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Deadline for New Iowa Urban Neighborhood District Designation Brings Focus to the Campus to Campus Plan in Central Davenport

The city's news release stated that the Campus to Campus Plan is an "effort to continue the revitalization of the corridor between St. Ambrose University and Palmer College of Chiropractic."

The news release continued: "Representatives from various businesses and institutions within the area have been invited to begin the process by first defining the project area and sharing initial thoughts about how stronger connections can be created. Invited participants include the anchoring institutions of St. Ambrose University and Palmer College of Chiropractic, Davenport Schools, [and] businesses and organizations of the Hilltop area. Wider public participation will be sought once the project's parameters are further defined through the input gathered at this initial meeting."

Several dozen people including business owners, city staff, and aldermen met from 4 to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 5, at J.B. Young Junior High School Cafeteria, 1702 Main Street in Davenport.

What emerged at the meeting was the city's application for a Main Street Iowa designation as an Urban Neighborhood District Program (UNDP) was due in three weeks, and some decisions on project boundaries needed to be made.

The UNDP provides for technical assistance from the state and funding assistance for a full-time project director for three years. The literature provided at the meeting stated that there could be up to four urban neighborhoods accepted into the program in 2009. The program fully adopts the four-point focus of "The Main Street Approach": Organization, Promotion, Design, and Business Improvement.

A paid program director selected by the community is paid for by the Iowa Main Street program, within the Iowa Downtown Resource Center and administered by the Community Development Division of the Iowa Department of Economic Development.

Everyone needs deadlines though, right? And many of these groups have been around for a while; it's time they got coordinated, and this might be the catalyst to make some real progress between three major stakeholders: St. Ambrose, The Hilltop Association, and Palmer College, as well as the several public and private schools within the discussed areas.

The program director would live in the area and help plan and implement the Campus to Campus Plan in conjunction with existing revitalization and beautification entities such as the Edmond Gaines group and the Hilltop Association.

What was at stake were the geographic boundaries of the "Urban Neighborhood." St. Ambrose was the north anchor and Palmer was the southeast anchor, with many schools in between, as well as the Hilltop Association on Harrison Street just north of Central High School.

After breaking everyone up into smaller groups with color-coded maps of the central city, staff were working toward consensus on a geographic area from the stakeholders. The discussion included whether residential neighborhoods were included in these designations. Pam Miner said that it might be necessary to remove residential from these plans, depending on the way the grant is given.

Third Ward Alderman Bill Boom advocated a two-tiered approach, with a contingency for a residential component. The Hilltop Association was identified as a potential source for some matching funding for a full-time project director.

The Main Street application is due April 1. There is a presentation to the state on April 28. Funding announcements will happen between May 18 and 22. The one-sheet issued by the city states that the Next Campus Town Strategy Meeting would be the week of May 25.

Pam Miner, City of Davenport Planning & Economic Development Director
"It's not a pot of money they are going to throw at us. It's technical assistance and more resources as far as help. The community is putting in their efforts either in cash or by donating an office space, computer, or telephone. Those kind of things count. The Edmund Gaines project that is already organized to do some lighting -- that can be somehow be creatively put in there as well."

Matt Flynn, City of Davenport Planning Senior Manager
"When you have organizations in place, there are a multitude of different programs that look [and ask], 'Well, where is the capacity to move forward?' I think it will give the Hilltop an advantage."

Ron Franz, Hilltop Association and Property Owner
"When I sat down, I listened to what was said, and it was strategic gateway and 90,000 vehicles per day. If there's 90,000 vehicles every day over there, I'm going to be excited.

"The next thing I wrote was Urban Main Street designation. To keep focused when I sat down in here, that's what was told to me. So I just want to argue a bit ... we're getting too loud and going to miss our focus if we don't keep to what was told a strategic gateway. I've seen plans for a long time. I'd like to see something happen. A little narrower focus would probably make it happen."

Bruce Berger, Development Senior Manager
"Regardless of the grant, I think, if all of you are in favor of these things, this probably needs to happen anyway. It's a lot easier if you have a staff person, and this thing can bring it together. But I think the Hilltop and each organization here has been saying,'Tthis is the kind of thing we need to be doing to get everyone moving forward in a direction.' Our suggestion would be regardless if the money comes through or not, let's keep this momentum going -- keeping the lines of communication going and discussing the improvements and existing ideas and how we can best get them implemented."