



Potential site for sports complex identified

Anoka County has emerged as a viable option for a possible stadium development project, as the Minnesota Vikings look for a place to build a new stadium.

The cities of Blaine, Lino Lakes, and Columbus Township each suggested a site for consideration. All three municipalities are located along I-35E or I-35W in Anoka County, within 20 minutes of both downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, pro-

“The National Sports Center and TPC golf course, combined with a Vikings stadium complex, would make Anoka County the hub for sports and recreation across Minnesota and the entire region.”

Dan Erhart
Anoka County Board Chair

viding easy freeway access for fans and tourists.

A market study indicated that the Blaine site along I-35W between 101st and 109th Aves. is the most viable location of the three. The study criteria



A site in Blaine along I-35W between 101st and 109th Aves. may be the most viable possibility for a Vikings stadium complex.

included access to regional freeways, availability of urban services, natural features of the property, and potential for commercial development.

Blaine is already home to the National Sports Center, which attracts as many visitors per year as the Metrodome, as well as the Tournament Players Club (TPC) Twin Cities, where one of the most successful

senior PGA tournaments in the nation is held each year.

Only Anoka County has identified sites large enough to accommodate all three operations needed by the Vikings, a stadium, training camp facilities, and administrative offices at one location, plus ample surface parking. Currently, Vikings operations are spread out in three different cities.

“The National Sports Center and TPC golf course, combined with a Vikings stadium complex, would make Anoka County the hub for sports and recreation across Minnesota and the entire region,” said Anoka County Board Chair Dan Erhart.

“The county will require assurance that it will receive more in revenue from a stadium complex than it pays in for development,” Anoka County Commissioner Margaret Langfeld said.

Kraus-Anderson, a major national developer headquartered in Minnesota, is assisting with plans for the development, which could also accommodate University

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Thanks to those who filled out surveys

The public recently had two new opportunities to provide input about issues affecting Anoka County government.

Close to 2,700 property owners filled out a survey that was mailed with property tax statements last March. Just under 111,000 surveys were mailed out. In addition, the survey could be filled out on the county's Web site.

At this year's Anoka County Fair, more than 500 adults and some 262 youngsters took the time to complete touch-screen computer surveys about county services.

While neither were scientific surveys and are not an accurate measure of taxpayer or voter sentiment, the surveys did offer an additional avenue of communication between Anoka County commissioners and the public.

On the survey mailed with property tax statements, county services that respondents ranked highest in importance were: road construction and maintenance, sheriff, and public health and safety.

On the county fair survey, respondents ranked traffic congestion as the biggest challenge facing Anoka County in the

future followed by public safety and affordable housing. An overwhelming majority of respondents support Northstar commuter rail, and believe construction of a Minnesota Vikings sports complex in Anoka County would help increase jobs and expand the tax base.

Most youngsters taking the kids' version of the county fair survey reported that they like school, most do not know a bully at school, and the vast majority think it is best to either ignore a bully or tell a parent or teacher about a bully.

Julie Shortridge

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Bunker Beach a splashing success

In its first year of operation, Bunker Beach quickly established itself as the region's top destination for summertime family fun.

During the summer 2003 season, more than 107,000 visitors enjoyed the new features at Bunker Beach (formerly the Bunker Hills Wave Pool) including a new double flume waterslide plunge pool, a shallow water adventure pool, and creative water and sand play area. The wave pool continues as the main attraction at Bunker Beach.

"One of the main goals of the wave pool expansion was to provide more recreational opportunities for younger children," said Anoka County Commissioner Dave McCauley, chair of the county's Parks and Recreation Committee. **"The new sand play area and adventure pool have been very popular with younger children."**

Bunker Beach can accommodate 1,500 guests, nearly double the capacity of the wave pool. The \$2.1 million expansion project is being financed exclusively through user fees.

Bunker Beach is available for birthday parties or other large groups. For



more information visit www.BunkerBeach.com or call 763-767-2895.

Ruth Bedor

The shallow water adventure pool and double flume water slide are two of the new features at Bunker Beach.

Businesses push for commuter rail

Business leaders in Anoka County and throughout the Northstar Corridor plan to escalate their support for Northstar commuter rail this fall.

"We need the governor and state legislature to pass funding for Northstar," said Jerry Teeson of Shamrock Development, Inc., Coon Rapids. "Northstar will help businesses move customers, employees and goods more easily by relieving some of the congestion growth on roads."

Chambers of commerce covering Anoka County along the Northstar line have passed resolutions of support for the project.

"Anoka County is grateful for such strong support for Northstar from the business community," said Dan Erhart, Anoka County Board chair. "A public/private effort is the best way to get this project passed."

Northstar commuter rail is expected to carry the equivalent of one-and-a-half lanes of traffic at peak periods and will also focus economic development along

"Northstar will help businesses move customers, employees, and goods more easily by relieving some of the congestion growth on roads."

**Jerry Teeson
Shamrock Development**

the corridor. "We're planning a \$1 billion development for the new Ramsey town center," said Bruce Nedegaard of Nedegaard Construction, Columbia Heights. "I would expect nearly \$4.5 billion in development along the entire corridor."

The Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA) voted unanimously this summer to aggressively pursue funding for Northstar commuter rail in 2004.

Governor Tim Pawlenty spoke by telephone to the NCDA board and encouraged the board not to give up the fight for funding.

The Northstar ridership forecast will be updated this fall to meet new state and federal requirements. Cost estimates for improvements to the existing tracks will be refined based on renewed discussions with Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway. The NCDA will begin purchasing land to be used for station sites

and will complete other engineering work to prepare for final design of the system.

More information is available at www.mn-GetOnBoard.com or by calling 763-323-5729.

Information provided by Jeff Dehler

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of Minnesota football and major league soccer. In addition, the county is working with Hammes Co., a construction management firm involved with stadium developments nationwide, to study the feasibility of a sports complex in Blaine. Hammes developed the new Detroit Lions stadium complex and is currently under contract with the National Football League to study a stadium development in L.A.

The proposed stadium complex would be supported by surrounding commercial development, including a major corporate headquarters, retail, light industrial, and housing. The total development would be an entertainment, commercial, and sporting complex that would encompass approximately 500 acres.

Community and business leaders are building a coalition of support around a Vikings development. The group is assisting the county in evaluating a stadium development, gathering information, and promoting the county's objectives for a possible stadium project.

"We continue to be extremely impressed and appreciative of the strong working relationship we have with Anoka County and the first-rate public/private partnership that is working on this project," said Mike Kelly, executive vice president of the Minnesota Vikings.

Julie Shortridge

The public is invited to drop off non-perishable food items and unwrapped toys and gifts for children of all ages for the **Toys for Joy** and **Christmas Committee** programs. Drop-off sites are located throughout Anoka County. Sponsored by Anoka County, area service groups, District 15 Schools, North Metro Realtors, and hundreds of volunteers.



County Attorney Report

by Robert M.A. Johnson
Anoka County Attorney

Voters elect three people in county government: the county commissioner from your district, the sheriff, and the county attorney. Few people understand the responsibilities of the county attorney. In this article, I will summarize the responsibilities of the County Attorney's Office and in subsequent articles, I will provide a more in-depth description of the work performed by this office.

The Anoka County Attorney's office is organized as follows:

Criminal Division

The Criminal Division works with area law enforcement agencies to prosecute major crimes. Last year the Criminal Division prosecuted more than 1,400 felonies that occurred in Anoka County.

Juvenile Division

The Juvenile Division handles violations of criminal laws by juveniles. It also handles matters relating to children in need of protection and termination of parental rights. Last year, this division handled nearly 4,000 matters.

Civil Division

The Civil Division represents the county in lawsuits. It advises the county board and county departments in matters relating to social services, employment, real estate tax, condemnations, commitments, solid waste, contracts, data practices, county parks, and more. It also handles appeals to higher courts.

Family Law Division

Paternity and child support enforcement matters are handled by the Family Law Division. Last year, this division brought nearly 400 enforcement actions.

Expedited Process

The establishment and modification of child support is the responsibility of this unit. The unit handles approximately 125 cases a month.

Victim Witness Unit

The Anoka County Attorney's Office was one of the first in the state to establish a victim witness unit. It responds to the needs of victims and witnesses in criminal and juvenile matters.

Investigation Unit

Claims against the county are investigated, and sometimes settled, by the Investigation Unit. This unit also investigates welfare fraud, election irregularities, and pursues necessary internal investigations.

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County reduces spending

Anoka County's proposed budget for 2004 is \$210.5 million, down \$8.5 million from 2003.

However, because of the loss in state and federal funding to counties, the tax levy for 2004 is \$95.9 million, up 3.4 percent from this year.

The majority of county revenue is derived from property taxes; the balance comes from various state and federal funding sources, fees for services, and interest on investments. State budget cuts, which will reduce funding to Anoka County in 2003 and 2004 by \$16 million, are increasing the burden on county property taxpayers for services the state requires counties to provide such as maintaining roads, libraries, property records, and social services programs for children, the poor, elderly, disabled, and others in need.

"The 2004 budget includes many adjustments due to the state budget crisis and focuses on our priority areas of road improvements, public safety, and child protection," said Board Chair Dan Erhart.

The Anoka County Board has cut serv-

ices in several areas including: reduced library hours and fewer library staff; no lifeguards at county beaches; limited



The 2004 budget includes special emphasis on road improvements, especially safety improvement projects.

hours and fewer programs at many parks; and reduced funding to outside agencies, such as the Extension Service and the Historical Society.

The number of county employees is being reduced, despite a rapidly growing county population with growing demands on services. Currently, 130 positions remain unfilled, 84 of which will not be funded next year.

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Sheriff's Office honors citizens

The 2003 Sheriff's Awards Ceremony presented two Awards of Merit to local citizens for their contributions to public safety.

The first Award of Merit was presented to 18-year-old Mike Owens. In October 2002, Owens and two friends were hunting on Crossways Lake in Columbus Township when their boat began to sink. Overcoming panic and very cold water, Owens helped his two friends safely to shore. He then walked alone through two miles of swamp and woods before reaching a business where he was able to call for help. Owens' actions prevented what could easily have been a tragic outcome,



Anoka County Sheriff Bruce Andersohn with Mike Owens



Anoka County Sheriff Bruce Andersohn with Chuck Jacky

according to Anoka County Sheriff Bruce Andersohn.

The second award was given to Chuck Jacky, lead dispatcher with Anoka County's 911 Emergency Center. In 2001, the Sheriff's Office began construction of a mobile command post for use at the scene of large scale emergencies. Over a two year period, Jacky volunteered hundreds of hours of his time building and equipping the mobile command post.

"The Sheriff's Office is proud to recognize the efforts of these two citizens," Andersohn said. **"Each of them has demonstrated a selfless commitment to the needs of others and to the community in which we live, and that is worth noting."**

Information provided by
Captain Robert Aldrich
Anoka County Sheriff's Office

Anoka County is open for business

by Anoka County Board Chair Dan Erhart

"City of Excelsior says no to Starbucks!," a recent news article reported. That won't happen in Anoka County. Here we count interest by Starbucks, Lowe's, Gander Mountain, or other clean, well-run businesses as a plus. We look for ways to say "yes," to businesses wanting to locate here, not reasons to say "no."



Gander Mountain's new store in Columbus Township opened in September, 2003.

In Anoka County we value initiative and welcome new ideas. We're willing to talk to the Minnesota Vikings about a possible stadium development complex. We're eager to form coalitions with other cities and counties to promote development of

Northstar commuter rail from Minneapolis to St. Cloud and beyond. We're working hard to attract strong, healthy, clean development to strengthen our tax base and create jobs for our citizens.

Anoka County is perceived as a "working class" area and that's okay with us, even if by most demographic measures it isn't quite true. For instance, the median family income in Anoka County is over \$72,000, and the average sale price of a home is over \$200,000. Both figures are strong when compared metropolitan-wide. Recently, developers of a proposed harness horseracing track and entertainment complex approached us to tell their story. While this group has a long way to go to secure various state and local government approvals, our response to them was open and receptive.

We've got a lot to brag about in Anoka County, including the National Sports Center in Blaine, home of the USA Cup soccer tournament; Medtronic Inc. world headquarters in Fridley; and the

Tournament Players Club (TPC) of the Twin Cities in Blaine, where the 3M Championship senior PGA golf tournament is held each year. We have historic downtown Anoka, a new town center being built in the city of Ramsey, the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes in Lino Lakes and Centerville, the Carlos Avery Wilderness Area in Columbus and Linwood Townships, Bunker Beach Aquatic Center in Coon Rapids, booming housing and retail developments throughout the county, including an expansive Gander Mountain retail store opening in Columbus Township in September. Anoka County's Sandhill Crane Natural Area was designated by the McKnight Foundation as one of the metropolitan area's "Top Ten Treasures." We have two premier hospital facilities -- Mercy and Unity, Mercy being one of the leading heart hospitals in the nation.

Anoka County is booming, and we haven't gotten that way by saying "no" to sound development ideas.

So come to Anoka County, Starbucks. Trains, stadiums, horse tracks, housing, and retail developers -- we'll listen to your ideas.

Anoka County is open for business.

(A version of this editorial was published in the Minneapolis Star Tribune August 30, 2003.)

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Fewer employees will result in reduced service hours at the county's property records walk-up window and phone help line. In Corrections, reduced staff levels will mean less probationary supervision of offenders, fewer drug screenings, and fewer appearances by Corrections staff at court hearings. There also will be fewer juveniles being served by probation services, truancy programs, summer youth jobs programs, and violence prevention programs. The teen pregnancy prevention program is being discontinued, as is the youth risk behavior program. In Human

Services, there will be reduced service hours, increased number of clients per worker, and longer waiting lists. Staff will focus on the highest risk family intervention situations.

"In these times of state budget cuts, we are forced to make difficult choices," said Commissioner Jim Kordiak.

County taxes on a \$180,000 home will increase from \$692 a year to \$722 a year, or about \$30 per year. County taxes on a \$500,000 business will increase from \$3,558 a year to \$3,580 a year, or about \$22 per year.

The county tax rate is actually going down 6.5 percent but with property values

increasing an average of 11.5 percent, most taxpayers will see a 4.3 percent county tax increase. (Property tax statements include tax amounts from school districts, cities, special taxing districts, and special assessments. County commissioners only have authority over the county's portion of the total property tax.)

"We are committed to assisting the state in solving its budget crisis in a fiscally responsible manner, while providing citizens of the county the services they desire," said Erhart.

Julie Shortridge



Dennis D. Berg
District 1



Dick Lang
District 2



Margaret Langfeld
District 3



Jim Kordiak
District 4



Dave McCauley
District 5



Rhonda Sivarajah
District 6



Dan Erhart,
Chair
District 7

