

Southeast Strategy Developer/Investor Forum

Friday, January 19, 2007 @ 8:00a

Staff Present: Tom Walls, Pam Holocher, Julie Sanchez, Terry McCaffrey, Cristian White

Advisory Committee Members Present: Bill Brown, Mike Bynum

Developers/Investors Present:

Brad Sturges & Guest – CBRE/Sturges

Dave Nugent – BND Commercial

James Wilhelm – RCI Development

Todd Ramsey – RCI Development

Brian Fleming – RCI Development

Adam Probst – The Parke Group

Rick Zehr – Northeastern Group

Karl Bandemer – CBRE/Sturges

Jeff Thomas – Oakmont Development/Mike Thomas Associates

Matt Lancia – Lancia Homes

Welcome

Advisory Committee member Commissioner Bill Brown opened the forum with a few words about the Southeast Strategy, his ties to the area, and his experience as an Advisory Committee member. Everyone then introduced themselves.

Introduction to the Southeast Strategy

Pam Holocher gave a brief introduction to the strategy. She also summarized the progress thus far by detailing the various methods of public input being used, and by explaining the elements being included within the strategy.

Overview of Key Areas

Tom Walls gave a brief synopsis of the Public Input Forum in August 2006. He explained that the public placed votes in areas where they desired focused efforts. After a few explanations of the various current initiatives and opportunity areas the staff identified, Tom gave an overview of the Southeast Strategy Conceptual Development Map. He explained all the areas the staff identified as proposed commercial nodes, residential nodes, rehabilitation nodes, mixed-use nodes and major corridors.

Summary of Commercial Incentives

Julie Sanchez gave an overview of the reasons certain commercial/retail nodes were identified. She then gave brief summaries of the commercial incentives available in the area. Those incentives include Tax Abatement, the PRISE matching grant façade program, and many others. She also informed the group of ideas staff will propose to increase incentives by: 1) collaborating with Development Services and City Utilities and 2) expanding Economic Development Target Areas.

Summary of Housing Incentives

Tom Walls briefly explained the justification for staff selection of areas identified for focused housing efforts. He reviewed the general information about Renaissance Pointe, the City's primary housing focus. He also informed the group that residents that participated in the August 2006 Public Input Forum identified the area surrounding Renaissance Pointe as an opportunity for major housing rehabilitation. Pam Holocher informed the group about the Young Professionals Focus Group held December 2006. Responses from that forum indicated that despite the perception of the area, suburban style housing is also strongly desired in the area. Tom explained that the areas identified for Greenfield development outside city limits are close enough to the city that discussions can take place regarding city utility extensions and available incentives.

Key Development Questions:

Question #1: Which of the opportunity areas cited on the map interest you most? Least? Are there other areas that need to be considered?

- *Many of the group participants have not been to the area in a while. Re-discovering the area was important to the group. A couple of individuals did drive the area and noticed some opportunity areas.*
- *The map should include Interstate 469 and water and sewer line delineations.*
- *Land (50 acres or more) should be identified as a precursor to identifying new development prospects.*
- *Focus should begin in the Southtown Centre area and slowly migrate north along South Anthony Blvd.*
- *There seemed to be a consensus about housing and retail needing to come to the area simultaneously, as mixed-use development, as opposed to traditional ideals of housing then retail.*
- *South Anthony Boulevard was identified as a major corridor by staff and the group. The group agreed that beautification of that corridor could spark much needed development.*
- *The former Franks Store and Victoria Acres site were noted as potential opportunity areas to be investigated.*

Question #2: What do you think are the most important incentives presented? Are there other development incentives that might be important or of interest?

- *Over time the cost of connecting to city utilities has risen, therefore utility discounts or other utility “breaks” should be offered or used to incentivize development in the area.*
- *Programs should be developed that allow for demolition in areas where rehab costs exceed market values, but prevented in areas that have seen years of demolition and have since turned into vacant blocks of land.*
- *The group agreed that there should be an effort to focus incentives in areas that are very visible such as major corridors and larger groups of vacant, available land.*

Question #4: What would it take for you to develop a project in southeast Fort Wayne?

- *The group agreed it would take a combination of factors mentioned above, such as land packages, price, retail and housing being developed simultaneously, etc.*
- *The school districts often impact where development occurs. “There are strong parochial schools in the other quadrants of the city, but not in the southeast,” was a comment made by one developer. Northwest Allen County Schools was also identified as a target area for many homebuyers.*
- *One issue raised was trying to find a buyer for clients who are purchasing new homes and need to sell their old homes.*
- *The rising cost of materials and the amount of time to invest in the area before accepting a loss were two issues raised by one developer.*
- *“Perception is reality.” The City should focus its efforts on dealing with the perception of the area first. The City should partner with developers, initiate both residential and commercial development simultaneously, and take on more risk in development projects.*
- *There is an “unsophisticated selling market.” Suggestion made to change the way realtors sell properties.*

- *Reward the first developer(s) who takes the risk in investing in the southeast area.*

Question #5: If you had this strategy and/or map in hand, would you use it?

- *All agreed that they would use the Southeast Strategy materials and want to use them as soon as copies are available. The developers suggested adding a few things to the map such as aerial photos with opportunities areas identified, a layer that identifies areas where incentives are available, and a map layer identifying the locations of water and sewer lines.*

There was a brief discussion that followed the question session of the forum about various properties in the area. Staff in attendance was able to answer many of the questions being asked. Julie Sanchez agreed to work as a mediator between various property owners and local developers interested in the area. Staff also reported that the planning team is working with the Board of Works to confirm that current water and sewer lines in the area have enough capacity to accommodate further development.

The developer group unanimously decided that they would like to meet again soon to discuss ways to collaborate on a major mixed-use project Southeast. They also agreed to drive around the area and familiarize themselves with the opportunity areas staff has identified. Staff agreed to provide the Conceptual Development Map and the aerial map as soon as possible.