



STAFF REPORT

TO: Mayor Keis and Members of the City Council

FROM: Corrin Wendell, Community Development Director

DATE: Wednesday, May 11, 2022

RE: RCP – Resilient Communities Project Presentation

ACTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED

Discussion of RCP Project, Outcomes, and Next Steps

BACKGROUND

Earlier this year, the City began a partnership with the University of Minnesota’s RCP Program focusing on “Creating and Sustaining Equity through Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Public Transit Connectivity” through research, analysis, and community engagement.

Little Canada’s population numbers are forecasted to remain steady through 2040. Geographically positioned in a robust region of cities and communities of different sizes and a population with diverse abilities and changing characteristics due to things like aging, retirement, work from home, or childcare, accessibility, connectivity, and safety in transportation are paramount priorities in servicing the needs of the residents and visitors as stated in our 2040 Comprehensive Plan and the City’s Strategic Plan. As we shift to the implementation of these plans, this project would focus on these three priorities, aiming to accomplish the five objectives listed below:

1. Improve and enhance the equity, accessibility, connectivity, and safety of pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit pathways.
 - a. Considerations can include:
 - i. Safety measures that work in tandem with vehicles using the road and where vehicle use intersects with non-car transportation;
 - ii. Connected sidewalk networks;
 - iii. Clearly signed and marked pathways and simply-to-use safety measures, like HAWK signals, zebra crossings, and bright, noticeable signage.
2. Improve and enhance the equity, accessibility, connectivity, and safety of transit stops.
 - a. Considerations can include:
 - i. Connected sidewalks and paved areas free of mobility obstacles;
 - ii. Covered/sheltered transit stops with seating options (of various heights), open space under the shelter for standing and wheelchairs;
 - iii. Transit schedule information and signage, easy to access and in easy-to-read fonts, with options for those with different visual abilities.

3. After creating improvement and enhancement standards, identifying Little Canada transit stops and pathways for improvement
4. Ideally, all transit stops would be analyzed for improvement and upgraded; unfortunately, budget or technical constraints are transit planning realities. Students will create a detailed, multi-phase implementation plan to meet the identified improvement standards for all transit stops and pathways. This plan should also include community engagement strategies.
5. Learning objectives for the students:
 - a. Equitable, accessible, safe, and connected transit is a challenge with many moving parts, each with their own challenges. This project will be an opportunity to increase understanding of transit planning at multiple levels (city, region, county), transit budgets, Universal Design, prioritization, long-range planning, community engagement, and problem-solving.

Creating design and improvement standards for transit stops and pathways plans for the diverse, long-term, and changing needs of Little Canada residents and visitors greatly benefits the long-term development of Little Canada. The project provides specific, actionable models for equity, accessibility, connectivity, and safety while establishing a process for creating transit plans with the same qualities. The adaptability and equity of these processes would contribute to a stable and secure quality of life in Little Canada.

Improving bus, bicycle, and pedestrian transit stops and pathways provides safe, reliable, and accessible mobility to all residents and visitors, and is especially impactful for people with disabilities, those without access to a car or ability to drive, people with restricted budgets, and anyone with any intersections of identities that inhibit mobility. There are also the broader potential benefits of reducing individual car use, which can have impacts on road safety (fewer road accidents) and less pollution and emissions (improving air quality and reducing respiratory illnesses in BIPOC communities, which experience respiratory illness at a higher rate than the national average).

This project supports and conforms to Little Canada's Comprehensive Plan, specifically Chapter 5: Transportation. The goals and policies in this chapter identify safety and connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists as main priorities, aiming to remedy aging or outdated infrastructure, incomplete sidewalk and trail networks, and reducing car/pedestrian/bicyclist conflicts. This project also conforms with the transportation goals of the Metropolitan Council for equity, transportation safety, regional connectivity (via bus rapid transit connectivity), and strategic and actionable standards and processes. In addition, the City's Strategic Plan which outlines nine visionary outcomes were identified for 2019-2025. Those visionary outcomes were expanded into four strategic directions that were identified to help achieve this vision, including increased diversified community engagement as well as enhancing identity and empowering the community.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discussion of RCP Project, Outcomes, and Next Steps