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TO: Andrew Hellenga, City Manager
Katie Jones, Economic Development & Equity Manager

FROM: Megan A. Masson-Minock, AICP Principal; Matteo Passalaqua, Associate Planner;
Brady Heath, Community Planner

DATE: May 12, 2025

RE: Results from the Future of Water Street Community Engagement Event

The Future of Water Street Community Engagement event took place on May 1, 2025, at the Freight House. This was the third event in a series of community engagement events to inform the drafting of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and solicit community feedback on potential design elements to be incorporated into the site. This information will be vital to finding a suitable developer for the Water Street Redevelopment Area.

Fifteen people participated in the event to share their Hopes and Fears as well as their Needs and Wants for the future development of Water Street. Along with 3 staff members from Carlisle/Wortman Associates (CWA), Mayor Nicole Brown, City Manager Andrew Hellenga, 3 members from the City Planning staff (Joe Meyers, Katie Jones and Josh Burns), 2 members from AKT Peerless (Jeremy McCallion and Scott Wasielewski), and Washtenaw County Brownfield Planner Nathan Vought were in attendance to help facilitate the groups.

The purpose of this memo is to document the process and results of the meeting. The document has the following sections: Process, Results, Next Steps, Appendix A: Hopes and Fears worksheet, Appendix B: Needs and Wants activity, and Appendix C: Final Thoughts.

PROCESS:

The meeting began with a Gallery Walk where participants could familiarize themselves with the site's history, environmental status, brownfield plan, and former proposed developments. The boards included:

- Timeline diagram
- Proposed site plans for the Water Street Redevelopment Area over the years

*Benjamin R. Carlisle, President John L. Enos, Vice President
Paul Montagno, Principal Megan Masson-Minock, Principal Laura Kreps, Principal Brent Strong, Principal
David Scurto, Principal Sally M. Elmiger, Principal Craig Strong, Principal Douglas J. Lewan, Principal
Richard K. Carlisle, Past President/Senior Principal R. Donald Wortman, Past Principal*

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- 2002 Biltmore Plan
- 2004 Alta Survey
- 2013 Shape Ypsi Master Plan pages of Water Street
- 2015 Brownfield Plan
- 2020 Kaufman Plan
- 2024 Spatially Extensive Areas of Contamination/Areas of Concern.

Each participant was also given a packet, which contained:

- Meeting agenda
- Small group discussion ground rules
- A recap of the History of Water Street event
- A recap of the Brownfield Redevelopment and Water Street event
- A detailed description of each poster board
- Proposed site plans for the Water Street Redevelopment Area over the years
- City contact information
- Timeline diagram

Following the Gallery Walk, Mayor Nicole Brown welcomed everyone and thanked them for their interest in the future of the site. Katie Jones then shared an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement. Both the Mayor and City Manager Hellenga shared their vision of what the Water Street Redevelopment Area could become. A presentation from the City and CWA staff followed. That presentation included:

- A recap of the History of Water Street and Brownfield Redevelopment events
- Expectations for the Water Street redevelopment area
- The RFQ process
- Explanation of the small group activities

From there the fifteen participants split into 5 smaller groups that ranged in size of 2-4 people, accompanied by a facilitator. City staff, representatives from AKT Peerless, and Washtenaw County answered any questions from participants and helped facilitate the groups.

In the small groups, participants were asked to share their hopes and fears for the site (see results in [Appendix A](#)). Then, the participants were handed sticky notes to write down what they needed and wanted on the site. The participants wrote their own ideas down with a few overlapping themes from other participants in their group. Those themes are described in the [results section](#) of this memo. Then the facilitators asked participants to revisit the hopes and fears worksheet and rearrange their needs and wants based on what was discussed earlier. The needs and wants are transcribed in [Appendix B](#).

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Following the hopes and fears, and needs and wants activities, the small groups reconvened as one large group where the facilitators shared a summary of what their groups discussed. Before the end of the meeting, participants were then given the opportunity to share their thoughts with the group and ask questions (see [Appendix C](#)).

RESULTS:

Participants shared their own hopes and fears during the small group activity. While the responses varied, the following were common themes between two or more groups.

Fears	Hopes
Nothing happens with the site	Greenspace preservation and parks
Low density/single-use structures	Mixed-use and dense buildings
Auto oriented	Mixed income (low to high)
	Walkable
	Transit oriented

Participants offered a variety of needs and wants for the site. After the small groups revisited their hopes and fears, some groups decided that their ideas were in between a need and a want. The responses also varied, but there were common themes between other participants in their groups and other groups. The table below shows the common themes amongst the participants.

Needs	In between	Wants
Dense mixed-use development	Communal Space / Civic Center	Parks with recreational amenities
Tax generating		Retail/entertainment options
Mixed-Income housing (low to high)		Restaurant/café overlooking the river
Connection to the surrounding neighborhoods		Green development standards
Transit oriented		
Walkable		

NEXT STEPS:

The three community engagement events held in April and May of 2025 shared a rich amount of information about the Water Street Redevelopment Area and the expectation for the site. While all meetings were recorded and posted online, the participation was not the breadth expected or needed to inform the RFQ process. We recommend additional community engagement to inform decisions of the Ad Hoc Citizens Committee for the RFQ and City Council.

In terms of next steps, we recommend the City consider one or more of the following:

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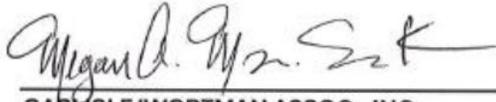
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- Community focus groups on expectations for the Water Street Redevelopment Area, using the same structure as “The Future of Water Street” meeting. CWA could facilitate the focus groups. These focus groups would likely capture richer feedback than an on-line exercise or statistically valid survey (described below) but would not reach the same amount of people as either of those two options.
- An on-line exercise where participants could share their hopes and fears, and wants and needs for the Water Street Redevelopment Area. This exercise could be posted as a companion to the videos of the community engagement events. CWA could design and host the on-line activity. Since participation would be voluntary, the results could not necessarily be seen as reflective of the community.
- A statistically valid survey addressing the same questions as the on-line exercise. CWA would sub-contract these services and assist with the analysis and reporting of the results. This option would be more expensive than the on-line exercise, but the results would reflect those of the community, due to the methodology of selecting the sample of people to survey.
- A real estate panel, similar to the panels to the “The History of Water Street” and “Brownfield Redevelopment and Water Street” panels but featuring real estate professionals could be assembled. CWA, with assistance on filming, could design and facilitate this event. This panel could be held in conjunction with an Ad Hoc Citizens Committee meeting or before the selection of the committee occurs. This option would provide direct feedback from the real estate industry on what developers will be looking for in the RFQ as well as what potential items could impact interest in submitting a proposal.
- Interviews or focus groups with developers, real estate professionals, state agencies, or professional organizations. CWA could schedule, conduct, and report findings.

We are happy to meet with you to discuss next steps in the RFQ process. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

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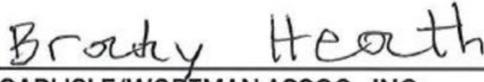
Respectfully submitted,



CARLISLE/WORTMAN ASSOC., INC.
Megan Masson-Minock, AICP
Principal



CARLISLE/WORTMAN ASSOC., INC.
Matteo Passalacqua
Community Planner



CARLISLE/WORTMAN ASSOC., INC.
Brady Heath
Community Planner

Appendix A

Transcribed Responses from Participants

Hopes and Fears Worksheet

Fears	Hopes
Group 1	
Trying to do too much on the site	200 ft buffer from river
Not a sea of nonpermeable surface	Public river walk
Sparks venue	Green space preservation
Dog park	Mixed use with civic services
	Observatory deck/rooftop amenities
	Community financial investing opportunity
	Large natural area/border to border trail
	MI arterial of downtown
	Orient transit
Group 2	
Low density	High density
Flood planning	2/3 on tax rolls
Public perception RE: native land	Accessible financially and physically
	Mixed income – low to high
	Safe relocation of current habitants
	Small park (pocket park)
	Bike paths
	Tall buildings along Michigan Ave.
Group 3	
They/developers won't follow through with concerns and fears.	Capture spill over from Ann Arbor
Continue to be saddled with this	Hope for people who want to be a part of the community.
Remember what was there, it was bad.	Buses from Water Street to A2 that are direct
Fearful that nothing happens	Hope that people who live at Water Street go to Ypsi Schools
Fell apart in the middle of development and half built (could be an opportunity)	Ypsi can thread the needle between the taxes we need while providing a mi of housing types where a variety of people would be comfortable.
Concerned that development would be too big and not organic – could be a giant force politically that comes in all at once.	Keep road going across the river (shape Ypsi Plan)
Doesn't want the city to feel desperate and that we need to take anything that comes our way.	Do some public infrastructure and catalytic development and don't need a master developer.

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Fears	Hopes
Don't want to be an A2 bedroom community.	Useful retail
2,000 sq. ft. houses are not needed	Walkable
	Improved pedestrian bridge
	Pharmacy
	Connect Parsons to Water Street and mesh with neighborhood to the east.
Group 4	
No connection to Ford Lake	Connection to Ford Lake and Border to Border trail (unify the site)
No walkability	Reevaluate automobile traffic to the site and minimize the parking lots.
Large single-use structures that could fail	Access to housing and services
Over parked	Accessible by mass transit
Ground contamination	Expanded green space
Developed in phases and the phases don't match	Capping the pollution
Awareness of what Water Street is	Diversity of uses (entertainment)
	Central Square
	Multi-use streets (Amsterdam)
Group 5	
	Would love a grocery store; particularly Trader Joe's
	River needs to be accessible to the public
	Café/Diner with outdoor seating overlooking the river
	Public restrooms
	Not suburban, dense enough, not designed around car accessibility

Notes:

- Commuter rail
- Efficient transit to airport
- What happened to the 2020 plan? Developers not prepared – pretty good plan
- Why not capture more of A2 growth in Ypsi?
- Steve Pearce Church
- Depot repurposed from abandoned into a restaurant

Appendix B

Transcribed Responses from Participants

Needs and Wants Activity

Needs	In between	Wants
Group 1		
Tax generating entities		Widen easement on B2B trail + improve trail surface
<u>AFFORDABLE</u> housing		New city hall
Mixed use development (office, retail, housing)		Canoe livery/tubing access/City run recreation to make \$ w/ water fun
Health of water (run off etc.)		Community center
deBrownfielding		Smoother connection to B2B + promotion of cycling
Preservation of and public access to the river front		Keep all the big trees
Access to water recreation		Public transit access
Community space		Net zero, green standards, LEED requirements for development
Minimize non-permeable surfaces i.e., parking lots		Landscaping that promotes native plants. No high maintenance, essentially nonfunctional grass.
Birds! Nature Plants! Preserve the space		
Large natural area		
Have sufficient green space		
<u>Environment</u> : protect wild life habitats		
Group 2		
Mixed income Housing (including High End)	Bike paths	Municipal office park
Ownership options for housing		Public restrooms
Sheltered bus stop		Park
Accessible grocery options		Energy efficient development
Mixed income housing		
Public space along river		

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Needs	In between	Wants
Water fountain and bottle refill station		
Economic growth		
Group 3		
Missing middle housing	2-3 story zero-frontage buildings along Michigan Ave. with cross streets	Central Park
Walkable	Kayak Livery	Ice Skating Rink
Encourage north connection to Depot Town	Placemaking around bus shelters along Michigan Ave.	Public art
Easy connection to Riverside Park		Affordable childcare
Grocery store		Design issue – could be successful without walling off the development
Pharmacy		River view restaurant
Connect to existing neighborhood streetscape		
Leverage the waterfront		
Bus stops on Michigan Avenue		
Group 4		
A place for people to gather	Green space buffer for river	Access to the Chicago/Detroit Rail
Alternative energy powered	Communal meeting space plaza/building	River front cafes
Transit access	Where you always know where the connection is to the WATER	Mixed retail (clothing etc.)
A reason for people to come downtown		Entertainment opportunities
Balanced access housing		Historic Education Features
High efficiency housing		Velodrome
Multimodal streetscape		
Multi-use business architecture		
Food retail		
Group 5		
DENSITY/revenue	Grocery store	“Riverfront” cafes/restaurants
Walkable		
To <u>NOT</u> design for car		
Variety		

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Needs	In between	Wants
Maintain public access to river		
HELP <u>TRADER JOES</u> see WHY Ypsi could be viable (They would serve our <u>DIVERSITY</u> well!)		
Active streets		
Mixed use buildings with first floor commercial		
Intimate scaled streets		

Appendix C

Transcribed Responses from Participants

Final Thoughts

- I think that it was well represented, but I just want to clarify that I think my group, and I were all on the same page about trying to preserve as much of a native plant, animal buffer as is possible along the walking trail along the river and keeping trees and wildlife so it feels like the woods that it is as much as possible.
- This has been brought up a couple other times, but educational component with the green space and having sites there for historic documentation where the land has been not just through the industrial period, but before that as well.
- I'm thinking that one thing I didn't say in my group that somebody said signage for Ford Lake, but I'm just thinking signage in general. I think that that's one thing that we could really use just more of it, in any of our development, but making sure people understand how to navigate downtown, and how to navigate into Depot Town and back to downtown. I think Water Street presents an opportunity for that, and so I am thinking that making sure that we have lots of signage of all types is important.
- I think the City needs a central square or a place that everybody considers is the center. This sort of feels like a center, but Frog Island sort of feels like a center rivers every, it would be a notion that is prevalent in a lot of urban settings in Europe where people say, we'll meet you there and everybody knows where there is. I think it helps to be apart of the unifying element of what being an Ypsilanti is about. If that could be created and maybe the Water Street represents an opportunity.