

# Master Plan Update – Draft Introduction

City of Northville

February 22, 2021

Rev. March 31, 2021

[NOTE: THE FINAL UPDATE DOCUMENT WILL INCLUDE A COVER PAGE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.]

## 2021 MASTER PLAN UPDATE

### INTRODUCTION

“Northville has a **distinctive village vibe**, open & welcoming to walkers, town explorers & cultural & commercial visitors. This should not be lost...”

“The City of Northville's **small town charm** should be preserved above all.”

“I am hopeful the master plan will reflect a commitment to the **historical integrity** of the downtown, vibrant retail and restaurants on the north end and community (commons) space to walk and gather.”

“**High quality architecture**, reasonable density, more dining and retail, and **accessible open spaces** are high priorities.”

“**Aesthetic diversity**, within historically sensitive style and **neighborly scale and massing**, is expected and encouraged.”

“The plan should... include home design that **"fits"** Northville. By that I don't mean homes built to look like 100+ year old Victorians but ones that complement the town architecture and that **don't look like a "cookie cutter" of each other.**”

“Northville attracted with its charm and small town atmosphere blended with **progressive and inviting retail shops and restaurants**. Thus far, this has been accomplished while, for the most part, respecting the historical value or character of the town.”

“One of the things I love about Northville is the **walkability**, and connecting to Hines Park would be really a great benefit.”

“**#1 daylight the river!!!!**”

“New development should include **green space**. Daylighting the river and incorporating a river walk on the Downs' property would provide a needed **public park-like space.**”

“The **Farmers' Market** is one of Northville's greatest assets for locals as well as out-of-town visitors.”

“Impact on **traffic** in town and the surrounding areas **MUST** be considered in any plan.”

“Density of development is a key issue.... **Limit density.**”

These are a sampling of the more than 200 pages of unique comments gathered from Northville residents, business owners, workers, and visitors when asked about how they envision the future of Cady Town/Cady Street, the Racetrack, and S. Center Street. These sentiments describe some of the things they most value about Northville, and what they want to see remain or improved upon if this part

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of town were redeveloped. Words like “distinctive,” “charm,” “historical,” and “high-quality” were used time and again to illustrate the special place this community has in the hearts of its citizenry. They also express concerns about issues that could come along with development, such as traffic congestion, and the worry that new development will be too dense, and will not reflect the variety of architecture and styles that have developed in this community over Northville’s almost 200-year history.

The Planning Commission sponsored this robust public engagement process as part of updating a portion of its Master Plan. This update was contemplated because there is reasonable potential that these areas of town will be redeveloped in the next decade, and the needs of the community have changed since the last time this area of Northville was studied and planned. Therefore, the community is looking at these sub-areas with fresh eyes, and has proactively created a new vision. This Update describes and illustrates a refined concept for these sub-areas, based on the current values and priorities of the community.

**Sidebar: What’s a Master Plan?** *A Master Plan is an official statement of policy, written and adopted by the planning commission, describing the desired physical development of the community. It does not lay out rules that must be followed – it paints a picture of desired land uses and development priorities. A Master Plan also:*

- *Aids in daily decision-making by the Planning Commission, City Council and City Staff through the Master Plan goals and strategies.*
- *Coordinates public improvements with private development.*
- *Educates citizens, property owners, developers, and adjacent communities with a clear indication of the City’s future direction.*
- *Provides the statutory foundation for zoning regulations. The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act requires that a Zoning Ordinance be based on a Master Plan.*

## **Sharing & Listening**

*[INSERT GRAPHIC SHOWING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS AND TIMEFRAMES]*

In starting the Master Plan Update, the Commissioners wanted to hear what residents had to say, identify priorities, and develop themes and guiding principles that could be used as a basis for Planning Commission decisions on policy in the Master Plan.

The board created a sub-committee of four Commissioners, charging them with developing a multi-layered approach to public engagement. Working with City Staff and planning consultants, the sub-committee developed a four-part process, as described below. (See later in this Update for public engagement results.) Greatly influencing this process was the COVID-19 pandemic, prohibiting in-person gatherings and workshops. The Planning Commission discussed delaying public engagement efforts, but given the uncertainty of how long the pandemic would last, decided to move ahead, extensively using technology and on-line engagement techniques in new, creative ways.

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Part 1. **Information Sharing.** Before soliciting opinions, the Commission thought it important that everyone involved in the Master Plan Update – from public officials to residents to business owners – have the same level of understanding about how land development works. Four thematic seminars were given. Each seminar provided up-to-date information by experts on a core topic of redevelopment. The sessions helped provide a common base of facts that underlie redevelopment. Informational topics included:

- Planning & Zoning Basics and Financial Topics
- Demographics & Schools
- Traffic, Walkability/Mobility & Parking
- Future Land Use

Part 2. **Survey #1. Identifying Themes and Priorities**

The first survey was conducted on-line, with paper copies available to those who wanted them. The survey questions were designed to be fairly broad and non-specific, encouraging people to “think big” and offer their ideas and opinions without judgement. The overarching goals of this survey were to:

- Discern what is most valued about the character and vibrancy of Northville;
- Confirm key priorities for the Cady Street/Racetrack/South Center Street sub-areas; and
- Identify potential opportunities, needs and concerns regarding the future of the Cady Street/Racetrack/South Center Street sub-areas.

Part 3. **Virtual Open House Sessions. Using a Design Activity to Illustrate Priorities**

The next effort involved three Open House Sessions conducted virtually. Participants were broken into small groups, and asked to use an electronic “gameboard” to design their vision for redevelopment of the sub-areas. This activity gave participants an opportunity to express their ideas visually. Small groups organized game pieces around an aerial photograph (gameboard) of the redevelopment area, “drawing” the location of new streets, preferred land uses and public open spaces on the gameboard. The gameboards also provided room to add notes and explanations of the design intent.

Part 4. **Survey #2. Exploring Top Priorities and Ideas**

The second survey was also conducted on-line, with paper copies available. The priorities and themes identified in the results of Survey #1 were used as a basis for Survey #2. Questions in the second survey “drilled down” into the priorities and themes gleaned from Survey #1, testing various versions of these priorities and themes. Respondents were also asked to make challenging choices between necessary features of a development and public benefits a developer may be able/willing to incorporate into a design.

*[INSERT GRAPHIC SHOWING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DASHBOARD...NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS/PARTICIPANTS (BROKEN DOWN BY LOCATION, AGE, HOUSING, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, ETC.) ]*

The Big Picture of What Residents Said or Illustrated

“Whatever plan we decide on should be **inviting** to all residents of Northville from all parts of the city. It should be an **integrated** area that people from all over the city want to come to and can enjoy the area - especially green spaces.”

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“The proposed redevelopment offers a unique opportunity to **link all three subareas** with the existing downtown corridor's feel and aesthetic, while also providing the chance to **build statement public amenities** which could become defining aspects of the City.”

“The opportunity to develop this large area of the city is exciting for Northville. As a small business owner in Northville, I hope the vision will seek to **complement what the City (and Township) already have** by increasing the amount of commercial, mixed-use, higher-density residential and park space. Such changes will make Northville a more enticing destination for business, dining, and entertainment, as well as make it a more affordable place to live. I believe this **can be done without losing Northville's small town charm.**”

“It’s a **delicate balancing act** to limit the density, provide desired green space and make the project financially viable to a developer. I trust the city to balance these to **maintain the “charm” of Northville** while growing in a smart and informed manner.”

“As we have experienced over the past 9 months, creating **walkable spaces** creates a vibrant community. A significant share of traffic-free space is necessary to maintain this throughout Northville. We are offering people the chance to socialize because we have created a safer place for them to do that.”

“The area needs to be an **extension of what Northville is now**. Single family homes, tree lined streets, some open green areas.”

“Please don’t let the grumpy old people in our city keep Northville from being a great place with many **attractions for younger generations** to raise their children. Food options are a must! additional parks! Mixed use buildings! Bike Lanes! Shopping! Farmer’s market!”

“I think the key point is **not to create too much density** so that it negatively impacts the current community, and to keep the feel of the existing downtown area.”

“**Diversity in building styles and uses** should be a focus as this is how "organically" grown **UNIQUE** downtowns/cities were built over many decades. ... That doesn't mean it has to copy the old downtown area style (which is bound to fail), but mixing in old elements with modern style will be critical.”

“The space is a fantastic opportunity to **create a sense of community through parks**, connecting the river, giving the proper space to be the **PREMIERE farmers market.**”

“**Sustainable development** practices must be included...”

“Let’s **capitalize on the rivers and natural features** currently hidden. That’s a special thing few cities have.”

“Go Big or stay home. Our community needs a refresh. **Let’s do this change!!** ... Northville deserves this shift. It will pay off from visitors coming to see our classic, streamline, inviting, chic, cool town.”

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The survey responses reflect a great deal of passion imagining what the three sub-areas could become in the future. They also reflect that there are many different visions, and that a preferred vision will require balancing the needs of many different groups, and deciding between a variety of options.

To assist in making these choices, the Planning Commission created “guiding principles” that will be used as the benchmark or guidepost to evaluate different development options. The principles are based on survey and open house input provided by residents.

## Guiding Principles:

*[INSERT GUIDING PRINCIPLES ]*

Full results of all public engagement activities are provided in the Appendix of this Update. Also, detailed public input results relating to each sub-area are provided in the specific sub-area descriptions.