funds are appropriate for realizing the larger vision.
- Whether previously evaluated tools like a TIF or BID can help realize development or management of the space.
- Whether other funding sources like property tax, MAGIC Fund, or state funding sources are appropriate.
- Identifying other funding sources through recent NDR contract with Strengthen ND.

**In Closing:**

It is my opinion that our current process is not working, and I do not believe proceeding further down the road we're on will deliver results the community expects. I propose that we stop the NDR activity on this project, take a step back, imagine the project we want to realize, and then figure out how to do that.

I welcome a discussion on any and all elements offered herein.

Respectfully,  
Alderman Wolsky