

Downtown Sub-Area Workshop

St. Charles Comprehensive Plan

October 12, 2011

On Wednesday, October 12, 2011, a downtown community workshop was held at the Baker Memorial Community Center to allow the community a chance to voice their concerns about the downtown areas of St. Charles. This was an interactive workshop where residents were able to place labels on a map indicating areas of concern and then follow up with a description on an index card. Following this opening exercise, residents, community leaders, and other stakeholders participated in a discussion. This document summarizes the meeting.

Index Card Comments

Residents were asked to write comments about the labels they placed on the map on index cards. These cards have been broken down into 10 categories. A brief summary of each category and their respective comments follows:

Buildings and Architecture

Comments in this category focused around the maintenance of buildings and the interaction between property owners and the city concerning upkeep and renovation assistance. Residents are proud of the Downtown's historic character and they would like to see the buildings maintained. A few comments surfaced about the City's enforcement of existing codes. Finally, some residents were concerned that strong pressure to develop will prevail over the need to preserve historic architecture.

Downtown as Destination

Residents would like to see the downtown become even more of a destination. Among ideas floated to achieve this were a cultural center for performing arts, gallery space, and new, significant architecture. One idea that seemed to gain traction with the group was to light the dam at night to help make the area seem more alive.

Bars

Bars were a frequent focus of the conversation, with many residents feeling that the bars have taken over the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. While there was some recognition of the role bars play in both the history of the community as well as generation of downtown traffic, almost all comments were for stopping bars from locating downtown.

1st Street

The vacant First Street site was a major issue, but residents seem split on what to do with the site. Some believe the site should be developed, according to the approved plan. Others appreciate the view that the vacant land has opened up on the River and would like to see the space converted into a park or other open space. There is also a concern that if the development does go through as planned, the buildings will be out of scale with the site.

Retail

Retail in the downtown is a major issue for residents. Some are concerned about a general lack of retail while others would like to see a more healthy mix of business types. Residents voiced concern that the retail that does exist does not create a strong draw for visitors. The conversation about bars is closely related to this topic, since some residents believe the downtown relies too heavily on nightlife and not heavily enough on daytime retail traffic.

The Fox River

The Fox River is, according to residents, one of the community's best assets. Residents believe the river is not used to its full potential though, and would like to see more riverfront recreation (riverwalks), and maybe a boat dock (though there was also some opposition to this idea). Residents also want to see more green space along the River. Other riverfront suggestions include riverfront dining, walkways, development on both sides of the river, and more recreation on the River itself.

Parking

While there was a general concern for a lack of parking downtown, residents are worried specifically about parking at the library site and parking during special events. A parking structure was a popular idea among residents since surface parking lots tend to detract from the charm of downtown. Other specific parking locations were west of 3rd street off Main and between 2nd and 3rd west of the river.

Streetscape

St. Charles already has put significant effort into the streetscaping downtown, and so residents were not as concerned with a lack of things like street furniture and planters. There were comments, however, about a system for directing people passing through downtown into the side streets so drivers would shop downtown. There was also some conversation about a lack of a gateway to downtown.

Pedestrian/Bike Issues

The safety and comfort of pedestrians while downtown was a primary concern. Comments ranged from the timing of crossing lights (too short) to the availability of crosswalks. Biking is a major concern downtown as well. Residents say that Main Street is nearly impossible to bike on comfortably.

Transportation

Traffic was the most commented on category. The primary traffic concern is expeditious crossing of the Fox River along Main Street. Residents are concerned that the driving situation has gotten worse in the recent past, and that through traffic (especially trucks) is creating a large part of the problem. Truck traffic is not only congesting the streets but it is also noisy and dangerous for pedestrians as well as more polluting than private automobile traffic. Residents say the worst time for using 64 is between 3:00 and 6:00pm. Residents also complain that traffic is too fast on 64. There were a few comments about the grooving on the road that creates a great deal of noise and that makes walking along Main Street downtown uncomfortable. Finally, there was some talk of a need for an inter-city transit system that would also get people from St. Charles to the Metra stop in Geneva.