

City of North Vernon Comprehensive Plan Downtown Merchants Focus Group - Meeting Notes

Date: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 @ 10:30 – 11:30 am

Location: North Vernon Education & Training Center

Facilitator: Scott Burgins & Erin Shane, SDG

Participants:

Name	Organization
Corrine Finnerty	McConnell, Finnerty & Waggoner
Mandy Gauger	Chamber of Commerce
Judy Ross	Perfect Day Café
Keith Stearns	Stearns Plumbing

Question: *What is downtown’s niche now? How do outsiders see it?*

- We have an interested in historic preservation; want better zoning and comprehensive planning
- We want to see that the zoning ordinance (ZO) and maintenance standards are enforced
- We all live in historic homes and own historic buildings; none of us are happy w/ the ZO and enforcement
- A lot of people do not maintain their buildings downtown
- City has invested and are on the national register
- We want to see a Historic Preservation (HP) ordinance w/ building standards that are enforced
- Family Video, CVS and Walgreens are on key corners now and that is a black eye
- Local officials will not enforce our ZO so we get these corporate businesses
- Signage is a big issue; family video sign was an issue; our sign ordinance is inadequate; we should not allow billboards at all anymore
- Our 20 year plan should be to separate ourselves from the county zoning and do it all ourselves; fund it ourselves
- Start saving our historic buildings
- We bldg and signage standards; we need a citizens committee to decide on these issues
- It seems that everyone wants to make exceptions to the zoning ordinances. That’s all we do here; spot zoning is an issue
- We are always battling variances and spot zoning
- People that own downtown buildings – they don’t rent them, but they don’t clean them; it’s an eyesore; papered windows; each individual owners now keep their storefronts clean except the ones that are vacant
- If we have standards for the downtown buildings everyone will have to abide and it will be better

- Way too many apts in the buildings, and these dwellers are taking up all the pkg, they are mostly all low rent apts; a lot of the people are transients; the people have not where else to go
- New construction also needs to be addressed as well for construction – they are allowing new pole buildings
- If we want to attract people downtown, we need it to look better
- The rules needs to be enforced here; some people have no shame and you can't get them to clean up their space
- It seems that city officials are aware and they should know that breaking from area plan
- Downtown special assessment would be OK if we knew that the funds would be completely used back on us and that we had local control
- Bypass – we are bombarded w/ semi traffic downtown and military vehicles; we need to prohibit these types of jacob breaks; we need to prohibit trucks downtown like Madison has
- We need a downtown plaza, need bricks in front of theatre, we don't need cars on that street
- Gateway – how are you going to get people off the bypass to come downtown? Put up sign for historic downtown area
- What dwtn merchants need is a stronger tourism dept – they need to better facilitate the chamber, tourism and city activities; better communication b/t these groups; tourism dept should be more centrally located
- We had a recent Geocaching tour – people did not know where to go!
- We do some advertising in regional magazines like Small Town Monthly, The Roundabout; - this really helps us
- The military base is a detriment to the downtown – but it is promoted as beneficial
- The base does not cooperate w/ the locals; our officials have not encouraged community outreach / coordination w/ them at all
- They may get 5000-6000 people there on a weekend and we don't feel the impact at all. Some come to the stores – they mostly hit the pizza and liquor
- The local construction is getting a small boost but not much b/c you have to be a govt certified contractor

Question: *What should be the first priority downtown?*

- Some infill opportunities
- We have the best 20th century Italianate architecture in the state
- Our issue is about maintaining and preserving
- Infrastructure not a big issue
- The city offices should be relocated into the Carnegie bldg
- Sidewalks are in good shape
- We have planters but no one plants or maintains anything

Question: *Does Downtown serve the local population or a more regional area?*

- Some come from Hwy 50
- we have outsiders; we have regulars; it's a mix
- A lot more people would be set at ease if we knew where US 50 would go – the bypass especially

Question: *Anything else we need to check?*

- Our infrastructure will hold us back for future development –we need to get it up to speed;
- We have serious fire protection issues w/ water
- Our lack of water is a serious issue – we will have to go to well eventually.