

# DEPOT/NLX COMMITTEE MEETING

January 24, 2024

Location: Hermantown City Hall

Present: Commissioner Harala, Commissioner Boyle, Commissioner Nelson, Brian Fritsinger, Kevin Gray, BreAnn Graber, Mary Tennis, Katie LaPlant, Brooke Wetmore (support), Grant Hauschild

Convened: The meeting convened at approximately 12:20PM

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## Approval of Agenda

Nelson/Boyle moved to approve. The motion passed. (3-0)

## Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Nelson nominated Harala as Chair and Boyle as Vice Chair. (3-0)

## Identification of Broader Committee Membership (County, City, Community, etc.)

Invitations will be made to the City of Duluth (“the City”) and the St. Louis/Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority (“the Rail Authority”). The request will be made to the City during the requested meeting in the next two weeks. A formal letter will be sent to the Rail Authority inviting them to appoint a staff member to participate in this committee.

Broader community, including but not limited to Arts Council, Depot Tenants, and the Greater Downtown Council, will be engaged by hired consultants during the planning process. County staff will provide support as necessary.

## Discussion on Committee Strategy, Goals, and Objectives

This committee will act as an internal operations body. Its overall objective is to utilize this station development to create a “Grand Entry Gateway to Duluth.”

All communications about NLX should channel through Chair Harala to ensure consistency. Chair Harala is designated as the communications lead for anything regarding “the experience once getting to Duluth.” Commissioner Nelson is designated as the communication lead for anything regarding getting the train to Duluth.

## Discuss Meeting Frequency and Schedule

The next committee meeting should occur February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024 immediately following the board meeting. Virtual options should be available to facilitate additional county staff joining the meeting. Future scheduling is to be determined.

## Discuss February Joint City of Duluth Meeting and Objectives

Staff has been asked to convene a meeting in the next two weeks with Mayor Reinert & Council President Randorf and make the request that an additional councilmember and appropriate staff are present. Topics for a meeting agenda include: (1) Requesting the City be a joint member of the NLX/Depot Committee,

(2) the City provide an update regarding the downtown library regarding legislative asks and timelines, (3) Depot/NLX area master planning, (4) requesting an additional meeting between the County and the City with an agenda that includes a presentation of work-to-date on the area masterplan from county & city staff.

#### □ **Additional Topics of Discussion**

##### ➤ **Request for Proposals**

St. Louis County has previously committed \$350,000 for NLX station area masterplanning purposes. County Staff has been asked to begin prepping the first Request for Proposal (RFP) to contract out an initial rough mock up of the Depot Station based off of previous planning efforts conducted in 2010 and 2016. County staff should consult with Bob Manzoline from the Rail Authority. Staff should begin planning for the second RFP for the area masterplan.

##### ➤ **State Legislative Ask**

As there are two “asks” being made – one for bonding to fund HVAC & Electrical improvements in the St. Louis County Heritage & Arts Center and one for MNDOT project funding for the creation of an NLX Station at the Historic Depot – language must be intentional to eliminate confusion. “The Historic Depot” versus “The Historic Depot Station/The Station/The NLX Historic Depot Station” should be used. “The Station” is a key term when discussing the NLX project. Senator Hauschild noted that the term “historic” is an appropriate and politically supported word in the current legislature.

Commissioner Boyle stressed that St. Louis County should be ready with our asks at the start of the legislative session.

Coon Rapids is currently the leading community in terms of Station planning and preparation efforts. Note that the NLX Coon Rapids Station will be the connection to the rest of the Amtrak system. An effort to identify the specifics of this project with MNDOT, Coon Rapids, or Anoka County should be under taken.

Only ‘The NLX Alliance’ has done station visioning up to this point, St. Louis County Administration has not engaged in visioning to date.

MNDOT manages the funds set aside for the stations as part of the entire state/federal plan budget. In the original plans that was approved by last year’s legislature and is currently being reviewed by the federal government \$8-12 million was believed to be earmarked for each station.

The Committee requested that SLC Administration refer to the 2010 planning efforts and index any estimates provided at the time to today’s dollars. Discussion ensued and concluded \$28.7 million is a viable request for this statement.

Administrator Gray suggested the Committee consider a future meeting with MNDOT regarding SLC’s vision for the Station.

##### ➤ **President Biden Visit on 1/25/2024**

President Biden will be visiting Superior, WI on 1/25/2024 for the Blatnik Bridge federal request. This would be a good opportunity to additionally raise attention to NLX.

➤ **Historic Depot HVAC**

Director Tennis and Director Hall have been meeting with architects regarding the HVAC project. The Depot Operations committee is the appropriate committee to discuss this and a meeting of that committee will be convened in the near future.

➤ **Ownership**

Deputy Administrator Fritsinger asked about ownership of this project for clarification of what the County may or may not own. Commissioner Nelson noted that NLX is working on BNSF trackage, the land the tracks sit on is Rail Authority property, Amtrak is a contractor/provider-operator for MNDOT, and SLC will sell the rights to the station in a matter similar to how airlines pay airports.

➤ **Language**

A collection of language used to discuss the NLX/Depot Station and surrounding economic development initiatives includes:

*The requests of MNDOT Appropriation is not something to fix a building, but is a grand entrance. This is a new role, this is a role to support economic development*

*Historic Depot facility (investments are readying the building for the station)*

*This is the newest neighborhood in the First District*

*Northern Lights Station at the Historic Depot*

*The Gateway to St. Louis County*

*Connection to Northeast Minnesota*

*Impactful for the whole region*

**The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:30pm**