

## JDA Annual Report 2024

### About the Joint Development Authority

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In 2012, a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between the City of Arden Hills and Ramsey County created the Joint Development Authority (JDA). The JDA oversees the development of the site now known as Rice Creek Commons, a 427-acre piece of land formerly part of the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant (TCAAP). The Rice Creek Commons site is located in the City of Arden Hills and currently owned by Ramsey County.

#### JDA Membership

The JDA Board consists of two members from the Arden Hills City Council, two members from the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, and one appointed resident from Arden Hills serving as the JDA Chair for a two-year appointment. In 2024, the JDA Board membership was:

- Jon Wicklund, Arden Hills Resident, JDA Chair
- Nicole Frethem, Ramsey County Commissioner, JDA Vice Chair
- Tom Fabel, Arden Hills City Councilmember
- Tena Monson, Arden Hills City Councilmember
- Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey County Commissioner

### JDA Business

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#### Meetings and Work Sessions

The JDA met approximately monthly in meetings and work sessions to conduct JDA business, listen to public input on the project, and take actions to support the development of Rice Creek Commons. The JDA continued its committee work with a JDA Advisory Committee, consisting of Commissioners Fabel and Frethem and an Energy Advisory Committee, consisting of Commissioners Monson and Reinhardt. The JDA Advisory Committee met as needed to discuss project updates, provide guidance to staff, and recommend topics to bring to JDA meetings and work sessions. The Energy Advisory Committee (EAC) worked with consultants and external partners to advance the Green Energy Vision for the site and make recommendations on sustainability measures to the JDA.

#### Communications

The JDA worked with Goff Public to communicate about Rice Creek Commons. This included preparing for proactive and reactive opportunities, such as:

- Outlot A purchase and sale agreement with Ryan Companies (11 media stories)
- Public infrastructure development and design request for proposals (1 media story)

Additionally, the JDA sent shared projects updates through the Rice Creek Commons e-newsletter in the summer and fall, and staff fielded inquiries from the public submitted through the website.

## Land Use Updates

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The [TCAAP Redevelopment Code \(TRC\)](#) and [Regulating Plan](#) are the zoning documents that dictate the land use for the Rice Creek Commons site. In 2024, the JDA approved three amendments to these documents, following the approval process laid out in the TRC.

Following extensive community engagement and analysis of real estate market trends, the JDA approved an amendment to the TRC to increase the allowable density from 1,460 to 1,960 housing units, as reflected in the TCAAP Regulating Plan. This change was largely accommodated by converting the southwest portion of the site from a flex office use to a residential use. As part of this amendment, an affordable housing requirement was approved, establishing that at least 20% of the units must be affordable at 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or below. The process for approving this amendment started in 2023 and completed in April 2024. Per the required process, this was approved by the Arden Hills City Council on January 8, 2024 and the Ramsey County Board on March 12, 2024, and the corresponding Comprehensive Plan amendment was approved by the Metropolitan Council on March 27, 2024.

The second amendment allowed ground-mounted solar energy systems within neighborhood residential districts, in alignment with a change made to the Arden Hills Code. Per the required process, this was approved by the Arden Hills City Council on February 12, 2024, and the Ramsey County Board on March 12, 2024.

The third amendment was a simple administrative update, correcting an oversight in the TRC. In 2016 amendment, the JDA development review process was updated, but a corresponding attachment visualizing this process was not updated to be consistent with that change. This 2024 amendment corrected Attachment 3 – Development Flow Chart to match the process described in Section 3.3. Per the required process, this was approved by the Arden Hills City Council on March 6, 2024, and the Ramsey County Board on May 21, 2024.

## Development Progress

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In 2024, the JDA and its constituent parties, the City of Arden Hills and Ramsey County, made significant steps toward beginning development on Rice Creek Commons.

### Alternative Urban Areawide Review

The City of Arden Hills updated the [Alternative Urban Areawide Review](#) (AUAR) for the site, which is a hybrid of the environmental assessment worksheet and environmental impact statement review processes. This planning tool evaluates how different development scenarios might impact the community's environment before construction begins and outlines how to mitigate these impacts. In late 2023, the JDA commissioned a traffic study that was incorporated into the AUAR analysis. This document is required to be updated every five years, so the 2024 update was the first since 2019.

## California Parcel

The JDA continued to work with Alatus LLC to move development plans forward on the California Parcel, the name commonly used to refer to the larger, 387-acre portion of the development site. JDA staff worked with Alatus throughout the year toward solutions for horizontal development in order to prepare the site for vertical development.

## Outlot A

Outlot A (sometimes called the Thumb Parcel) is the 40-acre portion of Rice Creek Commons along Old Highway 8 that is development-ready with infrastructure in place. In 2023, the JDA undertook a [Request for Development Interest \(RDI\)](#) process find a development partner for Outlot A and selected Ryan Companies. Following the JDA's selection process, Ramsey County negotiated a Purchase and Sale Agreement (PSA) for Outlot A with Ryan Companies in January 2024. Ryan Companies thus commenced its due diligence period and began working directly with City and County staff on pre-development activities such as the entitlement process and document review. In alignment with the site zoning and their concept proposal, Ryan Companies marketed the site to light industrial and office users throughout the year. Development on the site is expected to begin in 2025.



## Public Infrastructure

To prepare for private development, Ramsey County executed an engineering contract with consultant team Kimley-Horn and Bolton & Menk for county public infrastructure on the site. This work includes grading, roadways, drainage, stormwater management features, mitigated wetlands and public utilities. The proposal will also include the final design of the Spine Road (CSAH 4), which will provide primary access to future residential neighborhoods and commercial areas throughout the site, as well as a direct connection to Interstate 35W. Final design and engineering of the Spine Road began in summer 2024 and is on track for completion at the end of 2025. This will result in final construction documents for the county public infrastructure and is a critical step toward preparing the California Parcel for vertical construction.

Ramsey County sought \$25 million in state bonding assistance in 2024 to support these public infrastructure needs. State legislators did not pass a bonding bill by the end of the 2024 session, so this funding was not secured.

## Clean Energy and Sustainability

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Through a Request for Proposals process in late 2023, the JDA selected the consultant team of Ever-Green Energy and LHB to analyze implementation strategies for the JDA's Green Energy Vision. The consultants worked over the year to understand the feasibility of developing a sustainable, carbon-free community. Their work consisted of a comprehensive analysis of the energy demands of the planned development, a review of strategies to reduce that energy demand (primarily through energy-efficient building design), and a study of renewable energy technologies to meet the remaining energy demand. As a part of this process, consultants and staff met with project developers to discuss these strategies and financing solutions to support them.

After a review of sustainability certification systems, in August the JDA approved the Energy Advisory Committee's recommendation to [pursue LEED for Communities certification](#) for the project. This globally recognized standard establishes benchmarks for energy efficiency and sustainability. Achieving this certification will guide the project in meeting its ambitious energy and environmental goals while ensuring accountability through independent third-party verification.

Ever-Green Energy and LHB presented an energy analysis at the October 2024 JDA work session and a final report, the [Clean Energy Analysis Report](#), was accepted by the JDA at the November 2024 meeting. The report outlines potential options for clean energy solutions to power the site, including geothermal, solar, and community district energy systems. One key finding is that it is technically feasible for the development to be all-electric (installing no natural gas connections), which would enable it to be a carbon-free community. It also identifies strategies for minimizing building energy use, incorporating additional sustainability measures, and financing options.

Based on these findings, the JDA approved a Clean Energy Policy: Rice Creek Commons seeks to be an all-electric, carbon-free community. The JDA also directed staff to identify steps to implement this policy and provide updates back to the JDA.

## Looking Ahead

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Looking ahead to 2025, Ryan Companies continues to actively market the Outlot A parcel. A development concept is moving through land use approvals, and development is expected to begin by the end of the year. Planning for private development on the California Parcel also continues to progress, and mass grading plans for the site are underway. Final design and engineering of the Spine Road through the California Parcel and related infrastructure is on track to be complete by the end of 2025, with construction in the spring of 2026.

The JDA will work with project partners to implement sustainability and clean energy measures on both public and private developments. Rice Creek Commons is anticipated to be pre-certified by LEED for Communities by the end of the year, with full certification in 2026.

The JDA will continue to prioritize engaging with the community in 2025, with more details to be shared in the future about an upcoming community event.

## More Information

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For more information on the work of the JDA and the development of Rice Creek Commons, please visit:

- [Joint Development Authority webpage](#)
- [Rice Creek Commons project webpage](#)