

South Main Street Revitalization Strategy Area Community Meeting – November 4, 2004

Present: 12 Residents, 12 Organizations & Churches, 2 Businesses, 11 City Employees, 2 Alderman

Ald Bell Intro and thank you

Ald McNeely Intro and thank you

Jim Caruso Intro of the Healthy Neighborhoods Planning Program. Talked about Mid Town North Plan and Swedes role in that. Mentioned street improvements planned for South Main, IGA, intention to create a plan that won't sit on the shelf. *head nodding* Goal is to involve businesses and residents with a stake in the community.

went around the room with introductions

Jim Ryan Morgan St. Bridge – 2yr project with a 2006 start, a \$22 mil investment. Old bridge will be totally demolished and rebuilt as a steel tight arch, about 6-stories. Engineering and land acquisitions will begin in 2005. South Main Improvements from Belt Line Road to Cedar Street are the number 1 priority for the region (County, Loves Park, Machesney Park). Engineering is done, but still need funding for this stretch of the project, hopefully in the next 3 weeks. The only part that's funded at this point is at Main and Clifton (2006). Overall, an \$18-20 million project.

Q Valeri DeCastris: Is there cooperation with the County Board?

A Jim R: Yes, they've been very receptive. This project affects the airport too which makes it a priority.

A Jim Hughes: They have had many discussions with ED and road improvement. The County and City are working together on this.

A Jim C: From our [C.D.] perspective, the relationship with Scott Christianson is the best it has been since Jim C's time here. Working with Blackhawk Hills to access more EDA dollars for infrastructure improvements and possible revolving loan funds for business development

Jim Ryan Spoke on road conditions. Cunningham was included in the last bond issue, will get a new water main along with improvements. Fixing Winnebago may have been a nuisance but it has helped the neighborhood a lot, including Booker Washington. The junk yard near Morgan St bridge will be gone in the next 2 months. It will be cleaned, seeded and restored. Also spoke and passed around graphics on ADA ramps, traffic volume and pavement conditions within the planning area.

Commuter rail may be possible along the UP line, going from Elgin through Huntley, Marengo and Cherry Valley. Station would be at the location of the old Amtrak Station. There is also a RR consolidation plan, making the rail bridge a pedestrian bridge in the future. Looking for federal funding to extend the bike path in Davis Park, hopefully to Pecatonica

Q Jim Hughes: When is the South Main start date?

A Jim R: Need final design approval from IDOT, land acquisition will start after that. We are looking to begin at Klehm Arboretum in 2006.

Q Ald McNeely: How many lanes will Morgan St Bridge be?
A 4. We hope the bridge will celebrate the heritage of the area.

Jim R Is there anything we're not focusing on enough? Such as sidewalks?
David Beccue Lighting?
Jim R We plan on doing major streetscaping. There will be area in medians similar to Charles Street with room for lighting.
David Special lighting for South Main, to give it character?
Jim R We are working with Wolff-Clements out of Chicago. They are coming up with prototypes that we can bring to the public for discussion. This will include street furniture and lighting elements.
David What about the Abyss of the Railyards [dark]
Jim R We're thinking the bike path project would be a way to bring lighting into that area.

Valeri What is level of service?
Jim R Explained that

Valeri To City staff – we talked about expanding western edge, why wasn't it done?
Vicki Explained that we did extend it to the northwest. When pressed by Valeri about extending it more, she pointed out that the bigger the area you include, the less the impact will be since resources are finite.

Jim C We have HOME investment \$, CIP \$, we are competitive for \$. We need to maximize our impact, hopefully with spillover, then move on. Maybe we need to discuss with the community about boundaries. We plan to have meetings and surveys for people to tell us about the neighborhood. QOL issues, LOS, gaps, etc. What makes most sense?

Ald Bell Certain areas contiguous that enhance the neighborhood, some are not affected. This is a target area to concentrate resources, we are not shutting out other areas. We don't have Swedes and AMCORE here. We have to use BCV, Tinker, Ethnic Heritage Museum, etc. This is a 5-year deal.

Jim H Mentioned CCS and Tinker, the bridge. Would like a walkway along the Kent Creek, Tinker Cottage, South Main. Need a bike path so people can look at and get to these things. (Laura of Tinker agreed with statement)
Jim R We can definitely look at that

Wayne BCV (handout) – gave a definition of brownfields. City purchased BCV site in early 2002, prior to that we were involved in environmental activities there. He went through the handout and the process of environmental remediation and where the City is in that process on the BCV site.

Jim C Mentioned that the River Street Collaborative is working with Hendricks Development to create a plan for the site. Working on Phase 1 activities. Need to clean up frontages, making it ready to market for development. There will be selective demolition. Prepare for Center of Excellence (brief explanation). Can act as catalyst for additional development.

Ginny: What we would like to accomplish tonight is to determine the major issues and find out who is willing to work on solutions for the next 6 months. The end result would not be a traditional plan, but a list of actions, who is responsible, time frames, and hopefully funding sources to be completed over the next 5 years.

Valeri What does the city see as issues?
Jim C We would like to hear from you first. The strengths and issues.

Listing of Issues of South Main [Text in blue represents a positive; red, a negative.]

- Valeri Strength is and has been the diversity. Highlighted as a destination. Well integrated, got along
- David We're moving away from that and we don't want that to happen
- Valeri Strength is the small and enduring businesses.
- David/Valeri Property standards and enforcement is a huge issue. Boarded up houses. Lighting.
- Resident Need higher education. Need it to be convenient.
- Valeri Senior Center. Perception is an issue.
- Shirley Fedeli History – People just aren't aware of it.
- David The area is not marketed (EHM, Tinker, clubs)
- Sam Furman The river is a strength and weakness.
- Jim C Think about ownership and how that is changing
- Valeri Rental and absentee landlords on the rise.
- Jim H Erosion of the tax base, especially 61101, 61102, 61104. Low-income housing is fought, seen as negative. Need to educate people on what mid and low income housing is. Need to approach higher income such as 'employer assisted housing'.
- Ginny Pointed out that Swedes is taking that approach by introducing an employer assisted program.
- Ald Bell Has observed that younger people are not making commitments in community. They see that their success is not good if it is in this area. Problem as an Alderman is that the young are not investing. Lack of resources: education, evening social services, commitment from adults for the young, need retail (commercial and restaurants)
- Valeri Need to enforce curfew. Even if they are not doing any harm, causes a negative perception *officer nodded in agreement*
- David Street traffic is good, but after 11 pm it creates uneasiness.
- Valeri Officer Glover is doing good things in the community. *lots of head nods*
- Resident They can get the kids, but cant find their parents to enforce the curfew. Officer Glover agrees that this is a major problem, lack of parental involmnet.
- Ginny/Jennifer What about recreation? What do you do on a Saturday afternoon?
- Valeri The sidewalks are bad, there is uneasiness.

Resident Lives on South Main Street. There are panhandlers there making it embarrassing to bring people to the neighborhood. *head nods*

Valeri Graffiti is a big problem.

Resident Need to beautify the bridge like you said.

Shirley Trash. South Main needs trash bins like the River District has. Need more River green space *agreement*

Ginny Mentioned that she had heard about the desirability of a fishing park

Crowd Yes, near the creek. Need more green space around the river, a family fishing park at the river and Kent Creek. The flood zone should be public open space.

Valeri Are there fishing piers planned by the Morgan St Bridge?

Jim R Not really, there will be bump outs, fishing is not practical. The junk yard will be a good place when it is cleaned up. Fish passages upstream are possibly in the works.

Ron Moore The west bank has eroded away. Used to fish there. Could Army Corps of Engineers help us out with that?

Jim R Talking with DNR about the problem.

David Want some boat ramps along with South Main development.

Jim R There are some existing by IGA. They are in good shape but not marketed.

Sam You can only go South though, limited.

David Would like some boat parking so people can patronize South Main.

Jim R Have been looking into kayak/canoe rentals there. Untapped resource.

Valeri Public marina in the works?

Jim R In talks about how to enliven the area

Roger Sexton In taking down houses, vacant lots have been created. People will be looking at those lots for development. We have a diversity of housing – a one-story home next to a three-story home. Need to take advantage of design techniques to create a sense of place. Housing has Italian, Hipanic, etc look. Diversity is good but it needs to be cohesive. City houses look suburban in this neighborhood. Maybe work on 2-3 common themes in the neighborhood. [infill design standards]

Ald Bell Referred to a church on West and Morgan that needs to expand its parking. Landscaping requirements reduce how much parking they can get in; we need less restraints to build. Incentive to improve. [zoning requirements]

Ginny Suggested having a meeting with just churches to work with their problems and needs.

Jennifer There is high contrast in the neighborhood. There are gems of homes nest to those that are not. It's a struggle to maintain EHM. What resources do you need to anchor the neighborhood?

Valeri Businesses are a plus that they are there, creates influx from city.

Jennifer What draws?

Valeri Booker, social clubs, Ambrosia Club. The restaurants: Café Grecco, Taco Loco, Maria's and South Main.

David The tie to the "old neighborhood" still exists but is dying

Shirley She had some tours of the area for the CLR. Some were afraid of the area at first. She ended up having to offer the tour several more times because people loved it. East siders found that connection while visiting. Doing the tour again this Spring.

Valeri/Shirley Convention and Visitors Bureau needs to help more.

Jennifer I have found that the history is important to you, but that young people don't see that.

Crowd Agreed.

Valeri Hispanics don't integrate into the neighborhood

Shirley Capital Theatre is a gem that needs to be restored.

Jim C Diversity is a strength. The neighborhood becoming Hispanic, but there's not great turnout. We need to include them – how? Churches are an institution. St. Anthony's needs to become active. Neighborhood needs the total community.

Valeri There is a language barrier with Hispanics. They are afraid of authority, don't intend to stay, they have no vested interest.

Lucia There is a culture there – that is how they were brought up. They think City is all talk and nothing will get done. All people need to get to these meetings.

Ald McNeely Agrees, have to involve meetings with some Hispanics. To get the picture, we need to include all.

Millie (resident) Would like to see an extension of YouthBuild. Youth of community has taken over with crime. Need to take time to see problems with older youth to see why. Wide-spread problem. Has to be an extension of YouthBuild. Remembers WW II when democrats cane in with WPA. It is time now to arise with that cause. When kids get incarcerated, they come back and can't vote, can't get a license, can't get a job. A job would give these kids pride and off the streets. These are the barriers.

Jim R For meetings about the redesign of South Main, they sent out over 1,500 letters and marketed the meetings, only 40 people attended. There will be poor turnout.

Valeri Do you have demographics?

- Ginny Yes. Distributed 2-page summary of Joel Cowen's information.
- Jennifer Lots of youth in the area
- Minister **There is not even a Family Dollar store in the area. There should be one with IGA. There is not even a McD's. Need to get the young people off the streets.**
- Valeri Will IGA bring business?
- Jennifer We are waiting to see if it will survive
- Ald Bell No, we need to take care of the homefront first. We are not taking care of the IGA. Work with churches. We can't keep waiting for someone else to come in and save our neighborhood. No one is going to do it for us; we have to work together and do it for ourselves. We all have to step up to the plate and get involved.
- Resident McDs wont go into an area with such crime.
- Sam Furman McDs is not a solution.
- Ginny Picking up on what Ald. Bell said, asked those in attendance to step up to the plate, and sign up to work on one of the issues raised tonight. The topics she had listed from the discussion included housing and Neighborhood Standards, public improvements, safety, youth, businesses, the river, history, churches, and social clubs and other organizations such as community centers and museums.
- Jim C Final words. Need to involve the community. To help do that, we plan to do a survey similar to one we did in Mid Town North. This will enable the folks who live here to tell us what they think.
- David What is wrong with IGA?
- Jennifer Just not working with the community's shopping habits where people are used to buying fresh food every day for that day's meals.
- Jim C There is not one reason why. Some closing remarks.

Meeting concluded around 8:15.

Points listed on the big sheets:

- Need jobs.
- Sidewalks are in poor condition.
- Need lighting.
- Need boat ramps for recreation but also for market availability and access to businesses.
- Need a local housing trust fund.
- Lack of educational resources, integration of youth and adult activities.

- Poor maintenance of rental properties; buyers don't always have the means to maintain their property.

Sign ups

NAME	TOPIC	ADDRESS	PHONE
Roger Sexton	Business	310 Morgan St	963-3606
Sam Furman	River	518 College Ave	316-0893
Greg Steele	Property Standards	1225 S Main St	963-4052
Valeri DeCastris	Marketing/Perception/PR	918 Cunningham St	969-8899
Dave Beccue	Marketing/Perception/PR	918 Cunningham St	969-8899
Laura Bachelder	History/Museums	411 Kent St	964-2424