SOUTH MAIN REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

City of Rockford, Illinois

VOLUME 1 : STATE OF THE CORRIDOR

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Comprehensive Community Solutions
Southwest Ideas for Today and Tomorrow (SWIFTT)
Rockford Public Library

This plan is especially dedicated to the legacy and work of former Alderman Victory Bell. Representing Southwest Rockford for over 35 years, Alderman Bell was a tireless advocate for the South Main Corridor as the area went through many turbulent times. His dedicated support for community investment and redevelopment into the 5th Ward for decades established a foundation of strong neighborhoods and dedicated stakeholder groups that have made our outreach and planning efforts throughout the course of this project tremendously successful. The millions of dollars of investment in South Main that will be underway in the next few years serve as a fine tribute to Alderman Bell's service, and the strategy outlined in this corridor revitalization document reflect the ideals he brought as an influential Rockford leader for over a generation.

We also appreciate the involvement of the many community residents, business owners and organizational representatives who dedicated their time to participate in interviews, focus groups, community forums, and online surveys, which ultimately helped craft the following vision as presented in this document.

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INTRODUCTION

Planning Mission

In late 2010, the City of Rockford engaged The Lakota Group (planning and design), CLUE Group (market and economic analysis), T.Y. Lin International (transportation planning) and Arc Design Resources (civil and infrastructure engineering) to initiate a planning process to develop a revitalization and implementation strategy for the South Main Street/Illinois Route 2 Corridor. The process seeks to build upon programmed and pending improvements to the Corridor, including the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) roadway reconstruction of South Main Street, as well as a number of other studies and initiatives conducted around and within the South Main Corridor. While previous efforts have addressed important issues, none have taken a comprehensive approach to revitalization of this important gateway into Downtown Rockford. Previous plans, studies and initiatives that have addressed portions of the Corridor include:

- IDOT South Main Street Roadway Plans (on-going)
- River District Framework Plan: SmithGroup JJR (2003)
- Railroad Consolidation Study: Wilbur Smith Associates (2003)
- City of Rockford 2020 Plan: City of Rockford (2004)
- South Rockford Target Plan: SWIFTT (2004)
- Southwest Rockford Illinois Charrette: Pilgrim's Promise (2008)
- Rockford Retail & Residential Market Study: ERA (2008)
- Kishwaukee Street Corridor Revitalization Plan: HNTB (2008)
- Proposed Amtrak Station Layout: City of Rockford (2009)
- Rock River Greenway Master Plan: City of Rockford (2010)
- 2040 RMAP Long Range Transportation Plan (2010)
- Downtown Redevelopment Framework/Implementation Strategies: Live Work Learn Play (2010)
- Morgan Street Bridge Plans: City of Rockford (2010)

The City's goal for this planning mission is to create a clear, documented and shared vision, or "game plan," for the South Main Street Corridor that sets the stage for funding strategies, capital improvement programming, new development and retention/attraction of new and existing businesses. These goals will be shaped by evaluating the Corridor's land use, physical conditions, zoning, real estate market and infrastructure and transportation system.

The City considers this planning process as an important opportunity to:

- Create and test a range of alternative development concepts that enhance and revitalize the Corridor.
- Develop a plan that will attract land uses and development compatible with the needs, infrastructure and character of the surrounding neighborhoods and will meet realistic market conditions, expectations and capacities.
- Develop an optimal short-term and long-range land use strategy and development framework for the Corridor.
- Establish a framework for future changes to development regulations that emphasizes high quality, sustainable site and building design.
- Create retail and business development strategies to help existing businesses benefit from future development.
- Identify sensitive areas of the Corridor that should be maintained due to their character, scale and contribution to the immediate neighborhood and history of the area.
- Maximize the Corridor's transit-oriented development potential by improving traffic, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, and identifying appropriate sites for a land use mix and density supportive of these transit and multi-modal goals.
- Incorporate the preservation and reuse of historic and cultural resources into the overall South Main Revitalization Strategy.
- Incorporate the environmental cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites into the overall South Main Revitalization Strategy.

Planning Process

The first phase of this planning process involved an overall assessment of the Corridor's existing land use mix, physical conditions, transportation network and access, infrastructure and real estate market. This phase also focused on extensive public participation through interviews, focus group sessions, discussions with City staff and agencies, as well as a Community Open House. The process, which began in November 2010, includes the following phases:

Phase 1: State of the Corridor

Phase 1 involved an inventory of existing Corridor conditions and included team fieldwork and assessments, a meeting with the City's Project Study Group, numerous Focus Group discussions and stakeholder interviews, a Community Open House and the State of the Corridor report. Community outreach and public awareness methods included a City-sponsored project website, email blasts and community flyers distributed to area residents highlighting public input and planning process goals.

Phase 2: Community Visioning

Phase 2 will involve generating a range of development strategies for the Corridor, as well as concepts for enhancing the area's land use mix, physical conditions, traffic, pedestrian and bike circulation, parking and streetscape. After review by the Project Study Group, a Community Visioning Workshop will be held to review the State of the Corridor findings, development strategies and design concepts.

Phase 3: South Main Revitalization Strategy

Phase 3 will involve crafting a more specific Master Plan direction for the Corridor, as well as a set of design guidelines and a strategies for its implementation. This information will be reviewed with the Project Study Group, and a third Community Workshop will be held to discuss final plan outcomes. Corridor revitalization strategies will outline optimal and achievable short-term and long-range development scenarios and clear, concise methods for evaluating future development funding opportunities and required development control improvements. Key implementation action strategies will address land use policy and zoning issues, as well as public and private actions that can be taken to advance City and neighborhood objectives.

Plan Purpose

The City, as well as South Main neighborhood organizations, community leaders, property owners and developers will use the Revitalization Strategy for evaluating and promoting planning and development decisions over the next 20 years. The Plan will serve many purposes depending on the needs of the ultimate user, which may include:

Development Framework

The Revitalization Strategy will provide a focused framework for potential development and revitalization activities along the Corridor. City staff will review development projects for conformance with the goals, objectives and guidelines set forth by the Strategy.

Public Investment Guide

The City will use the Revitalization Strategy to prioritize public investment initiatives and improvement projects. The information on existing conditions and future land use and transportation/infrastructure needs will also be used to seek grants at the regional, state and federal levels.

Private Investment Guide

The Strategy report will provide a base of information about the area's constraints and potential for both local and outside investors interested in developing along South Main Street. It can also be used as a tool to attract outside developers by highlighting the unrealized potential of the area.

Future Vision

The Strategy will act as a local or regional marketing tool to inform current and future residents, businesses and private investors about the adopted shared vision for this key gateway into the community. This plan will further support the many other local and regional initiatives that focus on economic development for Greater Downtown Rockford and its primary natural resource...the Rock River.