MEMORANDUM

To: Matt Dalbey and Danielle Arigoni, EPA
From: Amy Doll, ICF WAM
       Harrison Rue, ICF
       Rick Williams, VMWP
Date: December 4, 2009
Re: WA 4-48 Cedar Falls Final Next Steps Memo, Task 9 Deliverable 9b

Background

The ICF team examined relevant plans, codes, flood-related policies, buy-out program considerations, and other related local and regional guidelines to identify barriers to focused redevelopment of selected corridors (and the buildings and neighborhoods surrounding them), as well as opportunities for better enforcement and interagency coordination to achieve the community’s desired outcomes. We also considered potential changes to codes, policies, and programs that might better position the corridors and City for public or private investment and redevelopment (see Policy Review Findings Memo).

In September, we toured several areas of the City with staff and residents, including historic downtown neighborhoods, new subdivisions, commercial corridors, and flood-impacted areas. We met with stakeholder groups, staff from local, state, and federal agencies, business people, and elected officials, and conducted a planning workshop in North Cedar Falls. Although the public workshop focused on a specific area, discussion of principles, policies and plans were framed in the understanding that the team’s recommendations could be applied throughout Cedar Falls and neighboring communities. This was reinforced in a work session for policymakers and staff the next day, where we discussed a variety of examples of form-based codes, design guidelines, multimodal corridor planning strategies, and zoning overlay districts.

North Cedar Public Workshop

This memo focuses largely on the North Cedar/Center Street area, based on results from the public workshop and ensuing policy discussions. The priorities discussed and presented by small groups at the public workshop fell into three general sets of desired community features:

Safety & transportation choice
- Safer bike and walk routes to school, parks and downtown
- Slower speeds on Center Street
- Improved street crossings (medians, roundabouts) at key intersections

Placemaking
- Hamlet-style “Main Street” district
- Roundabout and signage as “gateway” features
- Creating identity and beautification through street trees, banners, lights, etc.
Community Revitalization & Amenities

- Revitalized commercial buildings
- Buyout properties “naturalized” as open spaces and pocket parks
- Redevelop key parcels (e.g. Western/Center and Clair/Center Sts.)
- Housing options (affordable, retirement, etc.)

These concepts were then drawn by the team (see appendix for complete set of drawings). The next steps that follow are organized into short, medium, and long-term actions, with the understanding that this initial sorting should be reviewed by staff and policymakers and adjusted as needed (some of the mid-term actions could easily be re-prioritized and accelerated as short-term). Many of these strategies are also discussed in more detail in the Policy Review Findings Memo.

At the North Cedar workshop, residents worked together around maps, discussed future options, and presented priority strategies and potential projects.

Short-term actions (1 to 2 years)

Both public and policymakers at the workshops agreed that a focus on the North Cedar neighborhood and Center Street corridor is the most critical short-term action. Starting with the Center Street Corridor Plan (initiated by the City as a follow-up activity, with the City’s consultant attending our meetings and workshops), the short-term North Cedar strategy would help jump-start a mid-term sustainable recovery for the northern area, while serving as a longer-term model for revitalization of other corridors throughout Cedar Falls. Many of these “first steps” can be pursued at the same time (e.g., planning efforts and policy changes at the same time as streetscape investments, etc.), rather than thinking of them as a sequential strategy.

Key actions include:

**Planning**

- Accelerate development of the North Cedar/Center Street Plan, using a broad public process, in cooperation with the North Cedar Association and area businesses, and based on the concepts developed in the September public workshop. The Plan should address street design and network connections, pedestrian and bicycle networks, amenities and landscaping, trail connections to downtown and area parks, design concepts and guidelines for the “Main Street” district including commercial/retail and infill mixed use and housing along Center Street, walkable residential neighborhoods, parks and open space, and stormwater management/green infrastructure. It should also be developed to set a planning framework for a mixed-use zoning overlay district. In order to ensure that Cedar Falls’ land use and capital investment policies are based in current market reality, the City should also conduct an overview analysis to determine the types and price range of housing and commercial development that market demand will likely support.
Use the North Cedar efforts as the beginning of a public process for developing a new Comprehensive Plan. This approach will maximize the public’s participation and usefulness of individual planning products, while helping to get a much-needed Comp Plan update under way without significant added staff time and expense. Both the Comp Plan and the North Cedar Plan should follow the smart growth principles described in detail in the Policy Review Findings memo.

Begin discussions with surrounding communities and regional partners about developing a regional stormwater management plan (or Green Infrastructure Plan) for flood-damaged areas and parklands along the Cedar River. Consider use of some of the less-impacted buyout area for a regional sports field complex for multigame tournaments, depending on use limitations of specific funding sources used.

The existing North Cedar (top left) is in walking distance to downtown (lower left above), although separated by the floodway (blue) and largely surrounded by the 500-year floodplain (green). The developable land around existing North Cedar neighborhoods and the elementary school (top right) would provide space for walkable neighborhoods similar in size to the original downtown.

**Policies and programs**

Adopt the Draft Floodplain Ordinance Revisions (per staff recommendation) to provide more certainty and direction to rebuilding and/or buyout efforts. This should be done in conjunction with the conversations (noted above) about developing a regional stormwater management approach. Significant input during the site visit identified that filling in of individual properties to get structures above the 100 and 500 year flood marks has caused significant problems, redirecting water onto adjacent properties, even knocking neighboring properties off their foundations. A more sustainable approach to rebuilding would identify areas where growth is appropriate, and limit scattershot filling on individual properties, while making room for water to flow freely during storm events. Innovative strategies could be used that allow development without altering the path of flood waters within these critical impacted areas. In many communities that have been impacted by river or creek flooding, flood plains (100 year typically, and 500 year in impacted areas) are considered “sacrosanct.” Developments within these areas are not allowed to reduce a site’s flood retention volume, or to substantively modify direction of flood water flow onto or over a site. In this way adjacent, upstream and downstream properties are not impacted by changes in the flood waters by modifications in the flood plain.
Housing development that allows flood waters to flow onto and through a site, under and around the building (section diagram, above, and pictures, below, Novato, California). Note that street front entrance is at grade, above, while landscaped courtyard/patio is lower and allowed to flood in stormwater events.

- Conduct a work session for staff and policymakers to 1) prioritize these actions (especially the short-term list); 2) identify specific lead individuals or departments responsible for each action; and 3) determine available funding and more specific strategies for implementation.
- Conduct training sessions for staff, planning board, policymakers and the public on key principles of smart growth, walkability, complete streets, etc. Couple with specific planning efforts where possible (North Cedar, First Street, University) and include planning partners, developers, and other agencies.
- Continue discussions with Iowa DED staff about support for an early-stage “Main Street” program for North Cedar, to help residents and business owners to start thinking of the Center Street corridor as a market district and destination.
Detail of Center St. in North Cedar (north at right), with new walkable Main Street-style commercial district, senior housing, shared parking at rear of buildings, sidewalks, street trees, and a roundabout at Center St. and Lone Tree Road.

**Projects**

- Allocate funding in upcoming budgets for implementation of the North Cedar Plan. When the Plan is complete, conduct an exercise to prioritize key projects. Fund and construct priority Center St. improvements – such as streetscape and intersection improvements, curb and gutter, sidewalks and street trees, on-street parking or small shared-use city lots, signage, lighting, and drainage, as determined in the North Cedar Plan.

- Plan and construct a roundabout at the intersection of Center and Lone Tree. These intersection improvements should be discussed and confirmed in the North Cedar Plan, but our technical analysis (and public input) identified that location as a strong candidate for Cedar Falls’ first roundabout, for safety, traffic management, and placemaking reasons.

- In order to help connect North Cedar with downtown, plant a double row of shade trees along the multi-use path/sidewalk from the Center St. bridge, along the north side of First St., over to Main St. Install a mid-block median crosswalk on First St. between Center and Main (if designed carefully, this should be able to be incorporated into any longer-term improvements to First St.).

- Buy (or option) key available properties along Center Street, and include planning for their redevelopment in the North Cedar process. These could include a motel building or commercial property, in the area of Center and Western, Clair, or Lone Tree Road. Depending on the property, this could be senior or affordable housing, or a mixed-use project. Since it will take some time to create a Framework Plan and adopt regulations to ensure its implementation, public acquisition or initial control of key properties can be the quickest route to initiate catalytic redevelopment projects. Vacant properties would be preferable; if selected properties are currently occupied, redevelopment could affect the supply of affordable housing unless strategies to maintain long-term affordability are included (deed restrictions, loan requirements, tax credit program requirements, etc.). The purpose of purchasing the property is to gain more control of (and expedite) the eventual outcome of a development, not to have the City actually be the developer. Having ownership allows more say in the development program and design. The City might consider purchasing a property and then select and work with a community nonprofit or an enlightened private developer (through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process) to redevelop...
and manage the preferred project. The RFP can include design concepts and clear direction on how the development should fit with the community vision.

Example village-scaled mixed-use project (Davis, California).

Mid-term actions (2 to 5 years)

- Continue to fund and construct Center St. improvements – streetscape, sidewalks and street trees, parking, signage, lighting, drainage, etc. – as determined in North Cedar Plan (see initial concept drawings and street sections in appendix)
- Fund and construct new trails along lower Center St. from the new “business district” area to the Cedar River Bridge. Trail may vary in distance from roadway due to elevation (see street sections). Provide lighting and median crosswalks at key locations (park, school, trail crossings). Add new trailhead parking lot in the new “business district” to encourage bike riders and hikers to park near shops and services.
- Adopt a Framework Plan for North Cedar, based on design concepts and guidelines to be developed during the North Cedar/Center Street planning process (and eventually incorporated into updated local codes). Key elements should include:
  - A Mobility Plan showing how the multimodal transportation network will connect destinations and neighborhoods.
  - Street Design Guidelines, incorporating the relationship between vehicular, walking, biking, and transit movements, along with diagrams of the relationship between street R.O.W. and building frontage, street-front building activities, and design details for “green streets” approach.
  - A Parks and Open Space plan, linked by the pedestrian and bicycle framework, current and future transit stops, and integrated with a regional strategy for stormwater management and green infrastructure.
  - A parking strategy, which should look at the amount and location of shared parking needed at a district-wide level, and not just on each property. Maximize on-street parking as a resource and consider purchasing strategic parcels for City sponsored lots in lieu of individual on-site parking for each parcel. Otherwise encourage shared parking through a parking reduction regulation in the zoning ordinance for cooperative parking easements or arrangements.
  - An overlay zoning district, to require that the planning elements outlined in the Framework Plan are applied to all development in North Cedar. The overlay district approach allows implementation of new planning guidelines in a specific area without having to rewrite all city codes.
Some example model code language sources

*Massachusetts Smart Growth Toolkit* – fairly simple code language for specific elements, including form-based, parking, Transit-Oriented Development, and many other topics.  

*Smart Codes: Model Land-Development Regulations*, American Planning Association. Examples of several different types of smart growth codes.  
http://www.planning.org/research/smartgrowth/

*The SmartCode* is a more complex, but free, open source integrated land development ordinance. It folds zoning, subdivision regulations, urban design, public works standards and basic architectural controls into one compact document. It is also a unified ordinance, spanning scales from the region to the community to the building.  
http://www.smartcodecentral.com/smartfilesv9_2.html

*Westminster Traditional Mixed-Use Neighborhood Design Guidelines*, Westminster, CO. These are Traditional Mixed-Use Neighborhood Design Guidelines, adopted by the City that are then incorporated into a PUD 1 Master Plan Application.  
www.ci.westminster.co.us/files/tmund.pdf

- Align the development project review and approval process, and funding or site selection decisions for public projects, with the Iowa Green Streets Criteria (or similar standards, like Cedar Rapids Smart Growth Scorecard). Although not required by state statute, these criteria are a useful project analysis and ranking tool. Provide support for highly ranked projects or projects that are located in the specific target areas of revitalization plans.

- Continue to work with surrounding jurisdictions, INWCOG, and state and federal agencies to develop a Regional Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan for flood-prone areas along the Cedar River. The City of Cedar Falls could take the lead and advocate for a long-term planning effort by all jurisdictions along major rivers to implement a strong, enforceable set of development policies and regulations, which determine on a regional level where development can and cannot occur within floodways, 100 and 500 year flood plains. The first step would be development of this regional GI Plan. Of particular interest is limiting the filling of these areas, whether by private owners or cities, counties or state organizations.

- Incorporate new smart growth street guidelines into regional design standards, to be adopted by the City. Evaluate the Statewide Urban Standard Specifications (also called the Statewide Urban Design and Specifications, or SUDAS), and the Cedar Falls Design Supplement (to SUDAS), to incorporate new thinking into green streets (storm water management), shared streets and other detail design elements such as Complete Streets, roundabouts, etc. Many cities are beginning to adopt these SUDAS standards, and a set of modifiers, or context sensitive design elements, should be included to allow for simple local modifications. These context sensitive modifiers should be part of the base regulations.

- Update the Comprehensive Land Use Plan to 1) get consensus on a broad community vision; 2) outline a set of goals and objectives to guide planning and investment decisions; 3) incorporate (or establish a process for creating) more specific framework plans for other areas like downtown, the riverfront, the University Ave. and First Street Corridors, College Hill, and large planned PUD areas; and 4) include a clear implementation plan (short, mid, and long-term) with specific actions and named lead agencies/departments/stakeholders responsible for each strategy.
New North Cedar neighborhoods – based on extending the existing street grid, lot sizes, and neighborhood character – would be similar in size and scale to downtown. It would be both separated from and linked to downtown by the river, trails, and natural areas.

**Long-term actions (5 to 10 years)**

- Revise the Municipal Code and Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, design guidelines, and other standards to conform to the new Comprehensive Plan vision, goals, and policies. Incorporate Smart Growth Policies in the Comprehensive Plan as well as in the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance and street standards. Apply new codes and standards to all development proposals, but particularly in new growth areas, focused plan areas such as the North Cedar Area, redeveloping corridors, and large-scale subdivisions and PUDs.
- Implement a planning process (similar to North Cedar workshops) for other corridors and neighborhoods throughout Cedar Falls. Apply smart growth principles to retrofit commercial corridors in downtown, the riverfront, the University Ave. and First Street Corridors, College Hill, and large planned PUD areas. Focus increased density on “Transit Targets” to create Transit Ready Development along key corridors to gradually build ridership to support enhanced transit service.
- Develop and implement housing programs to provide more housing choice, and a range of housing types for neighborhoods throughout the city. Include a requirement for developments to offer a variety of lot sizes, building types, and prices; consider an ordinance to require all developments to provide a set percentage of affordable housing (typically 10% to 15%). Implement an Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance and program (garage or basement apartments or “granny flats”).
- Adopt a strong enforceable set of development policies and regulations, which determine on a regional level where development can and cannot occur within floodways, 100 and 500 year flood plains, as determined by the regional Green Infrastructure Plan recommended in the mid-term actions.
- Continue to work regionally and with other localities around the state to incorporate smart growth and Complete Streets standards into regional (SUDAS) and state DOT street standards. Coordinate local policies with any state actions to align funding resources toward sustainable outcomes, such as the Iowa Green Streets criteria.