

Council ID's Priorities from New City Plan

The Two Rivers City Council at its June 28 monthly work session reviewed the lists of "implementation strategies" contained in the City's recently-adopted Comprehensive Land Use Plan (so-called "Smart Growth Plan").

As the result of this review, the Council identified priority development activities to be pursued in the areas of commercial/retail, tourism, manufacturing and housing over the next few years. These priorities are summarized below.

Commercial: Downtown's Still the Priority

Priority #1 for development of commercial and service businesses: Focus on the traditional central business district from the 22nd Street corridor south, including both river corridors and all of the land between; also, the commercial corridor along Madison Street between the West Twin River and Memorial Drive.

Priority #2: Partner with TR Main Street, the Two Rivers Business Association and Plan Commission to develop and implement a strategic plan for continued redevelopment of the downtown area as described above.

Tourism: It's All About the Water

Priority #1 for tourism development: Enhance and promote outdoor activities tied to Two Rivers' unique natural environment, notably the water assets of Lake Michigan and the rivers. Specific strategies include:

- Expanding the role of Neshotah Beach as a visitor attraction and venue for special events.
- Enhancing visibility of, access to, and use of the beaches along Memorial Drive
- Expanding and better promoting our recreational trail systems, including links to regional trail systems and connections to the north and south piers
- Developing and implementing a harbor master plan what addresses recreational boating needs, including possible development of transient marina facilities
- Promoting more "eco tourism" activities, working with Point Beach State Forest and Woodland Dunes Nature Center

Priority #2 for tourism: Encourage development of new private campground facilities, to increase the area's tourist "carrying capacity" during the peak months in Summer and Fall. We all know how the campgrounds at Point Beach State Forest are filled on most weekends—why not give campers additional options for camping in Two Rivers?

Industry: Take Care of What We Have; Support Emerging Industries

While there has been considerable erosion of our manufacturing base across America and particularly in the upper Midwest, the City recognizes that our area of Wisconsin remains a center for high quality manufacturing... and we need to support the survival and growth of manufacturing businesses.

Accordingly, Priority #1 in this category is to “Work to retain existing manufacturing businesses by facilitating expansion and modernization.” That means using any available State and Federal grant programs, and local tools like TIF to promote such capital investment. It also means working with companies to address the “legacy costs” of abandoned, obsolete industrial facilities.

Priority #2 is to evaluate possibly establishing a local “technology incubator” for tech business start-ups. The City has a history of success with its manufacturing incubator buildings; how about providing cheap, workable space for start-up tech businesses?

Priority #3 is to participate actively in state and regional efforts to develop and expand clean energy facilities, including wind, solar and nuclear. Likewise to promote manufacturing and servicing businesses related to the clean energy sector. It is further suggested that TR and Manitowoc cooperate to promote Woodland Drive, already home to Orion Energy Systems, as a “green business” corridor.

Residential: Promote TR as a “Residential Community of Choice” in NE Wisconsin

Priority #1 for residential is to work with area realtors, builders and developers to raise the profile of Two Rivers as a desirable residential community for people employed in the region or looking for an attractive place to retire.

Two Rivers has many desirable attributes as a residential community—great schools, quality medical facilities, a very low crime rate, reasonably priced real estate, and all of the features identified earlier as tourism resources. Yet, we have not always put our best foot forward when it comes to promoting housing development in TR.

As for the specifics of where new residential development should take place, the Council has endorsed language in the Comprehensive Plan that calls for supporting new single family residential at the existing Sandy Bay Highlands Subdivision and along STH 42 near the high school on the east side, and along STH 147 on the north side.

Higher-density, multi-family development, both condominiums and rentals, are targeted for redevelopment sites downtown and along the river corridors.

Next Major Topic for Discussion: Community Branding

In the process of discussing future development, the City Council and senior staff agreed that Two Rivers needs to do a better job of “branding” and marketing itself, in order to more clearly and succinctly communicate the essence of what this community has to offer.

Branding can be a challenge. Look at how many different tourism marketing slogans Wisconsin has gone through in recent years: Life’s So Good; Originality Rules; Live Like You Mean It. (Living in the Chicago area at the time, I found the state’s 1980’s tag line “Escape to Wisconsin” very appealing, and still like it better than any of these recent marketing slogans.)

That said, effective community branding can enhance local pride and help draw new visitors, residents and private investment. It’s about both self-perception and the image conveyed to the outside world. We’re just starting to talk about this concept in Two Rivers, so look for more discussions to come.

For a complete listing of the development issues addressed in this column, go to www.two-rivers.org and click on the announcement about “development priorities.”

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