

August 17, 2011

Mr. Kurt Ulrich
City of Ramsey
7550 Sunwood Dr NW
Ramsey, MN 55303

Re: Preliminary Site Plan – Northstar Commuter Rail Station

Dear Mr. Ulrich:

We are in receipt of a Site Plan, Landscaping, Grading, Utility, Architectural, and Electrical Plans as well as Building Elevations for the Northstar Commuter Rail Station to be located in The COR, prepared by Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. and dated March 12, 2010. The City offers the following comments:

General: The site plan is proposing to develop a commuter rail station across from the municipal parking ramp and Municipal Center within The COR. The rail station includes platforms on both sides of the railway tracks that will be connected via an enclosed pedestrian bridge over the tracks. The bulk of the proposed project lies within right-of-way (both BNSF and public road right-of-way) and therefore, for reviewing purposes, this is being considered as a transportation improvement.

Zoning: As noted above, the bulk of the project falls within right-of-way and therefore is not subject to a specific set of zoning standards or zoning classification. It is adjacent to zoning district COR-1 as well as H-1 Highway 10 Business District.

Setbacks: There are no required setbacks applicable to this improvement. However, it appears that a portion of the inbound platform and roofline slightly encroach onto a city-owned parcel to the south of the tracks. This parcel was acquired for future transportation improvements (expansion of Highway 10) and thus, the encroachment does not necessarily represent a conflict. Nonetheless, some mechanism, such as a permanent easement or encroachment agreement for example, will need to be implemented to address this encroachment. Staff will review this matter with the City Attorney to determine potential actions to address this.

Landscaping: The proposed landscaping includes seventy-four (74) trees and 198 shrubs. There is a decent mix of deciduous and coniferous trees and only a single shrub species. Only a limited portion of the site is proposed to be improved with sod, the remainder of the area is shown as being seeded with a residential turf mix. Additionally, the limits of irrigation only encompass the areas receiving sod rather than covering all landscaped areas.

Staff provided some initial feedback on the 90% plan design that encouraged the use of additional and/or alternate species, noted that all disturbed areas should be improved with sod, that all landscaped areas should be irrigated, and that all disturbed areas being established with turf and irrigation must incorporate six (6) inches of topsoil meeting the City's specification (which has been amended since that time). Through correspondence with Kimley-Horn, we understand the desire for consistent, standardized station sites for maintenance purposes (performed by Metro Transit) and are accepting the proposed plantings. However, Staff still has a concern regarding the limited irrigation, the extensive use of seed and the specified topsoil identified in details 3 and 5

on Sheet C116. Ramsey City Code requires four (4) inches of Premium Topsoil Borrow (MN DOT Spec 3877) over all disturbed areas not otherwise improved and to remain consistent with all projects, the use of this material should be incorporated for all areas being established with turf. Staff will be asking for direction from City Council regarding the extensive use of a residential seed mix and the proposed limited areas of irrigation.

Whether the irrigation limits remain as proposed or are expanded, the plans indicate connection to the municipal water supply. While there is no issue with this approach, it is important to note that this water is extremely hard and its' use will most likely result in staining of the concrete surfaces. ***All concrete surfaces should be sealed to prevent such staining.***

Architectural Standards: The exterior finish of the proposed rail station includes a combination of cast-in-place concrete, metal paneling and glass. The structure includes sun shades on each of the enclosed elevator/stair towers as well. Height of the structure is roughly forty (40) feet. There is a proposed radio antenna located on the roof of the pedestrian bridge and it is unclear from the plans what the height of this antenna will be. ***Please provide clarification on the antenna height.***

Signage: The plans also include a sign package for the rail station. Most of the signage will be located on the platforms and appear to be instructional. Two ground signs, SA.2 and SA.4 as labeled on Sheet C119, will identify the site as the Ramsey Station and will be positioned on the south side of Civic Center Drive near the entrances to the station. The details submitted for the signage have been reviewed and are sufficient enough that no additional sign permit will be required. ***Any future signs noted on the plan will be subject to review by the City and may potentially require a sign permit.***

Fencing: A six (6) foot tall chain link fence is shown between the inbound and outbound tracks as well as around the southern edge of the station site (on the City-owned parcel). The proposed fencing complies with current fence regulations. ***The use of vinyl (or other material) slats for screening purposes shall not be permitted.***

Drainage and Grading: Staff has reviewed the drainage and grading plans and any previous concerns and/or comments have been addressed in the final plans.

Access: The rail station will not have direct vehicle access. Parking for the rail station will be accommodated by the municipal parking structure across Civic Center Dr NW. There are two pedestrian entrances for the station at the east and west ends of the outbound platform. City Staff has reviewed these accesses and finds them acceptable.

The City Council will be meeting at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 23, 2011 at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Dr NW, to review the proposed site plan. You or your representative may want to be present to answer any questions that may arise. Thank you for your cooperation in this process.

If you have any questions, please call us at (763) 427-1410.

Respectfully,
CITY OF RAMSEY

Chris Anderson
Associate Planner/Environmental Coordinator