



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & CONSTRUCTION SERVICES  
Planning Division

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TO: Planning Commission

FROM: John Kelley, Planner II

DATE: April 9, 2019

RE: **Upper Central-East Hillside Land Use Study, PL 19-013**

## Background

There has been recent development/redevelopment interests in the North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East and Central Entrance Drive corridors; therefore, the Community Planning Division initiated a land use study to determine whether any recommendations to change the Comprehensive Plan were warranted.

The area was previously studied in the documents noted below:

- 2007 - East Hillside Community Neighborhood Revitalization Plan
- 2007 - Central Hillside Community Neighborhood Revitalization Plan
- 2010 - Sixth Avenue East Schematic Redesign Study
- 2011 - Health Impact Assessment – Builds on Sixth Avenue East Schematic Redesign Study
- 2012 - Hillside Neighborhood Revitalization Plan – Update on 2007 Plans

The Land Use Study builds on the previous planning efforts and will primarily be focused on future land use changes. The adoption of the Imagine Duluth 2035 Comprehensive Land Use Plan included some amendments to the Future Land Use Map in this area. Specifically 6th Avenue East below East 9th Street has historically had a mixed-neighborhood character. There are several vacant and unused properties along this corridor. The land use along this portion of 6th Avenue East below East 9th Street was changed from Traditional Neighborhood to Neighborhood Mixed Use to better allow for redevelopment of this corridor. The Comprehensive Land Use Plan had envisioned much of the area as Traditional Neighborhood, Urban Residential, and pockets of Open Space along Brewery Creek. These land use designations, however, do not necessarily reflect the character of existing development on the corridor. The existing land uses are a mixture of residential, some commercial including a gas station, taxi business, hotel and undeveloped properties in the western portion of the study area. The UDAC building is a legal nonconforming structure, which was used as a child care/office/personal service facility and is currently vacant. The current zoning for the UDAC site is residential and would not allow for commercial use. All of these questions and considerations led staff to initiate this land use study.

## Process

Staff began doing research on the study area in December. A public meeting was held on March 4, 2019, with approximately 23 attendees. This was an open house where staff shared information and asked for input from attendees; 19 comment forms were received at the meeting. After a presentation with three land use scenarios, attendees were asked to submit feedback on potential land uses for the area. A summary of comments from these meetings is including in the Findings below.

## Findings

### ***Existing Land Use***

As noted above, the existing land uses are a mixture of residential, commercial, and undeveloped and/or underutilized properties (see attached *Existing Land Use* map). Residential dwellings are located on typical sized City lots and have access via N. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East or adjacent side streets. Commercially developed properties are located on larger lots with some having access from N. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East. The surrounding area to the east, west and south consists of a traditional neighborhood development pattern. The former UDAC building and are now vacant. The site is 1.8 acres and consists of a 38,000 square foot building, parking lots and a community orchard.

Many of the existing residential uses do correlate with the future land use designations in the Comprehensive Plan such as residential. This can be seen in the attached *Comprehensive Plan* map. Commercial/office activity in the area are long-standing uses (such as the gas station, former UDAC building, hotel and taxi business). Some of the businesses are within their properly zoned districts. However, if the future land use is not changed and the zone districts are not changed to align with the Comprehensive Plan, uses such as the former UDAC building site would become nonconforming uses.

### ***Transportation***

The two main thoroughfares in the area are North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East/Central Entrance Drive and East 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Both of these routes are Minnesota State Aid roads that the City receives funds from the state for maintenance. North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East/Central Entrance Drive and East 9<sup>th</sup> Streets are classified as minor arterials. Traffic volumes along the North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East and Central Entrance Drive corridor range from 12,800 to 14,500 average daily trips, and East 9<sup>th</sup> Street has 6,100 average daily trips within the study area. These roads have a controlled intersection with a light. Other roads in the area are local city streets, mainly residential in nature. Duluth Transit does provide service in the area. Routes are along North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East and East 9<sup>th</sup> Street.

Pedestrian and bicycle safety has been an ongoing concern for the area. Previous studies completed for this area have identified the need to redesign the roadway to make it more user friendly for all modes of transportation and to apply traffic calming treatments to lower speeds and make it more neighborhood friendly. Drivers on both of these roads experience congestion at peak traffic times.

### ***Natural Resources***

Brewery Creek runs along the western portion of the study area from west to east. The majority of the Creek is piped underground through a culvert system with the exception of two locations where it is day lighted. The creek does run directly underneath the former UDAC building. Previous plans completed for this area have suggested that Brewery Creek be day lighted in the area of the UDAC site as an amenity for open space and park purposes.

### ***Utilities***

Existing water, gas, and sanitary sewer (including sanitary sewer basins) were mapped and are shown on the *Utilities* map. The City's utility data indicates that most of the area is served by utilities, and that those utilities could be expanded or upgraded as needed for any future development. The notable exception is the western portion of the study area, which has no utilities extended into the undeveloped property. The City has no plans to extend utilities in this area.

### ***Community Input***

Comments received at the public meeting generally demonstrate support for commercial development along the North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East. Attendees at the meeting commented on the need for neighborhood commercial businesses that provide goods and services for residents of the immediate area such as gas stations, apartments, coffee shops, hardware store and small restaurants. Comments also indicated commercial development should not be auto oriented due to traffic volumes and turning movements. This type commercial development is consistent with ideas expressed in previous planning documents for the Hillside area to make the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor more bike and pedestrian friendly.

Comments for residential development included the need for affordable single-family homes, duplexes, and a mix of smaller apartment buildings and larger apartment complexes with some commercial on the lower level such as the Bluestone and Kenwood Village sites. Some commenters indicated that no new residential development was necessary.

Open space/recreation comments include the need for more green space to provide walking trails, play area for family recreation, dog park, more landscaping (trees and shrubs) along 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and to improve the community orchard area into a park like setting. Additional comments regarding new development/redevelopment indicated that open space should be inclusive of a project site.

## **Land Use Scenarios**

Based on internal staff discussions, Staff developed three land use scenarios to share at the public meeting (all three are attached). All three scenarios included a recommendation of Open Space land use in the western and south central portion of the study area. All three scenarios also supported Neighborhood Mixed Use and/or Urban Residential as a land use in sections of the study area.

- **Scenario 1:** This scenario considered the western portion of the area as being Open Space due to Brewery Creek meandering through this portion of the study area along steeper slopes and bedrock. The recommendation in this scenario does not envision residential or commercial development in this area. However there is the potential for pedestrian trails and to create a park like setting. The land use category of Neighborhood Mixed Use was also recommended in this scenario for consideration of additional mixed-use development such as residential and commercial.
- **Scenario 2:** This scenario also suggested the western section of the study area be classified as Open Space. The remainder of the study area was recommended to change land use categories from Traditional Neighborhood to Urban Residential. This would allow for residential and commercial uses for the area.
- **Scenario 3:** Open Space was the dominant land use category in this scenario mostly due to Brewery Creek meandering through the area. This scenario was also consistent with previous studies for the area to consider open space and trails, and to daylight Brewery Creek as an amenity for the surrounding neighborhoods.

## Recommendations

After researching the area, looking at existing land uses, and taking into account the comments received throughout the study, Staff has developed several Land Use Recommendations. Recommendations for the area:

- Recognize and support the need for neighborhood commercial businesses that provide goods and services for residents of the immediate area.
- Protect the character of existing single-family neighborhoods by placing close attention to buffers and transitions between land uses.
- Support land uses that protect natural resources while still allowing reasonable development on privately owned property.

**All of the below are recommendations to change the Comprehensive Plan – Future Land Use Map as shown in the attached map, *Recommendations*.**

- A. Change the Future Land Use from Traditional Neighborhood to Open Space in the western portion of the study area above East 11<sup>th</sup> Street and below East Skyline Parkway.** This area has steep sloped areas with rock outcroppings and Brewer Creek running through the central portion of the area. There are no utilities within this area and no immediate plans to extend utilities to the site.
- B. Change the Future Land Use from Traditional Neighborhood and Urban Residential to Neighborhood Mixed Use.** This includes a change from a small section of Urban Residential along North 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue East and East 9<sup>th</sup> Street to Neighborhood Mixed Use. This land use category would support the need for neighborhood commercial businesses that provide goods and services for residents of the immediate area.

## Next Steps

Planning staff is asking Planning Commission to recommend approval of these Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Changes to City Council. It is anticipated that a resolution would appear on the City Council agenda for its regular meeting on April 22, 2019. Council must adopt Comprehensive Plan amendments with a two-thirds vote. Future steps prior to development in the area would be rezoning of these areas to implement the Comprehensive Plan.