

Moorhead Power Plant Study Group

Stage 2 Recommendations

September 16, 2009



Stage 2: Next Best Use of the Power Plant Site: Working Toward a Good Fit

Submitted by the Moorhead Power Plant Study Group

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Introduction: The Moorhead Power Study Group was established in November, 2009, with the mission to determine “What is the next best use of this site for our city?” The Study Group was instructed to think “in a broad, open way, without attention to cost estimates of the probabilities of the project’s happening.”

In its first two months the Study Group worked intensively. We met regularly. City staff, in particular Scott Hutchins and Kristie Leshovsky, provided us with excellent support in our work.

We were fortunate to have assistance from a group of architecture students from NDSU’s Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, who presented various proposals with visualizations of possibilities that were extremely helpful. We sought public input through an Open House in early January, 2009, and a survey available to Moorhead citizens on line. The Group presented its initial interim report to the Mayor, City Council, and community titled



“Collecting Ideas, Exploring Possibilities,” with first stage recommendations in late January, 2009.

We were excited by our success in getting significant public input, and energized by the enthusiasm and high level of interest in the community for the project of identifying a new use for the Power Plant site. There was significant public participation in the Open House. We anticipated being able to identify one or several particularly suitable possibilities and planned an Open House to present these to the community in early May. There was particular interest in identifying a use or uses that would meet the DEED criteria (public ownership, public use, and providing jobs) so that the city might keep the \$1.4 million set aside for cleanup of the site.

Several factors led to a change in these plans.

- One factor was the difficulty in getting not just ideas, but more detailed economically realistic proposals for the site that met the criteria identified by the Study Group through input from Moorhead citizens. These include continued public ownership of the site, predominantly public use of the site, adaptive reuse of the existing structure, and the site’s serving as a gathering place in the community.
- A second factor is the continued difficult economic situation, including a serious budget deficit in the State of Minnesota, the City of Moorhead, and the Moorhead Public Schools. This seemed to make it more difficult for people to be optimistic about possibilities and likely contributed to the difficulty in getting more detailed proposals. In addition, there is evidence of public resistance to increased taxes and special assessments, making it more difficult to raise money for any sort of project in the city.
- The third factor is the Flood of 2009. The flood virtually paralyzed the city for more than a month. It prevented the Study Group from meeting for two months. The Power Plant site had limited access due to flood protection for more than a month. The flood was very hard on the community, and the devastation that did occur, along with the realization that the flood could have been worse, made people very cautious about any kind of development near the river.

Work of the Study Group February through July:

The Study Group invited various individuals and groups to think about and submit proposals with regard to use of the site. We met with people from the arts community, performing arts community, someone proposing a popular music center at the site, a local architect, the NDSU architecture students, and staff from the Moorhead Schools, Concordia, and Minnesota State University Moorhead. In addition, Study Group members received input from non-profit organizations, community organizations, community contacts, etc.

There were various ideas proposed for uses of the site: a venue for performing arts and popular music, studio space and space for community art education, a year-round farmers’ market, a center for non-profit organizations, a teen/youth center, etc.

The Study Group found that it was not easy to get proposals and that we were probably unrealistic about how quickly people would come forward with them, particularly in any detail. The lack of clear plans for the building to help people understand the existing structure and spaces, and the impossibility of letting people view the building while environmental remediation was underway likely contributed to this.

While a number of people who contacted us or met with us had a great deal of enthusiasm about possibilities, no “key player” or person or institution willing and able to coordinate detailed proposals has emerged.

What the Study Group has concluded thus far:

- Citizens of Moorhead who participated in the Open House and on-line survey have made it quite clear, that:
 - People see this as a valuable city-owned riverfront property, adjoining a park and the riverfront public path.
 - They would like a predominantly public use of the site, with the additional possibility of some compatible private uses.
 - They would like preservation and reuse of the existing building.
 - They see the site’s serving as a gathering place for the community.
 - They would like the site to be a “signature” place.
 - The use or uses of the site should be compatible with the neighborhood

- Some possibilities have been identified as acceptable and feasible for the site, given the criteria identified above, such as any of the following, including a combination of two or more of them:
 - Public library
 - Recreation center
 - Youth/teen Center
 - Studios and art facilities
 - Non-profit organizations’ offices
 - A performance center with small to medium venues
 - An appropriate museum

- Some other possibilities have been identified as unacceptable and unfeasible for the site, given the criteria identified above, including:
 - A hotel
 - A large performance center
 - Any use involving heavy traffic and requiring extensive parking
- Finding a use of the site that meets the above criteria may take some time. It may well be that such a process, realistically, takes longer than we originally thought, unless, through luck, some quick solution, such as the relocation of the Library to the site, materializes.
- The 2009 Flood has changed things and will likely limit creative and open thinking about the use of the Power Plant site at least until the Corps of Engineers' recommendations for flood control are announced and the City of Moorhead has made clear its flood mitigation plans for this area.

The Study Group met with City Engineer Bob Zimmerman. We learned that the Power Plant structure made it though this historic flood without any damage and no water, even in its basement. Zimmerman claimed that this flood should not change or limit thinking about future use of the site. He pointed out that this site is as safe or safer than many sites in the city.



(For example, the Heritage Hjemkomst Interpretive Center and the Emergency Services Center are much more vulnerable.)

- There are needs in the community that were made clear in the work of the Study Group which we believe require attention and planning, even if the Power Plant site is not suitable for them. There is a significant need for something like a **teen/youth center**. The Lake Agassiz Arts Council (now called the Arts Partnership) determined a need in the Fargo-Moorhead community for a **large performance venue** with seating for 1800-2000 people.

Stage 2 Recommendations:

1. There should not be a rush to come up with a solution for the question of future use of the site, including the adjoining publicly owned land, since some uses of the actual Power Plant site might require use of some of it.
 - Moorhead Public Service anticipates continued use of part of the site for its backup generator for perhaps two years. Since this generates some net revenue, there is a source of funding for some of the general maintenance costs of the site.
 - As of Fall 2009, DEED will likely be allocating the funding set aside for Moorhead to other communities, since a suitable public use combined with job opportunities has not been identified. This takes away the pressure to quickly identify such a use in order to keep those funds. It should be noted that the city could apply for such funding in the future, if a suitable proposal were developed.
 - It will likely be difficult for proposals to be made until flood control recommendations from the Corps of Engineers are announced and the City of Moorhead has determined flood mitigation plans for this area.
2. Input from the citizens of Moorhead has made it clear that they prefer continued public control of the site, preservation and reuse of the building, predominantly public use of the site, and the site's being a gathering place. The City should make every effort to honor these identified community criteria in the process of determining a future use of the site.
3. Proposals for private use or uses of the site should not be invited until earnest efforts to seek proposals for public use of the site have been unsuccessful and a realistic period of time has been allowed for that process.
4. To encourage and facilitate proposals that meet the above criteria, we recommend that

- City staff be directed to develop a packet of materials such as plans for the existing structure and photographs of the interior to be available for people or groups thinking about making proposals. In addition, since



Source: NDSU Architecture Student Concept

environmental remediation has been completed, perhaps a procedure to enable people serious about developing proposals to visit the building.

- City staff be directed to undertake an effort to find a public use. This might include developing a plan to publicize the City's interest in receiving such proposals and meeting with interested parties, much as city staff currently do with businesses or developers thinking about proposals for privately owned projects.
5. The Power Plant Study Group publicize to the community the current state of the process and seek further public input. We had projected an Open House for early May, and, of course, that never came to be. The study group might ask (at an Open House or a public forum, and surveys available on line) for:
- Ideas about how to encourage proposals
 - Views on what would be acceptable should no public use be identified after a sufficiently long period:

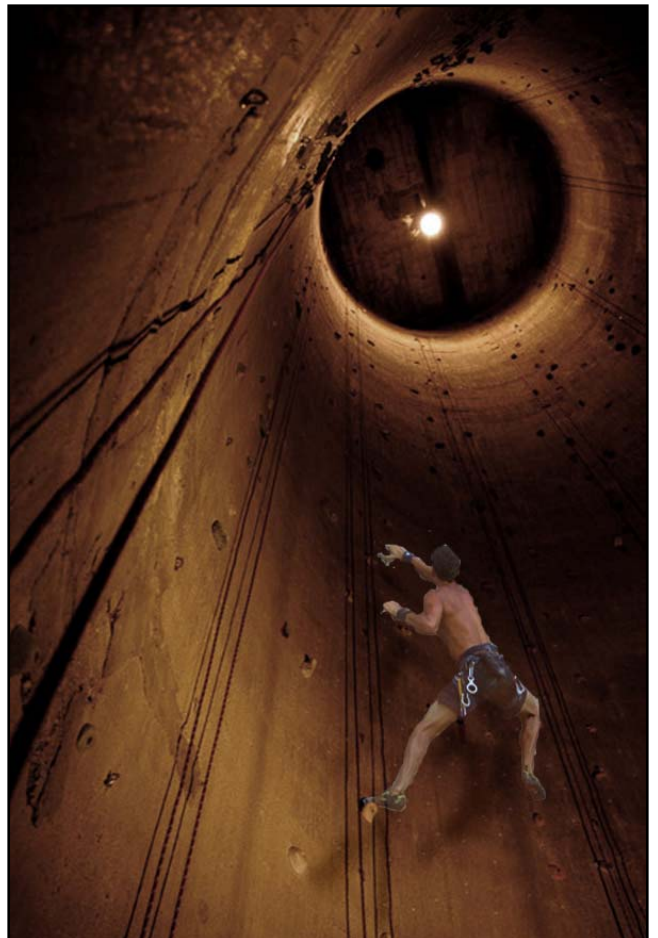
- Private uses that would be acceptable
- Would it be acceptable for the site to become private (be sold)?

The Power Plant Study Group should discuss and report on the input received.

6. Power Plant Study Group has gained valuable knowledge and experience that makes it well equipped to review ideas and proposals for the site, as well as to gather public input, and we believe the Study Group should continue. We recommend that the Study Group meet every quarter, and at other times when there is a need.

We recommend that a meeting be set up for the Power Plant Study Group, Mayor Voxland, City Manager Mike Redlinger, and Scott Hutchins and other relevant city staff to go over the report in detail

We recommend that city staff be asked to regularly update the Study Group on matters related to the Power Plant site, including inquiries about, and ideas and proposals for use of the site.



Source: NDSU Architecture Student Concept

In addition, if, after a satisfactory period of time (2 years) no public use for the site is identified, the Power Plant Study Group could be involved in the process of determining that the City should go on to seek other proposals, such as for private use or uses of the site.

We also recommend that the files of the Group and the materials collected, including the study projects, graphics and photographs prepared by the NDSU architecture students be archived by the city.



Source: NDSU Architecture Student Concept