

# Norwood Young America: Planning for future Growth

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It took 125 years for Norwood Young America to grow to its current population of 3,100. Now growth is coming fast to this city on the Twin Cities urban fringe. City officials expect the population to increase by up to 50% by 2010 and potentially double in just 15 years. The land area will double along with the population. Much of the farmland abutting the city, long held in the Agricultural Preserve Program, an agricultural land preservation tax credit program, has become available for development in 2002 and even more will become available over the next several years. In the face of the anticipated growth, people in Norwood Young America want to retain the small town feel they enjoy today. Community leaders knew that this was only possible if they planned ahead to guide and shape the expected growth. They called on the Minnesota Design Team to help develop a vision of the future and have been working since then to make the vision a reality.

*“While Norwood Young America has seen a lot of change since 1996, it hasn’t always been an easy ride. Our extremely dedicated and committed citizens have made this journey possible, toughing it out even in tough times. We will continue to seek ways to continue this superior quality of life; and hope to pass on to future generations this pride so they can continue our legacy.”*

Norwood Young America Comprehensive Plan.

Located just 35 miles southwest of the Twin Cities, at the intersection of busy highway 212 and highway 5, Norwood Young America is ideally located for people looking for easy access to jobs in the growing southwest Twin Cities area. That, in combination with the new availability of prime development land, makes fast growth a virtual certainty.

Both the people who live there now and those moving in value the small town feel of the community. People know each other. They spend the summers playing baseball, swimming and enjoying the Stiftungsfest celebration, Minnesota’s oldest continuing celebration.



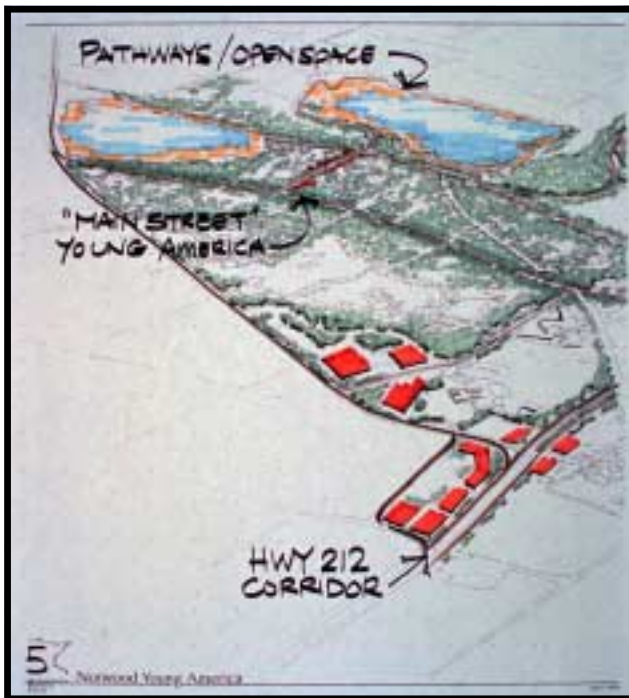
*Willkommen Park, home of Stiftungsfest*

The Norwood Young America application to the Minnesota Design Team said, “We want our community to be an attractive city in a rural setting with a small town image that provides a variety of services, housing, and employment choices. We want a community with character and a strong identify with healthy business districts that are friendly and functional for residents and visitors alike.”

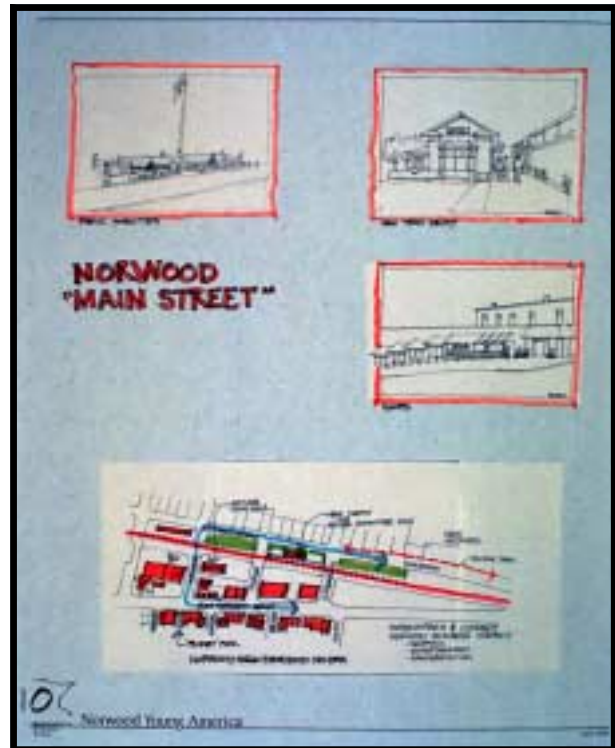
Norwood and Young America, once two towns, took the first step by merging in 1997. A new comprehensive plan laid out goals and vision for the new city. Although many people were involved in developing the plan, it was hard to translate the ideas in the plan into the concrete vision of what the new city could look like.

## The Minnesota Design Visit

Norwood Young America hosted the Design Team in April of 2000 in hopes of bridging the gaps between the goals in the comprehensive plan and reality. By all accounts, the four-day long Design Team visit and the resulting drawings and recommendations focused the community and gave life to the concepts in the comprehensive plan. NYA Community Development Director, Tom Terry, says “The Minnesota Design Team visit primarily served to reinforce many of the concepts in the City’s adopted comprehensive plan. The Design Team also helped to ‘fill out’ some of the broader policy statements. The visit served to re-energize the community towards the implementation of many goals identified in the comp plan, as well as renew community ownership of the plan.



*Minnesota Design Team park plan*



*Design Team plans for Norwood’s main street*

## Design Team Recommendations:

1. Young America Main Street
2. Norwood Main Street
3. Highway 212 Corridor
4. Pathways and Open Space
5. Future Residential Development

ressed areas of City responsibility like streets, sidewalks, parks, and new development. Since the City was acting on many of these items, leadership responsibility fell to elected officials and staff. Eventually, all of the citizen committees that grew out of the Design Team visit became official task forces to the City Council or Planning Commission.

## Community Involvement

Bringing the Design Team to town was a huge community effort. A citizen committee guided the planning and coordinated the event. After the Design Team visit, citizens had a follow-up meeting with Design Team leaders to take another look at the recommendations, ask questions, and begin planning for action.

City staff and leaders were actively involved in the Design Team visit and began coordinating implementation. The recommendations directly ad-

## Technical Assistance

Minnesota Project, Tree Trust, the Department of Natural Resources, and Biko Associates collaborated with the Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance through a grant from the agency to provide assistance to Norwood Young America as they began implementation of the Design Team recommendations. As part of this assistance, three workshops were held for key city decision-makers, including the Mayor, City Council and Planning Commission. The workshops were designed to flesh out

concepts of sustainable development and smart growth and identify different options to achieve the city's development objectives.

In addition, the City matched OEA funds to hire an intern who put together a development handbook clarifying the city's goals and development procedures for developers considering working in the city. The City found that the intern added significant capacity and they have continued funding the position.

## Accomplishments and Future Plans

Norwood Young America has implemented many of the Design Team recommendations in the two years since the visit. A newly designed main street with new sidewalks, lighting, crosswalks, and trees in downtown Norwood is the most obvious physical change. Other changes will become more evident as development occurs. In embracing the Design Team recommendations, City Council, Mayor, and the many volunteers on other Commissions and Task Forces are changing status quo development patterns into a new community vision.

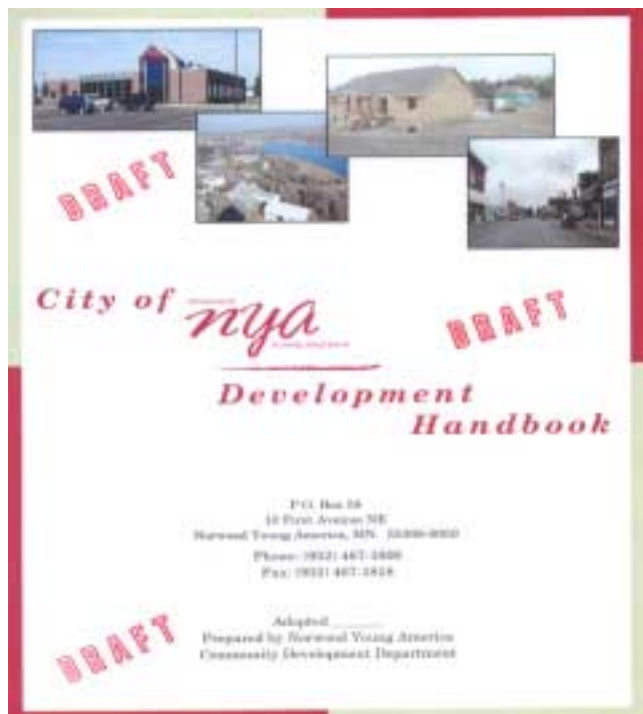
The City used its own resources to hire design assistance in several key areas including parks and trails, streetscapes, and Highway 212. Armed with their own clear vision, able assistance from their own community development staff, and targeted professional design assistance, the City Council, Mayor, Planning Commission and others on City

task forces have been able to make choices and develop the long range plans to guide and shape the coming development. Physical changes will be gradual, but there are clear signs that the new NYA will be that unique small community everyone was hoping for.

Development is coming fast, but City leaders and staff are moving fast as well. The specifics of their work are impressive.



*Norwood main street improvements*



*Young America Civic Center and Main Street --* The Young America downtown is north of Highway 212, and serves as the civic center for NYA with city hall, library, and Willkommen Park, the location of the Stiftungsfest celebration. A bulk fuel plant business and the city public works facility are located on the shores of Young America Lake. Much of the retail space on Main Street had been converted to lower quality housing. Plans for the following are well underway.

- Moving the bulk fuel plant and city public works facility off the lake front
- Building medium density mixed residential development in its place, including town homes and single family, on a town grid with alleyways to match the rest of the community and design consistent with original homes. This concept is part of a long-term redevelopment plan and the City has begun the process of acquiring properties in the redevelopment area.

- A new streetscape is proposed as a part of the reconstruction of the Main Street sidewalks.
- Preservation of the old Masonic Lodge, a historic building, is a goal of the redevelopment.
- A Small Business Development Loan Program, funded from loan repayments of Department of Trade and Economic Development loans, will serve the entire community and fund structural, exterior, and facade improvements for local businesses.
- Already a new restaurant has opened up in a vacant building, and City expects the increased residential density will spur other private investment

*Norwood Business District and Main Street* – The Norwood downtown area is south of 212, and has retail businesses, restaurants, a pharmacy, coffee shop, and the community center.

- The Elm Street (main street) Design team streetscape completed in fall 2002, includes trees, sidewalks, lighting, and brick pavers. The Design Team recommended creating a pedestrian friendly streetscape, and the City has done just that, with the goals of beautification and downtown revitalization. The landscape architect was, Gene Ernst of Ernst & Assoc. in Chaska, and the project was funded with water and sewer revenue bonds.
- Railroad Street, an area between Elm Street and highway 212, once the railroad track, is now an area with mobile homes and industry. The City’s goal is to redevelop the area as mixed use



*Downtown Norwood*

residential and retail. The street reconstruction will be done as a part of the 10-year infrastructure reconstruction program.

*New Residential Development* – Some of the expected new residents of NYA will move into the new downtown developments, bringing new density and new business to the two downtowns. The most noticeable changes in NYA, however, will be in the many acres of new developments that will replace open farmland. In the process of working with an initial developer, the City has clarified it’s goals and now has a clear idea of how they will work with future developers, what they will require, and the amenities for which they will negotiate.

- A visual preference survey showed that people in NYA wanted traditional suburban development, homes with 3 car garages. Contiguous to the two downtowns, the City will push for the town grid street layout and homes. The new farm field developments will be a typical suburban street layout and home type.
- The city is encouraging the use of PUDs,



*New development in Norwood Young America*

planned unit developments, which allows development of develop a site through the relaxation of the current conventional zoning standards in exchange for higher quality and more environmentally sensitive development. The City will to negotiate on density, lot size, setbacks, fees and other issues in exchange for elements like park dedications, wider buffers around lakes and wetlands, preservation of natural amenities, narrower streets, sidewalks, and trees.

- The Preserve, the first of many developments, will be on 150 acres on the old Shrupp farm. It will be 291 units, single family, townhomes, and twin homes. It will have 11 acres of park-

land, 27 acres of buffer strips, and 100-150 foot buffers with trails around lakes and wetlands.

- The new “Developer Handbook” will help the City carry the lessons learned from the first development forward into the next. It provides developers with a document outlining the procedures, process and criteria required through the various stages of the development process.

*Pathways and Open Space* – Many of the Design



Team recommendations addressed parks and trails. With the love of baseball and historic commitment to recreation for children, NYA already has a number of well-maintained parks. However, the community recognized that the existing park system would not be adequate as the community grows. Terry is particularly proud that NYA has gotten a handle on this complex issue. By taking a close look at parks in the context of the first development, they developed a comprehensive, community-wide strategy for parks and trails. Their plans will carry forward in new housing developments and in plans for streets and sidewalks in the rest of the community.

- A new park masterplan for the first new development, the Preserve, was prepared by LHB Architects. After considering several options, the City chose a linear, connected park system with nodes, connecting natural features with ball fields and other recreational facilities. The new parks will be connected to each other with greenways and trails and the park plan will be extended into contiguous developments.

- This plan launched the development of a city-wide Comprehensive Parks and Trails Masterplan with specific recommendations for each park. Terry anticipates that the City will adopt the plan fall 2003. The parks will be connected by a trail system of pathways and sidewalks. Sidewalks will be required in new developments and added in existing residential areas as a part of the infrastructure development plan.
- The City formed and appointed a new Parks Commission in Feb 2002. Previously, a citizen group, the Community Improvement Program, was the unofficial park commission.
- The Park Commission has done an inventory of existing parks, will do parks programming, and will work on developing and adopting the Parks Master Plan, and will keep an eye on the possible need for a parks referendum as the community grows.
- In March of 2003, the City adopted a comprehensive Sidewalks, Trails and Thoroughfare Plan, which includes a construction plan for sidewalks within the existing community and requirements for new development. The plan also includes guidelines for thoroughfares, including boulevard trees and other design elements.



- Enhancement and protection of open space and natural resources is encouraged through PUD in new developments, the newly adopted Carver County water resource management rules (September 2002) and City adopted regulations (anticipated in Fall 2003). There is an option for the developer to pay cash in lieu of land if no suitable land is available.
- A new skateboard park requested by the kids was approved and built in 3 months. Terry says the City was able to act fast to provide this new resource to the community's children because of their experience working together on other projects.

*Highway 212 Corridor*— Highway 212 is a designated Interregional Corridor, designed for regional, not local, trips. This makes development and safety tricky, since the highway divides the community. It is important to the Minnesota Department of Transportation to limit access and develop alternative transportation corridors within the growing community for local trips. The many lakes and wetlands in NYA make this a difficult task as the community grows. In addition, the City encourages appropriate development on the highway, while keeping the two downtown areas strong.



- The City worked with Carver County, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in a Partnership study to “develop a future transportation system with safe, efficient, and appropriate access.” The study was done by Short Elliot Hendrickson, Inc. This long-range plan addressed ways to protect natural resources while providing adequate local and inter-regional transportation. The study included preparation of traffic forecasts, model traffic impact ordinance, envi-

ronmental impact screening, and development of short and long-range vision for improvements. Public involvement included stakeholder workshops, community open houses, and meetings with the NYA Planning Commission and City Council.

- A pedestrian bridge over the highway was mentioned many times during the Design Team visit and is a mid-term item in the plan.
- Norwood Young America has approved the first phase of the Metro West Industrial Park development on land adjacent to highway 212. The development, which includes retail, office, housing, motel and restaurant pads incorporates many of the concepts presented by the MDT.
- NYA is working with a developer to build senior housing, including assisted living and independent senior apartments. Many of the elements of recommendations from the Design Team will be incorporated into the new development.

## Elements of Success

Terry says that without the MDT visit, many of the positive changes in NYA would not have happened. In part, the timing of the visit was very good. The Elm Street streetscape, for instance, happened because the Design Team was there at just the right time. The repaving and sewer work was already scheduled, and the streetscape was added because the Design Team drawing of a redesigned Elm Street inspired people.

When the City requested the Design Team visit, everyone knew that the community was on the verge of unprecedented growth, but people had different ideas about what new developments should look like and how to proceed. They were also unsure about how much direction they could or should give developers. Fortunately, the coming growth will be staged and there was time to develop a specific plan of action. The Design Team visit reinforced the existing comprehensive plan, and made it real. City staff was able to use the recommendations as a springboard for the extra design and planning assistance needed to make them a reality.

Terry points out that the City Council, commissions, and Mayor pushed to invite the Design Team, and many were involved in the visit. In part because of the visit, they share a common vision for the future of NYA and have a good working rela-

tionship. Having shared clear goals for residential development helped the Planning Commission and City Council stay strong and stay together when dealing with the developers.

The City had the opportunity to incorporate Design Team ideas right away because of planned infrastructure improvements. In addition, they had resources to hire the necessary design consultants. As a result, things began looking different right away. People saw real change starting with the Elm Street improvements and the integration of other ideas as development progressed.

Having an intern freed Terry to do the community building and outreach work that has been an integral part of success. The intern was such a success, that the City has funded the position on a permanent basis.

Not everything has been easy, however. It has sometimes been hard to sell the long-term intangible benefits of extra design work to City leadership and to the developers, and sometimes hard, in general, dealing with the many developers involved in NYA.



## Lessons Learned

In some ways, NYA was special. Not every community is facing unprecedented growth. NYA also had the resources to hire additional design assistance, in part because of the recent merger. Still, some of the lessons Terry talks about from NYA apply anywhere.

- Keep the Design Team drawings up on the wall. They are in the NYA city hall conference room and the images and ideas behind them have become subliminal. The ideas creep into conversations again and again. Because people have

them in mind, they are ready to act when opportunity arises.

- City Hall should be committed to the Design Team visit, involved in the visit, and bought into the recommendations.
- Be proactive rather than reactive whenever possible.

A great many fast growing communities around urban areas in Minnesota share the challenges of Norwood Young America. Once sleepy small towns, communities on the urban fringes and on highway corridors are facing unprecedented growth. Norwood Young America is proving that communities can take control to guide and direct growth in ways that are compatible with and even enhance the goals of the community. It takes thinking ahead, finding or hiring outside professional help, using the skills and vision of current residents and staff, and it takes vision. NYA has been successful and other communities can be as well.

## For More Information:

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