

Hennepin County seeks transit hub development proposals

by Chris Newmarker

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Want to build a hotel or office building near Target Field — or get a plaza named after your company? Hennepin County wants to hear from you.

The county this week started shopping requests for proposals from private entities looking to form partnerships with the proposed \$67.7 million Interchange transit hub in downtown Minneapolis.

The RFP is seeking a developer interested in building on 30,000 square feet of county-owned space, along Sixth Avenue North and Fifth Street North, across the street from Shapco Printing and the [Ford Center](#) and next to the main Interchange project. The county is flexible on air rights, so a potential project could be much larger, said Ed Hunter, the county's project manager for the Interchange.

Hennepin County is also seeking a private sponsor for a 67,000-square-foot open plaza planned at the Interchange, as well as an entity interested in signing a long-term lease to operate and manage two levels of parking — 150 stalls on the upper level and 250 stalls on the lower level — that the county would like to include at the Interchange.

The deadline for proposal submissions is Feb. 3; county officials expect to make a decision in March or April.

Developers are already publicly expressing interest. [Peter Remes](#) of First & First LLC says he is in discussions to build a hotel next to the Target Field station, along with restaurants and retail.

"I can only say that it will be dynamic, interesting and have a cultural flavor. We intend to bring a unique and innovative approach to the site. If city/county wants a predictable offering, we will not be the right party," Remes said.

Bloomington-based United Properties — which is wrapping up a \$50 million overhaul of the 270,000-square-foot Ford Center, at 420 N. Fifth St. — is also evaluating the RFP, said spokeswoman Jessie Folkens.

The \$957 million Central Corridor light rail transit line, which is scheduled to start running in 2014, will link the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul and will include to the Target Field station, which already serves as a downtown Minneapolis hub for the Hiawatha LRT, Northstar Commuter Rail, and local and regional bus service.

The Interchange project would create a passenger platform, storage and staging tracks, and a new plaza at the Target Field station to accommodate the extra transit users. [Four finalists are competing](#) for the project: St. Louis Park-based Adolphson & Peterson Construction, Eagan-based Graham Construction Services, Iowa-based Knutson Construction and Golden Valley-based Mortenson Construction.

Hunter said the county is open to a variety of development proposals for space across the tracks from the station. He thought restaurants such as Starbucks or Panera Bread or a bar



Hennepin County officials are seeking private development proposals to provide extra cash for the proposed \$67.7 million Interchange transit mecca in Minneapolis, which would update the Target Field station serving the Hiawatha light rail transit line, Northstar Commuter Rail, and local and regional bus service. The station is included on the \$957 million Central Corridor LRT line connecting Minneapolis and St. Paul starting in 2014. (File photo: Bill Klotz)

would perform well at the site, but there is also plenty of room for an office tower or something else creative.

"The county and the city are both looking for ways to activate this site 365 days a year, instead of just for ballpark events and rush hour and transit users," Hunter said.

Hunter is also hoping any development will infuse cash into the Interchange project, which received a \$10 million federal grant last month but is still \$30 million short of funding.

Besides settling on a construction team and private partnerships, the county board this spring will also have to decide whether the county has the financial resources to go ahead with the Interchange. Any money or revenue streams generated from the new RFP, whether it's from a development or a plaza sponsorship or potential loans based on parking lease revenue, could ease the way, Hunter said.

The opening of the Minnesota Twins' Target Field in 2010 has generated plenty of buzz in the area. The Ford Center has brought in tenants including HGA Architects and Engineers and the Olson advertising agency.

Then there's the mysterious "[Project M](#)," in which a still-unidentified developer is planning a 164-room hotel, a 400-space parking facility and an undefined entertainment complex at a nearby vacant building at 620 Olson Memorial Highway.

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