

June, 2014

Volume 8, Issue 3

Gem Lake News

Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Newsletter Editor

Special Interest Articles:

- *Business District Study Completed*
- *Development Moratorium to be Lifted 6/30*
- *City News Page 4*
- *Audit Completed for 2013*

Upcoming Recycling Dates:

- *June 25*
- *July 9*
- *July 23*

Business District Study Completed: Moratorium Expected to be Lifted 6/30

Final results from a recently conducted development study regarding the Gem Lake Business District were presented at the June 9th City Council Workshop at Heritage Hall.

Last December, a professional city planning firm was hired to study land use dynamics, comparable properties, and other subjects that would help make Gem Lake a more attractive option for commercial developers. Marc Putman of Putman Planning and Design conducted the study, which focused on the area east of Highway 61 and north and south of County Road E. The overall goal of the study was to enhance Gem Lake's ability to be more supportive of, and attractive to investors, business owners, developers and others. Key conclusions of the study were summarized on June 9 as follows: **(Continued page 5)**



Audit Completed for 2013 City Finances

Gem Lake's 2013 audit is now complete and the results are fairly standard for a city. Several small items had to be recognized differently on the books, such as special assessment and taxes in the amount of \$11,587 that should more properly have been recognized in 2012. City Council Members were given a complete presentation of the results at the May 21st City Council Meeting.

The audit was conducted by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, who also did the 2011 and 2012 audits. According to CliftonLarsonAllen, the result was what is called an unmodified report, which is good. Auditors found that the financial statements of Gem Lake presented fairly in all material respects the true financial position of the city.

Management judgments and accounting estimates were considered reasonable and supported. Disclosures were deemed to be clear and complete. **(Continued page 2)**



Development Study Survey Results Summarized

Gem Lake's recent business district study, which is referenced on page one, included a survey of Gem Lake residents, business owners, and those owning land in the business district, in order to obtain their thoughts on the present conditions, and suggestions for development in the future.

Key survey results are summarized here:

Run down facilities, a negative business climate and the lack of sewer and water are among the factors keeping Gem Lake's business district from thriving. This is according to the thirty four responses to a recent survey of residents and businesses in Gem Lake that was conducted as part of business development study.

While the response number was too small to be statistically accurate on all counts, Marc Putman of Putman Design and Planning, who sent out the survey, noted that respondents took a lot of time to thoroughly respond. "Residents and land owners who did return the forms, provided rather complete responses, with written narratives of observations, problems and solutions."

Almost all of the surveys return were filled out by people who live in Gem Lake. (33 out of 34) Most said they would do local shopping if more services were available in Gem Lake. Currently, 50% of respondents said they shop locally, when possible, but 79% said they would make a point of it if the stores and services were there.

The general views of our business district were somewhat brutal. Among the comments were the following quotes:

- "A big problem is seeing unkempt back of businesses."
- "It's an ugly business district. Looks run down."
- "The biggest problem is access."
- "The area is very fragmented, has no focus, has no logic, and basically does not serve the City of Gem Lake."

(continued on page 3)



Audit Completed for 2013 City Finances

(continued from page 1)

According to Christopher Knopik, a Manager of CliftonLarsonAllen, no difficulties were encountered in performing the audit. "In fact, management was most cooperative and helpful. We found that personnel and records were available."

They also noted that city finances are in good shape, with a healthy general fund balance in reserve for city expenses. The Minnesota Office of the State Auditor recommends that cities have no less than five months of operating income in reserve. Gem Lake is more than on target here, having approximately 15 months of operating funds in the general fund. They also found that tax revenues were consistent with the budget. Outstanding debt also decreased in 2013, due to the early calling of several city bonds.

Financial statements and the required State Auditor Reporting forms were both submitted to the applicable state agencies before the June 30 deadline.

Development Study Survey Results (continued from page 2)

- "The stores need to be what is needed in the area."
- "Very unattractive, make a more entry gateway appearance."
- "Poor condition of buildings is a major problem."
- "It's clearly unattractive and underutilized relative to its potential in a high traffic area."

Traffic flow in the area was regarded as a blessing and a curse. On one hand, residents understand the potential business growth that could come from healthy traffic volumes. On the other hand, there were a variety of comments about lack of sensible traffic flow through the business district, no safe pedestrian or bike access, etc. One resident said the biggest problem facing the business district currently is "odd traffic patterns, no good access."

Comments were not all bad and included the following:

- "Too busy to make turns into businesses safely."
- "Seems busy and seems to flow fairly well."
- "Needs to be reorganized. Very bad traffic."
- "Not easily accessible from all directions."
- "Huge traffic volume should make Hoffman's Corner and attractive place for developers."

When asked for their current perception of the climate for business in Gem Lake, 15% commented that it was a positive environment, but 50% said it was negative. Specific comments included the following:

- "Gem Lake attracts crappy businesses."
- "Good climate."

- "Getting better."
- "Not good."
- "I am under the impression, perhaps incorrectly, that the city leadership has been inhospitable to business development."
- "I think the perception is that Gem Lake is not business friendly."

Only 50% of survey respondents said they shop in Gem Lake when possible, but 79% said they would shop locally if services were available relevant to needs. The majority (69%) of those responding felt the city should engage in planning for future land uses and types of businesses in the area.

When asked what types of businesses or services would ideally be located in the business district, answers included coffee shops, convenience stores, restaurants, large scale or big box retailers such as Home Depot or Lowes, grocery stores such as Trader Joe's, hair salons, barber, apartments, senior housing and townhomes.

When asked to sum it up and provide "added thoughts" on the problems facing Hoffman's Corner, the responses were revealing:

- "Way too many auto sales and repair shops."
- "Be business friendly."
- "Clean up and landscape, consolidate property ownership"
- "Do health inspections, enforce rules, get rid of blighted old buildings."
- "Improve appearance of buildings."
- "Tired of hearing about past history, let's move forward."

In an effort to move forward, the final report from Gem Lake's business district study was presented on June 9 at the City Council Workshop.

City News Page

Crime-Even in Gem Lake

Gem Lake attracted a few burglaries during the past month, including one over the Memorial Day Holiday weekend. Some not so friendly burglars, removed a door and emptied someone's garage of tools, equipment and other items.

There was also a burglary on Scheuneman Road over a month ago. Other incidents included a car theft at one of the auto dealerships.



Dramatic Car Accident on Goose Lake Road

The spring snow storm that hit town on the night of April 16 provided a dramatic experience for one family. There was a roll over on Goose Lake Road that required the car to be dragged out of a ravine. Apparently, there was a Good Samaritan who helped out the passengers.

We are seeking information on this person for a story in next month's newsletter. Please contact Gretchen at 651-260-9742 if you know who this might have been.

Gem Lake Featured on Luxury Home Tour

The 13th Annual Luxury Home Tour, sponsored by Midwest Home Magazine, features over a dozen million dollar homes in the Twin Cities area. This year's tour spotlights one home that is located in Gem Lake.

A total of 14 houses are open to the public during the first three weekends of June. Homes are open from 1-7 on Fridays and from Noon to 6:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

The Gem Lake attraction is located at 7 Hillary Farm Lane. (A ticket is required to enter, which can be purchased on site.) The 6,000 square foot home features a gourmet kitchen, a lower level entertainment center, including game room, bar, sauna, wine cellar and billards area. Also included in the home is a rustic cedar porch, high ceilings, a BBQ deck, a four car garage and a luxury master suite.

The Luxury Home Tour began on June 6 and runs through June 22. The home pictured below is not on the tour.



Business District Study Completed: Key Conclusions Summarized at June 9 Meeting

Expert analysis of the conditions faced by Gem Lake's Business District were examined through a business district development study, led Marc Putman of Putman Design and Planning, leading to a variety of key conclusions and/or suggestions:

- Gem Lake should embrace development and find more ways to create a welcoming environment.
- Building the infrastructure necessary for development is absolutely key. This includes bringing water and sewer facilities to the business district. This may also mean exploring creative opportunities for financing what is needed, such as through grant programs.
- Expand the permitted uses in the business district. This means taking a hard look at the under-served needs for products and services in the area and finding ways to offer some of them in Gem Lake. Putman presented data on the volume of dollars that are spent elsewhere because residents have no local alternatives. Ideas include grocery stores, convenience stores, restaurants, big box retailers, senior housing, some green space, pharmacies, coffee shops, and some retail. Finding the right mix and the most attractive conception of that mix is the key.
- Take full advantage of the traffic volumes in the area, which are a big plus for developers. Keep all existing access and egress points within the area and add more. The development study detailed the significant volumes of traffic flow in the Hoffman's Corner area, as well as several other nearby areas. The data was laid out in an extensive report provided to the Gem Lake City Council and available for the public to look at.

- Use the city's unique tools of finance and cost reduction capability to reduce time and confusion in the development process.
- Find ways to streamline the approval process. This includes changing or tweaking the city's ordinances to be more welcoming to developers. This also includes reducing and eliminating language that drives development away.

Sample design concepts were provided to attendees at the June 9 City Council Workshop, demonstrating what the business district could like in the future. Each concept drawing blended existing business with ways to integrate redevelopment in the future, serving local needs for products and services.

All results will be reviewed again at the City Council meeting on June 17 with an eye on how to begin implementation and what possible next steps might be.



The City of Gem Lake

PHONE:
(651) 747-2790

FAX:
(651) 747-2795
City Hall Address:
4200 Otter Lake Road
Gem Lake, MN 55110

GENERAL E-MAIL:
City@gemlakemn.org

Newsletter e-mail:
gretchenas@comcast.net

Kiki Sonnen:
651-747-2790, or
Kiki.Sonnen@CO.RAMSEY.MN.US

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.gemlakemn.org

Meetings: June and July 2014

The following Gem Lake Meetings will be held at Heritage Hall for the next few months:

June 3, 2014

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

June 9, 2014

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m.

June 17, 2014

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

July 1, 2014

Planning Commission Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

July 14, 2014

City Council Workshop at 7:00 p.m. CANCELLED

July 15, 2014

City Council Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Your Gem Lake City Council

Bob Uzpen-Mayor

Phone: 651-492-5083

City Council Members:

Gretchen Artig-Swomley

Phone: 651-260-9742

Rick Bosak

651-426-9695

Faith Kuny

Phone: 612-718-4316

Jim Lindner

Phone: 651-429-7597

For more information on meetings, city ordinances, recent events, permit procedures, etc. please consult the Gem Lake web-site. The address is www.gemlakemn.org

Each Gem Lake Newsletter is also posted on the web-site under the

news section.

Please email your ideas, comments and suggestions. See box at left for detailed contact information.

CITY OF GEM LAKE
4200 Otter Lake Road
Gem Lake, MN
55110

