

# NATIONAL SPORTS CENTER

## CAMPUS MASTER PLAN



DRAFT



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over its 30 year history, the National Sports Center (NSC) has been the setting for millions of people to experience the joy and rewards of playing sports. It is hard to even imagine the countless memories made at this place and the positive impacts it has on the lives of the participants, their families, and their communities.

This impact is a direct result of visionary thinking and the ability to respond to opportunities as they arise. However, the NSC has never had a campus master plan to guide its growth and development. This document represents the outcome of a year-long process that has sought to take that step for the first time. The goal is to guide future investments so that the campus can become even more effective in creating lasting memories for visitors and expanding its positive impact on the community.

The NSC Campus Master Plan process began with a review of previous planning efforts and site visits to establish a thorough understanding of current conditions. A steering committee convened to shape the vision and guide the process for engaging stakeholders.

A series of focus group meetings and interviews were conducted to understand the impact of various stakeholders. A Town Hall meeting helped gather rich information about issues and opportunities from the community more broadly. That meeting was complemented by an online survey and a set of interactive boards that were displayed around the campus to gather feedback from people who couldn't attend a meeting. Many hundreds of unique inputs were gathered from these various sources, which were used to form a strong vision for this plan:

*The National Sports Center campus will build healthy individuals and communities by providing the best environment in the United States for playing amateur sports.*

1. The NSC Campus will strongly contribute to the memories made here.
2. The NSC Campus will offer comfort and activity for all participants and their supporters.
3. The NSC Campus will bring diverse communities together by offering the best sports facilities available to as many participants as possible.





4. The NSC Campus will be a model for sustainability and resilience.

5. The NSC Campus will contribute meaningfully to the vitality of the community.

This vision is explored in more detail later in this document, but it is focused on establishing a set of values that can inform current and future investments. It can also help answer questions and address situations that can't even be predicted today.

Many projects, in all stages from a glimmer of an idea to nearly built, fit well within this vision for the campus. This plan explores both discrete projects and strategies for improvements that might be incorporated or overlaid within the context of a particular project.

The discrete projects mostly focus on reorganizing existing uses to better serve participants, and supporting some new sports that aren't currently available. The strategies cover a wide range of efforts aimed at improving the experience of visiting the campus, including wayfinding, landscaping, comfort and activities for spectators, etc. In addition, a theme of sustainability and resiliency underpins the entire

plan and becomes part of the NSC brand.

For example, when a new playing field is added, it may be appropriate to implement portions of the new landscaping, wayfinding, sustainability, and comfort amenity efforts described in this plan. In addition, some of the strategies are not directly related to the physical campus, but instead focus on building relationships within the community and beyond.

Many conversations during this planning process have focused on strengthening relationships between the NSC and its neighbors and partners. Strong communication and shared vision are key to maximizing the mutual investments of the NSC and its many public and private partners. Building relationships with local, regional, state, and national partners will be a foundation for much of the work described in this plan.

Relationship-building also relies heavily on continuing to create a base of advocates in the form of the every day users of the campus. Their love for this place and the sports it represents are the NSC's greatest asset. Their voices will help move the campus towards its vision and into the next 30 years of its development.





# EXISTING CONDITIONS

## Facility History

The National Sports Center (NSC) is the world's largest amateur sports facility. It was the inspiration of Governor Rudy Perpich in 1987, who created the Minnesota Amateur Sports Commission (MASC) to build and run it, as they continue to do today. It opened in 1990 with the Velodrome, Sports Hall, Residence Hall and Dining Hall, Stadium, and fewer than 25 soccer fields on 92 acres in Blaine, Minnesota. From its very beginning, its largest annual event was USA CUP which continues to be part of the NSC's core identity. During its first year, 386,000 people visited the NSC. Today, over ten times that many people visit annually.

Over the years, the campus has continued to evolve. A variety of new buildings and venues were added as need and opportunity presented themselves, including the Schwan Super Rink and National Youth Golf Center in 1998, Victory Links Golf Course in 2004, the Super Rink expansion in 2006, the Herb Brooks Training Center and NSC Figure Skating Center in 2007, the Sport Expo Center in 2011, and a substantial field expansion in 2013. In the last couple years, the campus has been evolving to support training facilities for Minnesota United FC and in 2018, the opening of a new local elementary school. As these changes were taking place, the NSC continued to invest in a variety of field improvements, upgrades to existing buildings, advancing energy saving and other sustainability goals, and other campus improvements.

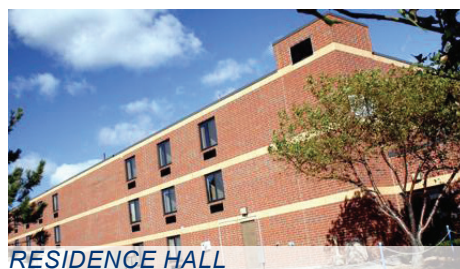


Figure 1.1 Existing conditions images



## EXISTING CONDITIONS, CONT.

The NSC has proven itself energetic and successful as it seeks to support amateur athletics with a variety of facilities and programs. However, its development has never been guided by an overall vision and plan for the campus. Today, as it seeks to continue to support the community of amateur athletes, and compete with other facilities that host sports in a similar way, it is undertaking a Facility Master Plan to guide investment and change.

### Facility Condition

Today, the most immediate impression of the campus when a visitor arrives is the expanse of soccer fields. Whether occupied or not, this broad expanse of fields is a unique feature in the suburban landscape and part of the unique identity of the campus. The fields convey an open invitation to play. However, there is currently no gateway announcing that you have arrived at a unique location, or sign helping you navigate to your destination. Most visitors who do not go directly to the field where they are playing a game, turn into the main entrance drive that leads to the front of the Welcome Center. A wide variety of sponsor signage, in addition to a lack of hierarchy between the many large buildings, makes it somewhat difficult to find the specific building a visitor is seeking. In general, wayfinding is difficult for many participants until

they have visited the campus several times.

Parking is adequate, but it is not well-distributed across the campus, so that some areas fill often, while others are rarely used. It also is not landscaped to contribute to the experience of a visitor resulting in the impression of a wide expanse of asphalt without much relief.

The buildings are primarily expansive one- and two-story brick structures that stretch across the south campus. The more recent buildings feature more windows and architectural relief, but sponsor signage interferes with the sense of a campus architectural identity, arguably without offering the sponsors as much value as they might. In recent years, substantial investments have been made inside several of the buildings, but others require updates soon in order to remain relevant. The interiors also lack a comprehensive and inviting wayfinding system, similar to the exterior.

The premier fields and the newer fields on the north campus, are in excellent condition and are well-used by a variety of sports organizations. Some users reported fields which could use upgrades, but this was not the general state. There is also opportunity to reorganize some fields and add lights and artificial turf, which would increase the potential for use. Victory Links Golf Course is





also extremely well-regarded and in excellent condition.

However, the experience that knits these facilities together is currently lacking. Basic amenities for safety, comfort, and shelter are not well-distributed across the campus. Drinking water, bathrooms, shade, seating, and weather protection are particularly lacking on the north campus, but are needed in general. There is no logical and enjoyable trail system to support pedestrians and bicyclists. Amenities for spectators, such as playgrounds, exercise opportunities, and other features (which are cited as integral to the experience of visitors to the NSC's peer facilities) are not present today.

### Community Context

Addressing the overall experience of visitors to the campus has potential impacts well beyond the campus boundary. Over its history, the NSC has also been investing in relationships with local, state, and national governments, nearby businesses, and the local, regional, and state community as a whole. Improving communication with these entities, and making investments in the campus that support shared goals, has the potential to greatly enhance those relationships.

Today, the NSC works closely with local hotels to coordinate before and during events, but little coordination is done with local restaurants, which also experience increased traffic during events. There is a sense that more opportunities exist for local businesses to benefit from the NSC's presence.

Similarly, the NSC has made strides to improve collaborations with the City of Blaine, but both sides see room to continue to improve those relationships so that the NSC can continue to positively impact the community.





# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Overall Summary

The National Sports Center (NSC) conducted a series of coordinated engagement events and tools in the first half of 2017. These events, including a variety of meetings, intercepts, and a survey, were aimed at understanding the perception of a wide variety of stakeholders. They were asked about both the current NSC facilities and potential changes to the campus. Their input, summarized below, will inform the creation of a new Master Plan for the campus that will guide its future.

## Town Hall Meeting

The Town Hall meeting was held on May 2, 2017 in the National Sports Center (NSC) Welcome Center. It served as an introduction to the project and an opportunity to collect feedback from the community generally, while raising awareness of the process. There were several overarching themes that came out of this event for the National Sports Center master planning process, including:

- Concerns about traffic, safety, and mobility
- Enthusiasm for enhanced golf facilities, especially a clubhouse and practice facility
- Desire for better wayfinding and signage
- Desire for trails, walkways, and increased walkability ofsite
- Interest in more baseball, basketball, volleyball, and tennis facilities
- Parking needs to be convenient and safe
- Potential for pools, playground and/or splash pad development
- Interest and opinions on hotel development/location
- Request for lighted fields
- Interest in conservation and alternative energy
- Interest in a fitness and/or community center for families of kids participating in sports
- Interest in medical services and research facility
- Desire for restroom facilities and water throughout campus
- More youth hockey
- Sports performance training
- Soccer/Football/Lacrosse
- BMX track
- Pursuing up-and-coming sports





## Focus Group Meetings

We held focus group meetings in the NSC Welcome Center. The focus groups covered a wide variety of topics, but several ideas and suggestions arose repeatedly:

- Participating in activities at the NSC should be a world-class experience in all its facets.
- Think about the experience of someone arriving at the campus, including signage and views.
- Improve wayfinding with signs and technological tools.
- Safety (personal, vehicular, pedestrian, etc.) for all users should be paramount.
- Provide premier sports facilities that serve the largest number of users possible, especially youth.
- Consider facilities for spectators and others who are not direct participants in sports.
- Raise the profile of the NSC at all scales from the community to the world by improving visibility and branding and making the most of partnerships and relationships.

## Intercept Boards

Intercept Boards were deployed at several locations across the NSC Campus, including entry lobbies to the main buildings, as well as at the Town Hall meeting. The boards asked participants about their opinions on the existing facilities and what should be added in the future.



Figure 1.2 Public meeting



# THE VISION

*The National Sports Center campus will build healthy individuals and communities by providing the best environment in the United States for playing amateur sports.*



1. The NSC Campus will strongly contribute to the memories made here.

a. Create an inviting place from the moment of arrival and throughout visitors' experience with gateways, landscaping, signage, and views.

b. Ensure safe and logical circulation for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers with intuitive wayfinding and circulation patterns.

c. Increase visibility in the surrounding community with signage, trail and transit connections, shared events, and messaging.



2. The NSC Campus will offer comfort and activity for all participants and their supporters.

a. Provide basic comforts throughout the campus, such as shade, seating, water, and bathrooms.

b. Include support facilities like walking paths, playgrounds, a dog park, and other elements that encourage activity for spectators and community members.

c. Provide convenient and healthy food options.



3. The NSC Campus will bring diverse communities together by offering the best sports facilities available to as many participants as possible.

a. Focus on sports with a broad appeal in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic circumstances, physical ability, etc.

b. Support sports with limited facilities available in the region.

c. Invest in new venues and facilities that are flexible for a variety of sports.



4. The NSC Campus will be a model for sustainability and resilience.

- a. Build a set of progressive goals for energy, water, and waste reduction, focusing on high-impact and visible features.
- b. Tell the story of sustainability throughout the campus with educational signage and design.
- c. Incorporate sustainability and resilience in branding and promotional efforts on and off campus.



5. The NSC Campus will contribute meaningfully to the vitality of the community.

- a. Provide a place for residents of Blaine and the surrounding community to gather and recreate.
- b. Create a positive economic impact on the local, regional, and state economy by developing relationships and events that increase the NSC's reach and impact.
- c. Act as a destination for visitors who will positively impact local, regional, and state economy.





# THE PLAN

## Multi-faceted approach

The Vision provides a strong foundation for decision making and investment. However, it is important to identify specific strategies and projects that support that vision. Those strategies may contribute to multiple goals within the Vision, but for purposes of clarity, this plan groups them to associate them with aspects of the Vision and reiterates those that contribute multiple goals.

At right is an overall Master Plan concept. It reflects the overall organization of the campus, as currently imagined by the contributors to this plan. Several significant organization changes are included:

- A new Elementary School (now open) will strengthen ties to the community and provide a connection between local youth, their families, and the goals of the NSC. An associated parking lot is provided south of the current Velodrome and features many sustainable strategies.
- The Minnesota United FC training grounds include new offices, players' facilities, parking, and practice fields. Including a professional soccer team at the NSC will provide an unparalleled opportunity for youth and amateur participants to observe and interact with highest-caliber athletes.
- Also on the north campus, this plan envisions the full build-out of the soccer/multi-use fields, related parking, and other amenities. These fields and amenities increase the NSC's capacity to support several popular sports.
- New indoor facilities including a dombed turf field that would provide an improved year-round facility.
- An artificial turf field in the current NSC Stadium will also extend the season and provide a more resilient surface for sports and other events.
- Renovations to the entry of the Schwan Super Rink could include a Hockey Inspiration Center, featuring the former St. Paul Herb Brooks statue, which would both improve the experience at the rink.
- A Hotel Resort and Clubhouse would provide a tremendous amenity for out-of-town participants, improve the ability of Victory Links Golf Course to serve its participants. An improved Clubhouse is a critical component to help the course remain competitive.
- Victory Links could also benefit from improved practice and driving range facilities (especially with lights) that could be coordinated with the replacement of the Clubhouse.





# THE PLAN, CONT.

## Goal 1. The NSC Campus will strongly contribute to the memories made here.

- Create an inviting place from the moment of arrival and throughout visitors' experience with gateways, landscaping, signage, and views.
- Ensure safe and logical circulation for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers with intuitive wayfinding and circulation patterns.
- Increase visibility in the surrounding community with signage, trail and transit connections, shared events, and messaging.

## Approach to this goal:

This goal requires a comprehensive look at the landscaping and building character of the entire campus. In addition to implementing the projects described below, it is important to consider the desired character--one of creating family memories focused around sports--in all design decisions.

This goal also requires communication and coordination with neighbors and the City of Blaine to increase the visibility of the NSC and improve connections. Improving signs along nearby highways, access by bus and other transit, trail connections, and joint marketing all could potentially support the shared goals of the NSC, Blaine, and nearby businesses.

## Features contributing to this goal:



ROUNABOUT PLANTING



SENSE OF ARRIVAL



LANDSCAPING AT CAMPUS EDGE



SHADE TREES



PEDESTRIAN / BIKE TRAILS



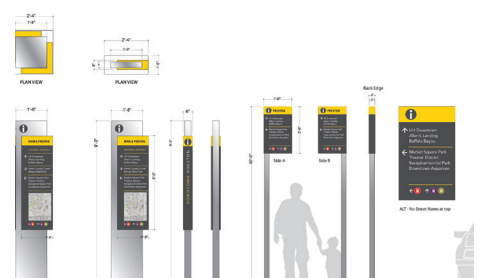
AMENITIES & SHELTER AT FIELDS



PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE



IMPROVE OFF-SITE SIGNAGE



COORDINATED WAYFINDING



# THE PLAN, CONT.

## Goal 2. The NSC Campus will offer comfort and activity for all participants and their supporters.

- a. Provide basic comforts throughout the campus, such as shade, seating, water, and bathrooms.
- b. Include support facilities like walking paths, playgrounds, a dog park, and other elements that encourage activity for spectators and community members.
- c. Provide convenient and healthy food options.

### Approach to this goal:

NSC users truly love this campus, but many mentioned the lack of basic amenities, especially on the north side of campus. In addition, if the NSC intends to compete with its peers and continue to attract sponsors, it is necessary to increase the support and experience of not only the sports participants, but also their families and other spectators.

The strategies around this goal are partly about adding physical amenities, like storm shelters with bathrooms, playgrounds, wi-fi stations, etc., but also about increasing programming and food concession options.

### Features contributing to this goal:



EXPANDED CONCESSIONS



DOG PARKS



PLAY FEATURES



SHADE TREES



PEDESTRIAN / BIKE TRAILS



AMENITIES & SHELTER IN FIELDS



EXERCISE FACILITIES



WI-FI AND CHARGING STATIONS



COORDINATE WITH RESTAURANTS



# THE PLAN, CONT.

**Goal 3. The NSC Campus will bring diverse communities together by offering the best sports facilities available to as many participants as possible.**

- Focus on sports with a broad appeal in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, age, socioeconomic circumstances, physical ability, etc.
- Support sports with limited facilities available in the region.
- Invest in new venues and facilities that are flexible for a variety of sports.
- Sport performance center and medical facilities.

## Approach to this goal:

Few activities have the ability to build relationships between people of different backgrounds more than sports. The NSC has a unique role in Minnesota as it supports equitable and accessible opportunities for us all to play together.

As the NSC evolves, it should particularly seek to develop facilities for sports that have the broadest possible appeal and that are under-served in the surrounding area. It is also important to build facilities with flexibility in mind so that changes can be made as the needs of the community shift.

## Features contributing to this goal:





# THE PLAN, CONT.

## Goal 4. The NSC Campus will be a model for sustainability and resilience.

- Build a set of progressive goals for energy, water, and waste reduction, focusing on high-impact and visible features.
- Tell the story of sustainability throughout the campus with educational signage and design.
- Incorporate sustainability and resilience in branding and promotional efforts on and off campus.

## Approach to this goal:

With over four million visitors annually, few facilities have as much opportunity to build awareness about sustainability as the NSC. In addition, many sustainability strategies can reduce long-term costs and maintenance which positions the NSC to invest its resources in sports, rather than electricity or other costs.

Incorporating sustainability in its branding also gives the NSC a unique message and initial conversations suggest it would be very well-received by sponsors. In time, a strategy around sustainability and resilience has the potential to yield multiple positive outcomes.

## Features contributing to this goal:



REDUCE BUILDING ENERGY USE



SOLAR ENERGY INSTALLATIONS



WIND ENERGY DEMO



INTEGRATED STORMWATER



NATIVE LANDSCAPING



SUSTAINABILITY BRANDING



OFF-SITE RENEWABLE ENERGY



RECYCLING/COMPOST



GREEN FIELD MAINTENANCE



# THE PLAN, CONT.

## Goal 5. The NSC Campus will contribute meaningfully to the vitality of the community.

- a. Provide a place for residents of Blaine and the surrounding community to gather and recreate.
- b. Create a positive economic impact on the local, regional, and state economy by developing relationships and events that increase the NSC's reach and impact.
- c. Act as a destination for visitors who will positively impact local, regional, and state economy.

## Approach to this goal:

The NSC already brings millions of visitors to Blaine, but there seems to be more opportunities to increase its positive impact, and mitigate concerns. The NSC has the potential to act as a source for new recreation opportunities in the community. This is just one example of how increased communication and cooperation could support the shared goals of both entities.

Similarly, increased communication with nearby businesses, such as coordinating before major events, could also support shared goals and reduce miscommunications.

## Features contributing to this goal:



AQUATIC & COURT SPORTS



COMMUNITY PARK



INDOOR DOME



TRAIL SYSTEM



105TH IMPROVEMENTS



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



STADIUM EVENTS



BUSINESS COORDINATION



GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIPS



