

An aerial photograph of a small town with colorful buildings and streets. Overlaid on the image are several yellow and red outlines of people, suggesting a focus on community and individuals.

# EMPOWERING SMALL MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES

**Knife River Community Futures | Oct 30, 2025**



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>**



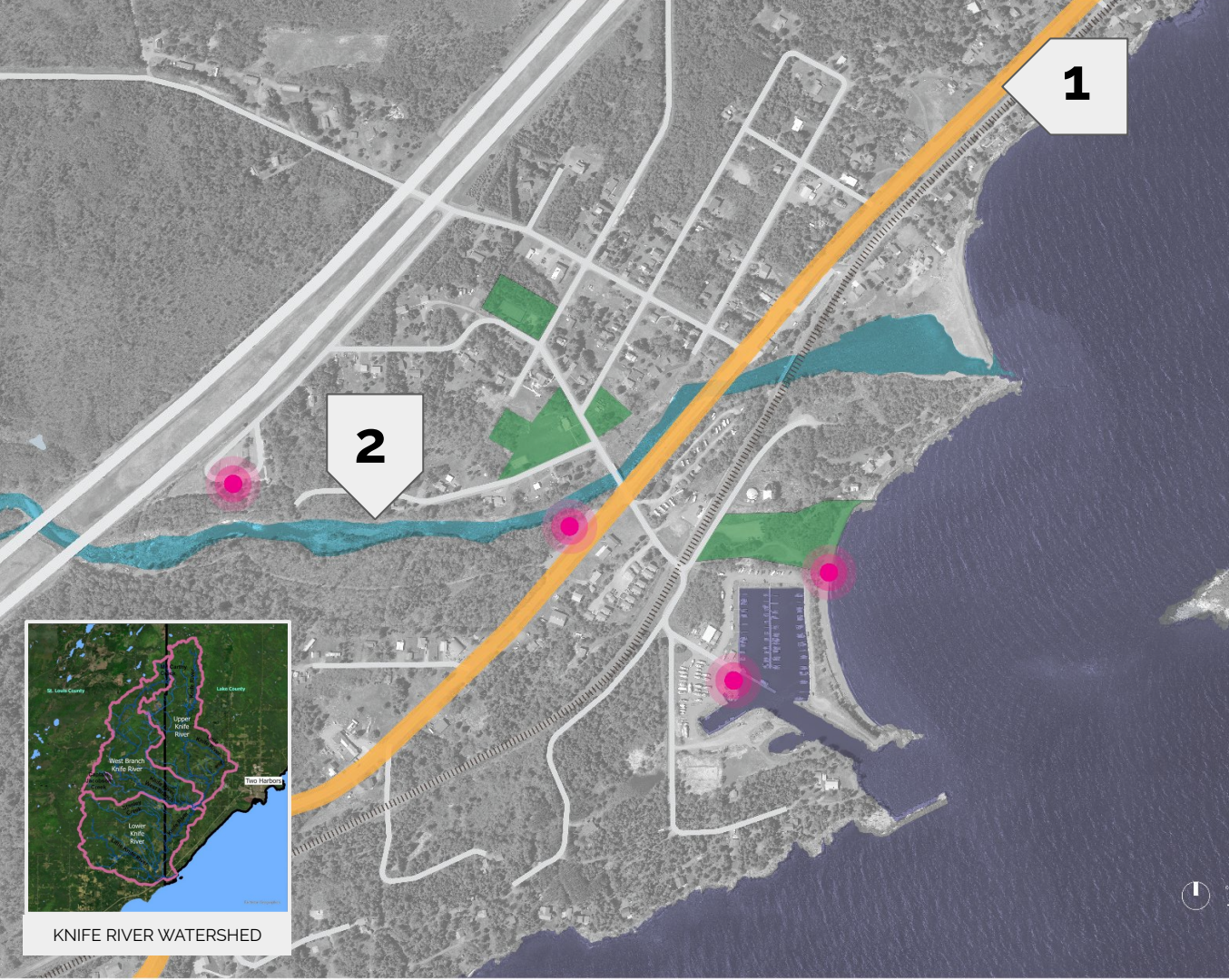
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## North Shore Scenic Drive

- Federal status as an All American Road Scenic Byway
- Opportunity to celebrate Knife River as the *Gateway to the North Shore*
- Public access
- An industrial past and a recreational present - evolving over time







## Knife River

- Improve and protect water quality
- Protect the River's unique fisheries and wildlife habitat
- Enhance public access, especially the relationship between river and lake
- Identify and work with partners



## CONTEXT Public & Community Ownership & Stewardship

To Knife River Hiking  
Trails & River Access

St Louis & Lake Counties RR/Mesabi Trail

Lake County

Knife River Sanitary Sewer District

Knife River Heritage & Cultural Center  
Leif Erikson Viking Ship  
Historic RR Depot

Knife River Recreation Council  
Rec Center, Public Beach,  
Pickleball, Playground, Fields

MN DNR  
Office for School Trust Lands  
Sailboats, INC (Marina Operator)





# 1. Identify Opportunities for Expanded Public/Community Access and Ownership

## STRATEGY FOCUS AREA 1

### *Opportunities*

- **Pursue public ownership of the Knife River Campground parcel** (currently for sale)
- **Partner** with Lake County, MN DNR, private landowners to consider additional and improved public access points for the Knife River
- **Explore partnerships** with Knife River Heritage and Cultural Center, St Louis and Lake Counties Regional RR Authority/Mesabi Trail, Leif Erikson Viking Ship, SWCD, IRRR, and Lake County





## 2. Explore Opportunities for the Knife River Community Center: Knife River's Heart

### STRATEGY FOCUS AREA 2

#### *Opportunities*

- *Identify programming needs*
- *Identify the feasibility of alternative siting options*
- *Consider several preliminary design scenarios with UMN / ESMC partners*
- *Identify next steps for funding and potential partnerships*
- *Use public pre-design process as a guide*





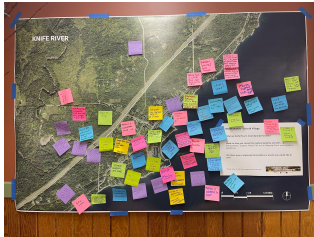
# 3. Build Internal Community Capacity & Decision-Making

## STRATEGY FOCUS AREA 3

### Opportunities -

- **Identify and develop robust internal structure** for capacity & decision-making & fiscal management and responsibility
- **Develop consistent communication strategy** for transparency, and to invite broader engagement to support community efforts
- **Expand membership in community organizations**, to reflect broader perspectives from the community

- **Coordinate and collaborate between community organizations**, to strengthen pursuits for funding and other community projects



*(and more...)*

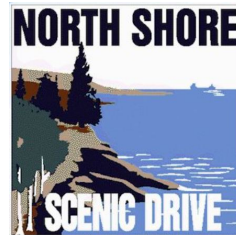


## 4. Coordinate Infrastructure Improvements for Safety, Connectivity and Access

### STRATEGY FOCUS AREA 4

#### Opportunities

- **Public Safety on Local Roads:** Continue work with the ongoing efforts of the Lake County Highway Department and Soil and Water Conservation District focused on **stormwater management & infrastructure improvements**
- Develop relationships to **work with Scenic Byway partners and MN DOT** to improve signage and interpretation, and to create a gateway experience and/or a potential visitor center in Knife River based upon its existing assets.



# Design Process: Considerations

## Community Considerations

- Build upon history of **community volunteerism & inclusive capacity-building**
- Plan for **Julebyen** and other community events
- Consider *residents*, *visitors* and *travelers*
- Recognize **Indigenous presence**: past, present and future
- Celebrate **what is special and unique about the Knife River Community**
- Consider at multiple scales the ways designs could support **community resilience**

## General Site Considerations

### Soil conditions

- clay and variable depth to bedrock, contamination and past uses

### Environmental conditions

- wind, sun, seasons, climate & climate change, pollution/contamination and past uses

### Surface water management & plan

- ensuring water quality for Knife River & Lake Superior

### Utilities and infrastructure

- municipal sewer/water; septic/well; renewable power potential - solar, wind, geothermal

### Zoning

- Conditional Use Permit process (Lake Co. Planning Commission) & Max. allowable buildable area

### Parking & Traffic flow

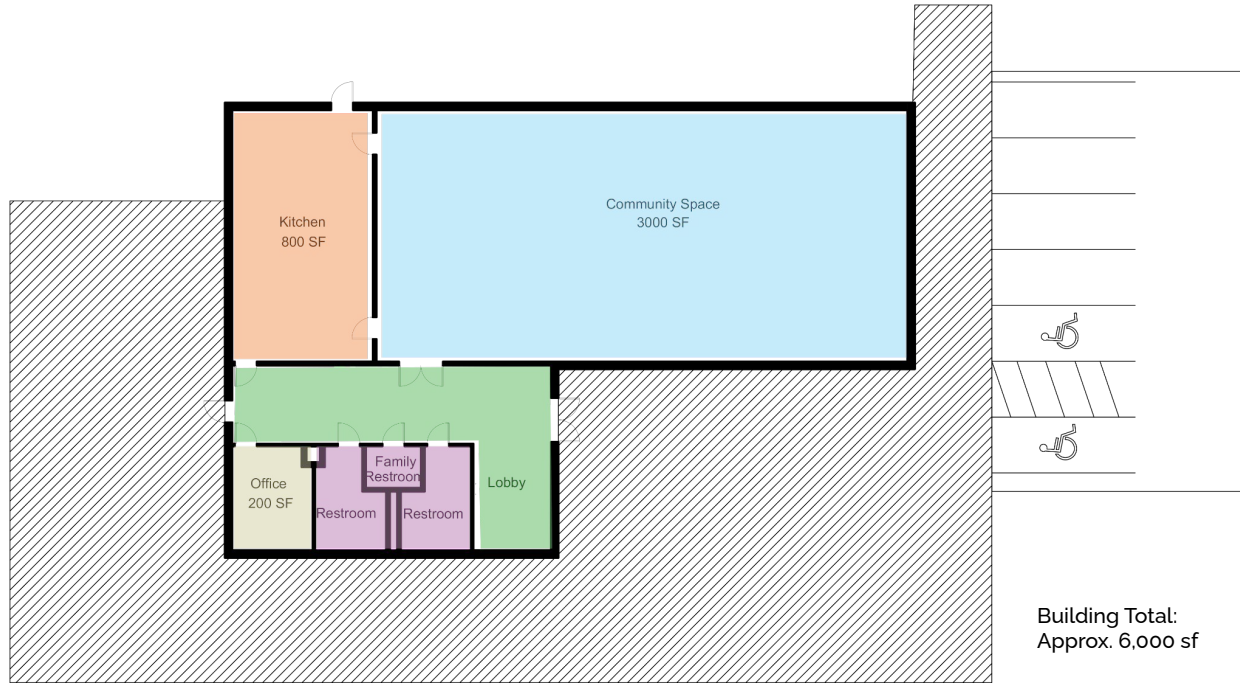
- everyday use (4-6 spots) and special events parking needs (50 or more spots)

### Circulation & Accessibility (ADA)

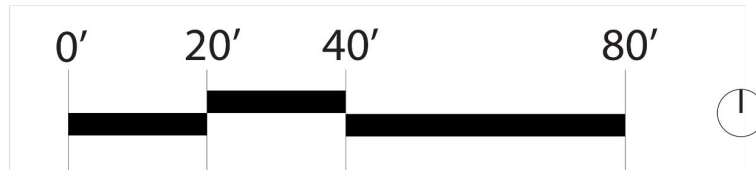
- vehicle, pedestrian, bicycle, ATV/snowmobile



# Test Program/Building Footprint



Building Total:  
Approx. 6,000 sf



Flexible community space for big or small gatherings, meetings, programs, events

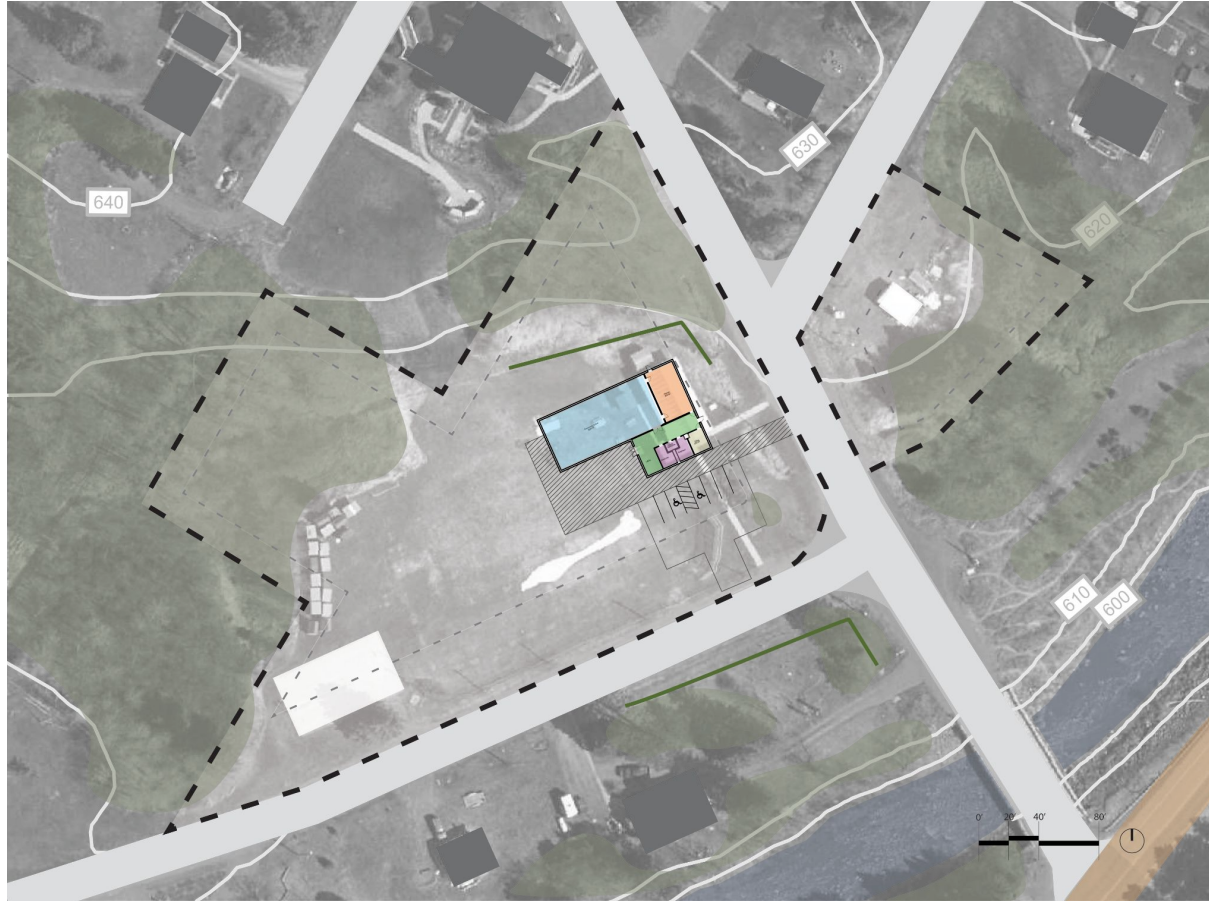
Kitchen  
Entry/Lobby  
Office  
Restrooms (3)

Parking for everyday use and accessibility

Options for additional parking on/off site

Outdoor site design TBD, eg, patio, seating, sheltered gathering spaces

# Scenario 1: Maximize KRRC Rec Center Parcel



This is the **test fit of possible new building footprint**. Design and exact site planning TBD.

New building located to preserve and maximize open green space.

This includes improved everyday parking and loading access.

Special event parking would need additional plans (could potentially be on street or other arrangements TBD).

No new property acquisition for this Scenario 1.

Public beach parcel remains as is.



## Scenario 2: **Public/Community Ownership of Campground Parcel**



This is the **test fit of possible new building footprint**. Design and exact site planning TBD.

New building located to preserve and maximize open green space and river access.

This includes improved everyday parking and loading access.

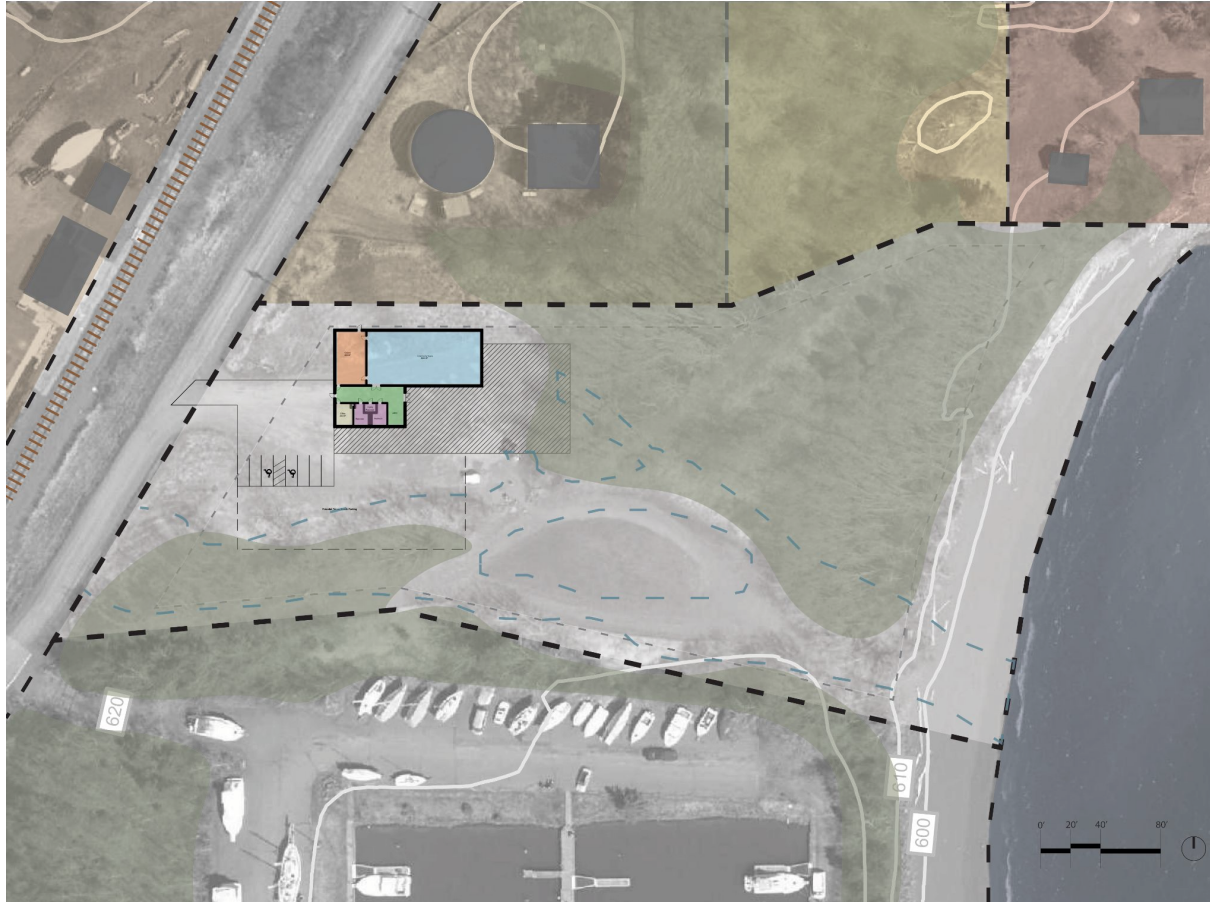
Special event parking and potential connections to RR property TBD.

New property acquisition required for this Scenario 2.

Existing KRRC Rec Center could be adapted to focus on sports equipment and access, or other uses. Field could remain open for sports or other uses.

Public beach parcel could remain as is.

## Scenario 3: KRRC Public Beach Site



This is the **test fit of possible new building footprint**. Design and exact site planning TBD.

New building located to preserve and maximize vegetation areas along lakeshore as is.

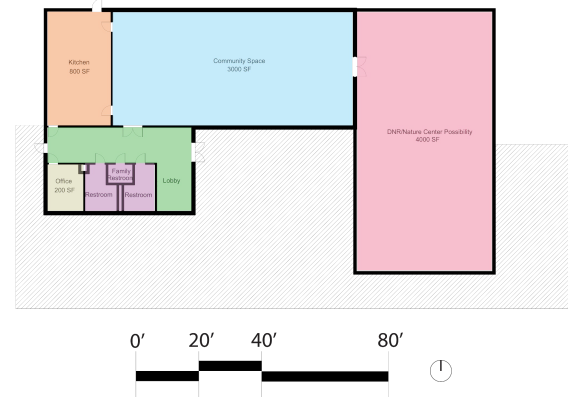
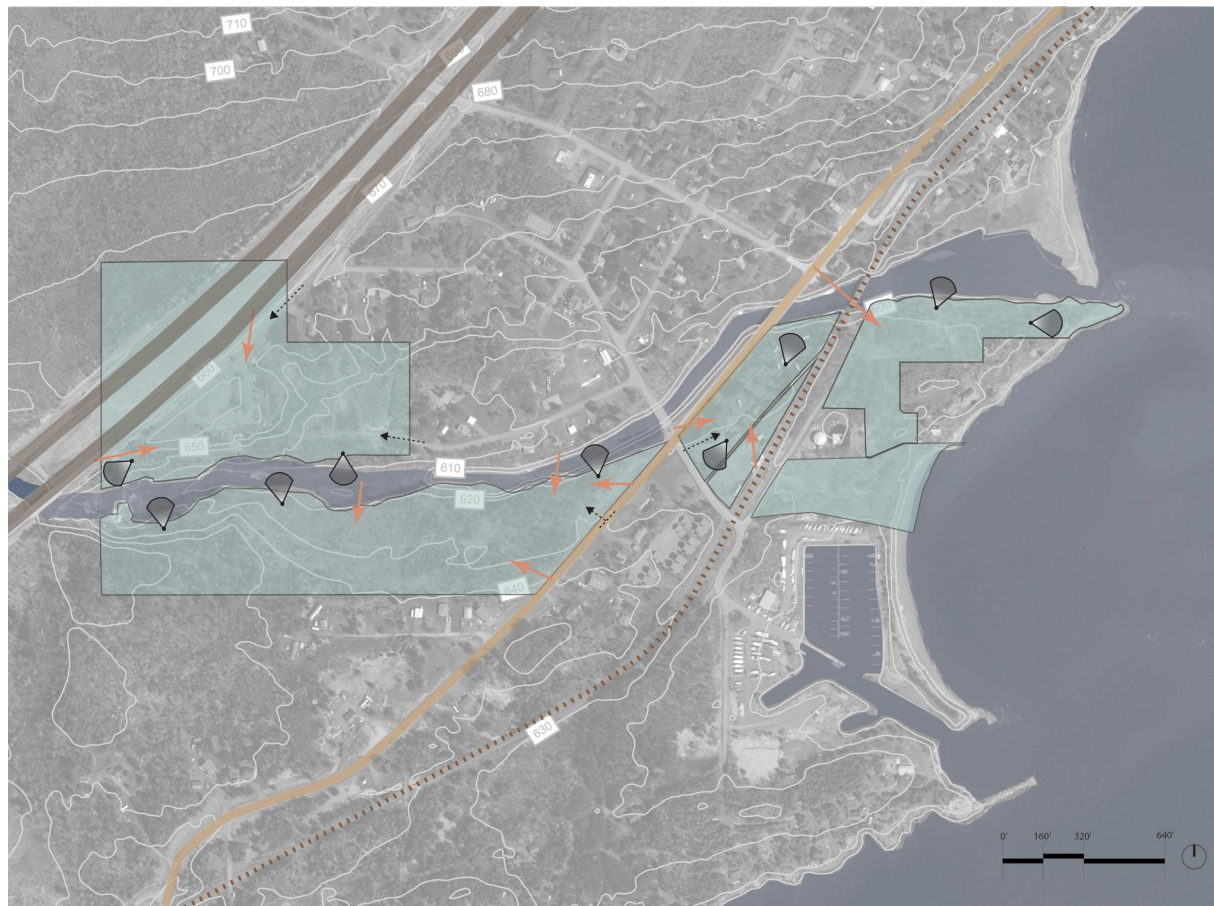
This scenario includes improved everyday parking and loading access. Public beach parking could be incorporated into this scenario, TBD. Special event parking TBD.

No new property acquisition required for this Scenario 3.

Existing KRRC Rec Center building could be adapted to focus on sports equipment and access, or other uses. Field at that site could remain open for sports or other uses.



## Scenario 4: Celebrating Nature's Gateway: Public Access/State Park



This scenario is ambitious and speculative. The scenario connects all the existing public and community parcels, and could include a variety of partners: MN DNR, MNDOT, MNHS, Lake County, others.

Details would be worked out with these partners. A larger diagram for a community center is shown, that would include spaces to support those other partners' needs.

(Alternatively, this is something that could be developed alongside the other scenarios.)

# Funding Possibilities: Pre Design Process

## Use Public Pre-Design Process as a Guide

- Before Pre-Design
  - Agency Planning
  - Exploration of Assets, Roles and Partnerships
  - Identification of Need
  - Project Organization

## Elements of a Pre-Design

- Basis of Need
- Organization Planning
- Project Description
- Site Analysis
- Financial
- Schedule



## PREDESIGN MANUAL For Capital Budget Projects



Seventh Edition – July 2019

### CERTIFICATION SIGNATURES

Due to the complexities involved in major capital undertakings, State Agencies and local government units



# Funding Possibilities: **Construction Pathways**

## **Private / Non-Profit Funding** **(4-?? years)**

- Design Concept and Initial Fundraising: 6 to 12 months
- Architecture and Design: 12+ months
- Fundraising: 18 to 24 to ?? months
- Construction (Phases): 12 to 24 months
- Move In and Occupancy

## **Hybrid**

- Non-Profit Receives Public \$\$\$ through Bonding and/or Grants
- Non-Profit/Local Funding for 50%
- Public sector contracting procedures
- Public Land Owner may be required

## **Public / Bonding (6 to 12 years)**

- Public Owner and Contracting Required
- Design Concept and Initial Fundraising: 6 to 12 months
- Architecture and Design (Pre-Design): 12+ months
- Fundraising: 18 to 24 to ?? months
- Bonding Process: 2-6 years (2027-2031)?
- Architecture and Design (Public Bidding): 12 months to 24 months (2028-2032)
- Construction Phase: 12 to 24 months (2028-2032)
- Move In and Occupancy
- Operations

## **Funding Possibilities and Strategies**

- Building Construction = \$2,100,000 (6,000sf x \$350/sf)
- Site Construction = \$420,000 (20%) to \$630,000 (30%)
- Subtotal Construction = \$2,520,000 to \$2,730,000
- Soft Costs @ 30% = \$800,000 to \$820,000
- **TOTAL COST = \$3,300,000 to \$4,600,000 (+/- 30%)**

# Next Steps: **Tools for Moving Forward**

## **Community Capacity for Acquiring Campground Parcel and Developing a Community Center**

- Current focus on Design Scenario 2
- Build internal organization and decision-making capacity (KRRC)
- Establish an organizational structure and strategy for the project (KRRC and more)
  - Consider how to engage broad community
  - Develop a transparent and accessible communication strategy
  - Consider roles / skill sets
  - Consider how all the Knife River community groups can work together



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## Continue to Build and Strengthen Partnerships Beyond Knife River Community

- Current focus on Design Scenario 2: Campground Parcel and potential Community Center
  - IRRR - Relationship getting established
  - Lake County
  - St Louis and Lake County Regional RR Authority/Mesabi Trail
- Broader coordination into the future
  - MNDOT / Scenic Byway organizations & decision makers
  - MN DNR & Knife River organizations
  - Trail organizations

# *Heartfelt THANK YOU to the Knife River Community!*

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## MINNESOTA DESIGN CENTER | MDC

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Regional Sustainable  
Development Partnerships  
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**EXTENSION**

