

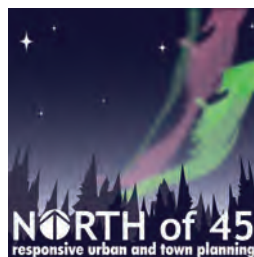
# Summary Report

## Life After the Parking Deck Community Engagement



Prepared by:

Patrick Coleman, AICP  
North of 45 LLC



January 26, 2022

## Table of Contents

	<u>page</u>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Workshop 1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Workshop 2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Takeaways and Analysis Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Attachments:</b>	
<b>Tabulations from Workshop 1</b>	
<b>Comments from Workshop 2</b>	

## **Introduction**

Structural issues with Houghton's large parking deck, constructed in 1978-79, were first identified in a parking facility analysis completed in 1999. The major concern is that the post-tensioned concrete and steel structure may be prone to a potentially catastrophic failure of a tensioning cable, due to the effects of chloride penetration over the years. It should be pointed out that this type of construction has not been used for parking structures for many years, especially in northern climate locations where salt is used for winter snow and ice management.

Considerable investments in coating the concrete surface to reduce chloride penetration and replacing deteriorated parapet walls and other structural repairs have extended the useful and safe life of the structure to the present time. As this structure is now more than 40 years old, and in need of additional repairs, the City has determined that further investments to try and extend the life of the structure is unwise, and the City Council has decided to demolish the structure in the near-term.

Recognizing this decision was going to create major changes in downtown and for the business community, the City wanted to involve citizens in the planning process of adapting to this change. The urban planning firm of North of 45 LLC was retained to lead two community planning workshops. This report describes the workshops and summarizes the results of those meetings.

## **Workshop 1**

The first community engagement meeting was held on September 29, 2021 at the Bonfire meeting room in downtown Houghton. The meeting was attended by approximately 80 persons. When asked, a majority of participants indicated they were City of Houghton residents.

The workshop began with a presentation to provide important background information on the parking deck issue, the need to demolish the structure, and parking utilization in downtown Houghton.

Following the presentation, people were asked to work as a team with others at their table to formulate ideas. Group leaders presented their ideas to all attendees, and the ideas were summarized and recorded. Each workshop participant was provided with 3 dot stickers to “vote” on their favorite ideas or concerns.

Following the meeting, group summary sheets were photographed and tabulated by City staff. Some ideas were similar and combined in the results summary (such as mixed-use development, private development, housing, etc.). Vote “dots” were tabulated. Results were used to guide further study of ideas.

Listed below are the top ideas and number of votes.

- Mixed-use development (40)
- More efficient parking structure (22)
- Housing development; various types (18)
- Sheldon Avenue one-way with parking both sides (14)
- Green space with shops and dining (11)
- Town Center (9)
- 2nd business entrance; Lakeshore Drive level (7)
- Add business and shops; Lakeshore Drive level (7)
- Walkability (4)
- Form based zoning (4)
- Waterfront (3)

The attached comment summary shows all of the ideas and concerns expressed by participants.

## **Workshop 2**

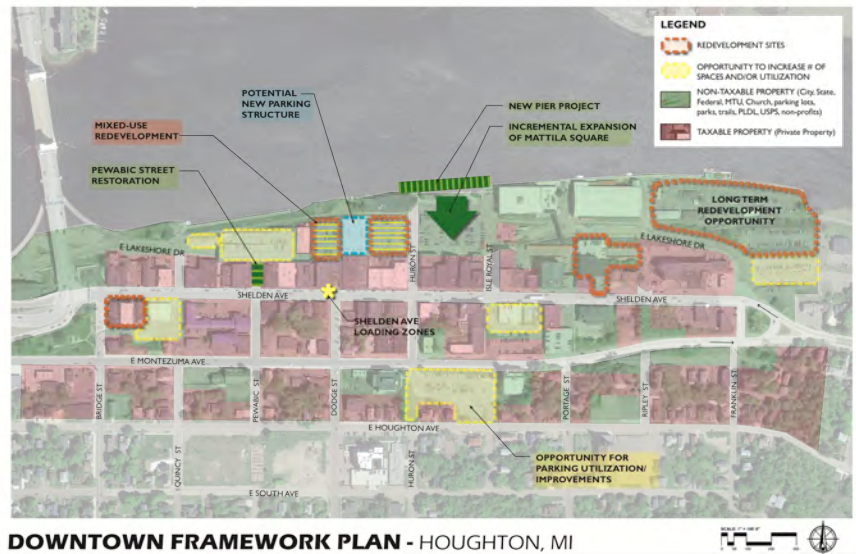
The second community engagement workshop was held on November 10, 2021, at the Bonfire in downtown Houghton. Approximately 60 persons attended this meeting.

A presentation was made that included the following information

- A summary of the parking deck issue and parking utilization.
- The vote tabulations for ideas generated at the first workshop.
- An analysis of the idea of relocating US 41 northbound to Montezuma. It was demonstrated that Shelden Avenue does not have sufficient width to allow angle parking on both sides, and that parking on one side only does not increase the on-street parking supply. While removing US 41 traffic from Shelden Avenue has benefits, increasing parking is not one of them.
- The presentation included several scenarios for financing the demolition and a new parking structure.

The presentation also included a graphic depicting the area now occupied by the parking deck with the question “how much land do we want devoted to parking on the waterfront?” in order to generate discussion.

A Development Framework Plan graphic that summarized the results of Workshop 1 was presented. The Development Framework graphic identifies several major redevelopment sites downtown, including a mixed-use development (housing/commercial) and parking structure on part of the land occupied by the parking deck, at Isle Royale Street and Lakeshore Drive.



The Development Framework Plan showed existing parking lots where utilization could be improved. The graphic also identified the restoration of Pewabic Street as another opportunity to improve connections to the waterfront, and between existing parking and Shelden Avenue.

The Development Framework Plan showed possible expansion of community waterfront green space south of the current Pier Project, and suggested this was the best place to expand waterfront green space. Several concepts for this idea from 1997 and 1998 were shown.

Following the presentation, participants were asked to provide comments and ideas on sticky notes. The collage of notes was photographed and documented.

A total of 65 comments were made, covering a wide variety of concerns and ideas. City staff organized the comments into 7 generalized categories: parking, walkability, development, taxpayer needs, green space and town square. The comments are provided as an attachment to this report.

## **Takeaways and Analysis Summary**

The parking deck issue is one of the greatest challenges that has confronted the City of Houghton. The aging of the mostly grant-funded deck has created a massive legacy cost issue for the City in that the DDA tax capture did not increase enough and parking fees were massively outpaced by the cost of operating and maintaining such a large piece of infrastructure.

The public engagement workshops were a great start to inform the community about the issue, receive meaningful input, and to begin the process of moving forward with new plans. This section of the report provides some key takeaways and analysis of major points.

### **Parking**

Participants are concerned about the loss of the convenient deck parking, especially those who have businesses that are accessed directly from the deck and those who hold permits to park there. The demolition of the deck structure will require shifting permit parking both on and under the deck to other facilities. Previous deck repair projects have required closing off the facility, so there is some precedent and experience for making this adjustment. The City should continue to inform businesses and residents of their planning for this and efforts to improve utilization of other existing parking facilities.

The public engagement workshops provided important information to the community about the financial challenges of constructing a replacement parking structure. Replacing the existing deck is going to be very costly, and probably not feasible without a significant infusion of grant funding, even if parking permit rates were increased substantially. Without a major redevelopment project, tax increment financing (TIF) is unlikely to be able to cover debt service. In addition, a significant private redevelopment may qualify the project for grant funding.

A number of public comments were made that a new parking structure should not burden the taxpayers of Houghton.

Other locations have been suggested for a replacement parking structure. The current location does provide a central convenient location and constructability without significant disruptions to US 41 traffic flow, compared to other locations. The Lakeshore Drive location also makes sense when combined with a redevelopment project.

### **Walkability**

There is a lot of interest in improving overall walkability downtown, which would contribute to better utilization of existing parking facilities. Topography, snow, and ice make downtown difficult to navigate on foot in winter. As a “winter city”, Houghton should continue to explore new technology and approaches to improving pedestrian conditions downtown and throughout the community.

### **Redevelopment**

The workshops identified strong interest by residents in seeing some mixed-use redevelopment occur on the parking deck site, including higher end housing developed to accommodate local retirees looking to downsize. This type of project can provide affordable housing options as smaller households relocate and place their family-type units on the market. The current parking deck site offers a great location for a redevelopment project that could include housing, retail and other uses without infringing on the waterfront public space.

### **Lakeshore Drive**

The demolition of the parking deck is going to “daylight” a significant part of Lakeshore Drive for the first time in 40+ years. This downtown street frontage has been mostly non-contributing to the vitality of downtown as it has been treated as “dark back alley”. A number of comments were made that removing the deck can improve business opportunities along Lakeshore Drive, as existing businesses fronting on Sheldon adapt their rear access, as well as creating new retail and service opportunities along Lakeshore Drive. The City should explore opportunities to improve the Lakeshore Drive streetscape, pedestrian conditions, and parking lot design along this corridor to enhance its potential for redevelopment and overall attractiveness as a contributing downtown street with retail, service and residential uses.

### **Waterfront Green Space**

There have been concerns that redevelopment of the site currently occupied by the parking structure should encroach upon or take away the existing waterfront park property that fronts the Portage Lake waterfront. It has been the City’s intent to not allow that to happen. In fact, due to the existence of the waterfront trail easement, the waterfront was never in peril of being developed for private use.

Several comments at the public meetings have suggested the entire site be developed as a public park. If there was no other public space along Portage Lake, this would make sense. However, Houghton benefits from good urban planning and policy over the last 40 years that directed the acquisition and development of significant waterfront frontage, from the Kestner Park on the west to the Pilgrim River on the east. This string of parks and open space is connected by a well-used paved waterfront trail and includes a number of major recreation investments at the Nara Nature Park, the East Houghton Waterfront Park, and the entire waterfront from Isle Royale Street to the Kestner Park.

The City should determine if additional park space is needed, and what programming or recreational use of the site is needed, keeping in mind that additional park space requires on-going costs to maintain, and additional legacy costs to replace outdated or obsolete facilities as time goes on.

From an urban planning perspective, Houghton's waterfront parks and open space are well-used, but not overcrowded or dealing with conflicts of use, other than in winter when snowmobiles tend to dominate the waterfront. What is lacking in Houghton is a town square; a central, downtown multi-use, multi-seasonal gathering and event space. What makes sense is to expand public space in the area that has become known as "Mattila Square" between the MTU Lakeshore Center and the Public Library. The Pier Project will greatly expand public space in this area, and expanding the public space further south into the existing parking lot would provide more opportunities for gathering and public use for things like bringing the skating ribbon downtown, snow and ice carvings, farmers market, entertainment, and other multi-seasonal uses. Improving pedestrian connections to the waterfront at Isle Royale and Huron Streets would be a great improvement, as currently these connections are not well-defined.

The demolition of the parking deck will also provide the opportunity to potentially increase public space and improve pedestrian connections at Dodge and Pewabic Streets as well.

Overall, the public engagement workshops were successful, as both the community and the City learned a lot from each other. The format provides a good template for continuing the community conversation as the project moves forward.





## Workshop 2, November 10, 2021

### Written Comments

#### Parking

- Hire a parking consultant to propose an overall parking plan for the city and increase parking rates. Look at parking in the whole downtown and create a comprehensive plan.
- Move employee and tenant parking to south side of Shelden. Increase size of existing decks between Montezuma and Shelden.
- Build a concentrated parking structure with four levels between Library and Suomi.
- Find out how Marquette Pays for their parking.
- Better signage and utilization of current parking.
- Figure out the approved winter access for the Methodist Church and are there parking lot signs directing people to this lot.
- Tear down the Ambo parking deck and build a 4-5 story structure.
- Charge for parking at Chutes and Ladders for non-city residents.
- I like the idea of a smaller deck with metered parking. Perhaps businesses could validate parking?
- Build a parking deck south of public library between Suomi Restaurant - 4 levels.
- Have a shuttle taking people that park at last end lot circling through town and back.
- Thank you for putting the potential parking deck behind Swift Hardware. Great Plan!
- All of the money to build, maintain and restore a parking deck could be saved by having only ground level parking in that location.
- People will probably pay for gated lots based on an hourly rate. It is time to modernize this city and its economy.
- If there are 360 spaces with 25% utilization 8 hours a day, 365 days a year, \$0.5/hour = \$131,400/year - this is reasonably in line with other municipalities.
- Overnight parking for tenants must be covered. Musical parking spaces for snow removal would have management problems.
- Buy old Backroom Bookstore, tear it down and build a parking deck.
- Talk to Marquette officials regarding metering parking spaces. Consider installing meters on every parking space along Shelden Avenue plus all spaces along the lake. Could this make money for Houghton?
- Don't move forward with adding any deck until there is time to see what develops with empty buildings, etc.
- Charge for parking. Utilize bus system to shuttle to and from parking.
- Make better use of lot near Krist Oil. Dee Stadium needs better parking.
- Shuttle from remote lot.
- Waterfront is too valuable to use it for parking. Charges for parking should be increased. Avoid building a deck for parking as it is too expensive and ugly. Lay out various parking scenarios to evaluate how many spaces are needed there.

- People should pay more for covered parking. Employees should be parking in outer spaces leaving the ideal spaces for quick turnovers.
- Parking East of the Hampton Inn could be a great site for covered parking/retail/and residential.
- Increase the cost of parking downtown - especially covered parking as we are not charging nearly enough for parking.
- Need a parking plan that will not hurt downtown businesses. Charge more for permit parking. Use loading zones for people buying large things.
- Charge more for covered permit parking.
- Multi-level parking deck will be a challenge due to small footprint. Travel ramps between levels will be inefficient use of footprint but will maintain some or all of backdoor access for Shelden Avenue businesses.

## **Business Access**

- Provide skywalks to businesses.
- Utilize 2 story and back door access to business instead of parking right outside the door.
- Need to keep accessibility of the back doors of businesses on Shelden.

## **Walkability**

- I understand some people need to drive; however, if the downtown is more pedestrian and biker friendly it will reduce the need for a surplus of parking spots.
- Build a tunnel for walking like down on M26 which leads to Chutes and Ladders.
- Too much focus on wanting your car to be close, not enough on easy access outside of vehicles.
- Increased/efficient public transportation.
- Encourage walking by improving/advertising parking areas that already exist, especially at the ends of downtown.

## **Development**

- Where to be developed needs to be established to an exact space.
- Develop west of Garver condo.
- Designate specific areas for development. A prime area of Chamber of Commerce and Isle Royale Parking.
- Reconsider Scenario 2. I don't think the citizens really need to vote on this. Do the right thing for the community.
- Once an agreement has been made for development, municipalities seem to allow variances if the developer complains (ie the apartments by Hancock Marina was supposed to stay below the bridge height, but then something cost him more and boom - there's an extra floor destroying the view forever. Any development needs to stay within footprint and scenic vista constraints.

- This area should be considered for development with covered parking, retail, and residential.
- Development - desire for true mixed use (retail, dining and xyz).
- Add moderate to high end condos for retirees with garage underneath where Chamber of Commerce is.
- I want to know an estimate based on previously, private company scope of development. And then use that to project the revenue based on 2-3 story.
- The idea of a taxable mixed-use deck area looks very attractive.
- Mixed use (residence, retail, restaurant, office) redevelopment.

## **Taxpayer Needs**

- Taxpayers need to have a stronger voice than people who just want to share their opinions.
- If there is any way to not burden taxpayers with the project it should be pursued.
- Taxpayers are the individuals that will pay their taxes for whatever is decided. Contact Veridea or another developer. Surely what was unfortunately voted in the past can still work with Houghton.
- Give each resident of Houghton a parking pass with tax bills so people paying taxes don't have to pay for parking.

## **Green Space**

- You said the waterfront is the most valuable property. It is priceless. We do not need to develop it. Maintain the natural beauty it provides.
- We are perfect the way we are. Growth is not necessary. Celebrate the beauty of our area. This is what attracts people here, the natural beauty not buildings.
- Maintain current green space and open waterfront.

## **Town Square**

- Big support for "town square" concept.
- I like making Mattila Square a larger green space without parking there.

## **Miscellaneous**

- There will be 2-3 years of pushback and then it will be normal.
- More public restrooms downtown.
- Does this plan make Houghton the jewel of the Keweenaw? That should be the first question that is asked when planning.
- Communicate to the public more specifically about how all the ideas given will function in the actual planning process.
- I need to see two bracketing alternatives. One does not allow any private development, but removes unnecessary parking on the waterfront & flesh out the town square concept maximizing total public use of the waterfront. Cost it out for a bond proposal. You've got half the numbers with parking lot destruction and new construction. If at a

loss, use Marquette's parking revenue as if we were the same. The second concept would create a scenario where private development makes it so tax revenue paid for all. How many square feet will it take to cover costs? Assume no development can block the canal view from the back side of current restaurants, bars, etc. So height limit. I know you've said you don't have accurate estimates - use a best guess and state it as a best guess. Will it take 25%, 50%? What amount of development would it take? The answer is between, but it would bracket options.

- Clean up street and roof runoff before entering the canal.
- Meeting was a farce. Viable and sincere questions and comments from audience were repeatedly shot down using irrelevant and outdated data. Told the audience that parking fund cannot pay for all of the costs, and then planner said Marquette made it work because they invested a lot of time planning and were confident that people would want to come downtown. It is time for Houghton to invest, plan and innovate and stop being an achronistic. it is not 1986 or 1997. It is the city's job to make things profitable. Parking is a public asset and should be managed as such. It can be profitable but it will require real vision and innovation. It really felt like the meeting cherry-picked only a few ideas from the last meeting and burned up a lot of time pedantically dismissing them, citing data from a parking study conducted during a major construction project as the case for why less parking is needed.
- Lakeshore Drive Open.