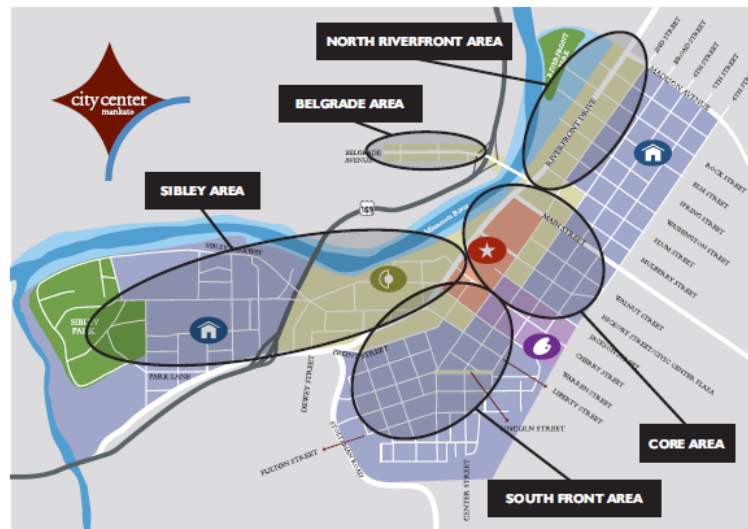


City Center Mankato

Business Focus Group Summary

Spring 2011



P PARKING **G** MARKET CENTER **H** RESIDENTIAL **6** ARTS & HISTORIC **★** E-DISTRICT





City Center Mankato - Business Focus Group Summary Spring 2011

The City Center Partnership's Business Development and Retention Committee convened to review their progress regarding the five year strategic plan. During the meeting there was a strong consensus that there are five neighborhoods in the City Center and each has unique characteristics and needs. Understanding these characteristics will assist in facilitating the objective of "increasing critical mass and business vitality".

The committee created five sub-committees that were charged with creating 2-4 action steps needed in each of the five identified neighborhoods including Belgrade, North Riverfront, Central/Core, South Front, and Sibley.

After sending invitations to over 400 businesses and having a total attendance rate greater than 20 percent for the six meetings (one in each area and two in North Riverfront) the sub-committees reconvened to discuss their findings. It was determined that each neighborhood had similar goals or focus areas they wanted addressed but the approach to accomplish these goals may be different. These focus areas include: Parking, Pedestrian Environment, Connections, Unique/location specific.

The remainder of this summary outlines what the City Center Partnership, the Business Development & Retention Committee and local businesses can focus their collective energy on in order to increase critical mass and business vitality of the City Center. These summaries are directly based on the input from the business community with consideration given to the extent of the Partnership capabilities.

Jerry Crest, Chair – Business Development & Retention Committee

Dave Schooff, Co-Chair – Business Development & Retention Committee

Eric T Harriman, Coordinator – City Center Partnership

City Center Mankato

This section addresses several ideas that provide economic enhancement to the entire City Center and were developed and discussed by several of the focus groups.

Trolley

Could start as a special event transportation to/from City Center events, such as Cherry Street Transit Hub to Rib Fest or as a for hire shuttle to/from Civic Center to specific neighborhoods of City Center. This would better facilitate trade & traffic from convention attendees to other City Center neighborhoods.

Recommendation:

Appoint a committee with representation from throughout the City Center to identify options. Report findings to the Community Traffic Study team appointed by the City of Mankato.

Support Development of a Children's Museum on/near the old Embers site

This would capitalize on the areas focus to be a family friendly area, particularly with the library and Children's Museum located adjacent to each other.

Recommendation:

Support Children's Museum fund raising initiative if requested by Children's Museum.

People access

Maintain and expand the emphasis on pedestrian and bike infrastructure along the City Center with the Core area as the hub.

Recommendation:

Appoint a committee with representation from throughout the City Center to identify options. Develop a plan for advocacy and implementation as appropriate.

Continue hosting focus groups

Many attendees stated their appreciation of having the focus groups and suggested we continue them. These groups of people feel more compelled to participate in activities that result in action steps rather than social events. Some suggested the focus groups be held quarterly but we concluded hosting two annually (Spring and Fall) would fulfill their desire to remain connected without over taxing the BD&R resources. In addition, inclusion of business owners in addressing opportunities outlined herein will enhance buy-in to conclusions and increase commitment among City Center businesses to the notion of the greater good.

Recommendation:

Meet before the end of July with business owners from each City Center Area to report conclusions from the initial set of meetings.

- Get representation for the two committees identified above.
- Support decisions each area makes related to the recommendations included in each of the area reports.

Schedule follow-up meetings with each area every six months.

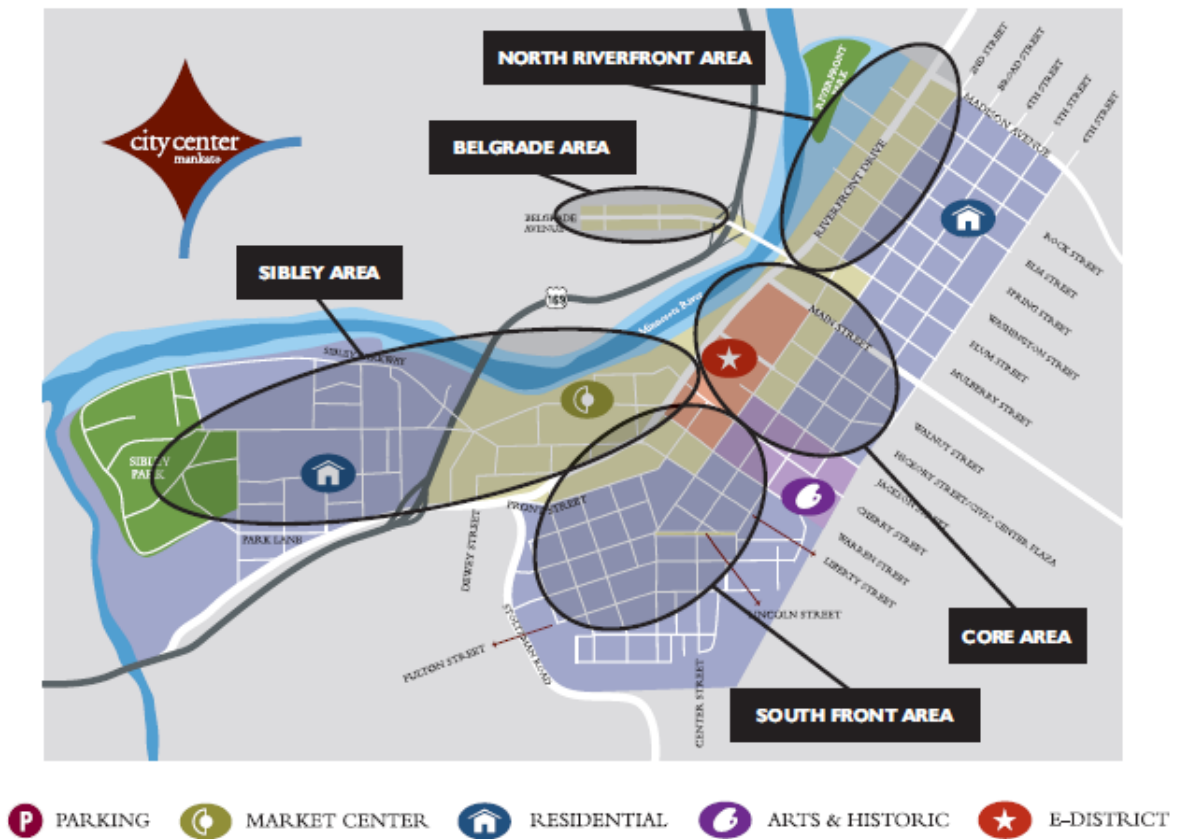


Figure 1
Map of City Center Business Focus Group Areas. (Areas selected based on geographic proximity and similarity of area businesses)

Belgrade Area

Meeting held at Dinos May 5th, 2011

facilitated by:

Eric T Harriman, Coordinator – City Center Partnership

Bryan Paulsen, Sub-committee Chair

Michael Fisher,

David Thompson

Area Vision:

Neighborhood service provider for residents of North Mankato and region

Parking

-Evaluate parking needs, challenges and alternatives for addressing any needs.

Pedestrian Environment

-Create mid-block crosswalks and safety island to improve pedestrian crossings.

Connections

-Enhance connections to regional bike trails and evaluate public transit opportunities to connect all of City Center, such as trolley or bus.

Unique/location specific

-Identify retail needs to compliment neighborhood (i.e. convenience store).

-(Marketing) Study a unique branding identity, consistent and complementary to that of the City Center, which would better connect with their North Mankato location. Example: “LoNo” for Lower North.

Sibley Neighborhood/Parkway Area

Meeting held at Neighbor's Italian Bistro

April 26th, 2011

facilitated by:

Jerry Pietz, Sub-committee Chair

John Considine,

Julie Nelson,

Bayard Black

Eric T Harriman, Coordinator – City Center Partnership

Area Vision:

Redeveloped neighborhood capitalizing on the river and significant vacant land to highlight a contemporary mix of residential, commercial and public uses.

Parking

-Not a specific issue

Pedestrian Environment

-Market area as a “healthy walk” with signage and marketing materials to support walking routes that connect commercial of the Sibley Neighborhood and Sibley Parkway with Sibley Park.

Connections

-Signage (vehicle and pedestrian) coupled with trolley and transit that connects to the rest of the City Center

Unique/location specific

-Opportunity for significant infill development.

South Front Area

Meeting held at Redsky Lounge May 3rd, 2011

facilitated by:

Eric T Harriman, Coordinator – City Center Partnership

Dave Schooff, Sub-committee Chair

Jill Klinger,

Jed Hanson,

David Naples

Area Vision:

Entertainment hub creating South Front as a pedestrian mall supporting access to City Center Core and Convention Campus.

Parking

-Create significant parking in 600 block area to support business on South Front and access to City Center Core. This will grow the capacity for surrounding businesses and better support the area as a “park-once” pedestrian district.

Pedestrian Environment

-Create a transitional pedestrian/vehicle street on the 500 (and potentially the 600) block of South Front. It would allow vehicle access until evening when it would close for pedestrian only access. Coupled with pedestrian design facilities to include a small stage and or water features, this transitional street would expand the Entertainment Districts attraction as a lively and fun environment.

Connections

-Greatly improve the pedestrian connections between South Front and the Civic Center.
-Maintain and expand the Front/Cherry transit hub and its services such as expanded transit routes or including a trolley stop.

Unique/location specific

-Redevelop the 500 block along Riverfront (between Cherry & Warren) to enhance the connection between Riverfront Drive and the Entertainment District.

Central/Core Area

Meeting held at Emy Frentz Arts Guild May 2nd, 2011

facilitated by:

Eric T Harriman, Coordinator – City Center Partnership

Tony Frentz, Sub-committee Chair

Todd Loosbrock,

Brady Schmidt,

Larry Krmopotich,

Brittany Mitchell

Area Vision:

Business and service industry core for the community including regional civic and convention center.

Parking

-Consider how existing parking ramps can be made more accessible and less frustrating as people currently need to drive by empty stalls that are reserved for 24 hours.

Pedestrian Environment

-Create a 24 hour pedestrian only street (mirroring the closed sections of Front Street) that passes through the Mankato Place, the Civic Center and the City Center Hotel so that pedestrian traffic from the Core can pass between the South Front and North Riverfront areas and have easier access to the Belgrade area. Note: extra attention will need to be giving to pedestrian design to ensure the area maximizes its attraction and retention of pedestrians (example: lighting, architecture, mix of complementary uses, music, water features, art, street entertainers, sidewalk vendors, unique pavement, seating, bike facilities, transit stops, plantings, signage)

Connections

-Maintain and expand its function as the hub connecting all areas in the City Center through vehicle, bus, trolley, pedestrian and bike.

Unique/location specific

-Expand Civic/Convention/Performing Arts functions in an effort to ensure maximum economic and civic impact. (The CCP needs to be part of the discussion and decision)

North Riverfront Area

Meeting held at 302 N Riverfront Dr. April 26th, 2011

facilitated by:

Jerry Crest, Sub-committee Chair

Cathy Brennan,

Dan Robinson,

Jay Weir

Eric T Harriman, Coordinator – City Center Partnership

Area Vision:

Family Friendly setting aligned closely with Riverfront Park, the Library, and complementary programming including specialty retail.

Parking

-Develop effective signage directing vehicles to existing parking with consideration to pedestrian paths to/from parking and destinations.

Pedestrian Environment

-Color crosswalks (similar to 2nd Ave), install flashing crosswalk signs, and increase enforcement of traffic laws related to pedestrians.

Connections

-Enhance connections from Riverfront Park to Core area parking ramps during special events through the use of a trolley. This also has the potential greatly improve visitor access to all areas in the City Center by temporarily connect directly to all areas during major events (Rib Fest, Marathon, Training Camp)

Unique/location specific

-Develop connection between Riverfront and 2nd, using homes on 2nd as combination affordable housing and store's parking between the two. Develop as a family friendly unique destination shopping district.

Appendix - List of main topics/issues raised at meetings

Belgrade Area

- Disconnected to what the CCP is
- Small town feel – safe/family friendly
- Traffic too fast
- Missing & wanting convenience store back
- 25% of traffic bike/walk to site
- Shortage of parking – ease of access
- Like new construction
- Open lot serves as access to alley behind

Sibley Area

- Neighborhood – little connection to City Center
- Like access to 169 (ease of access)
- More signage directing people to park. At 169 and trestle
- City transit – examine stops
- Market businesses with Sibley Park
- Desire a hardware store
- Vandalism/crime seems improved over the years
- Like round about concept
- Lots of vacant property
- Signs directing to/from Red Jacket, especially to Sibley Park
- Celebrate history – brick road
- Better pedestrian connection

South Front Area

- Parking:
 - Better signage
 - Know/enforce parking rules
 - Orient new parking south to generate ped traffic through Front
- Pedestrian Plaza (transitional street)
 - Turn Front (Cherry-Warren) into pedestrian street at night
 - Improve aesthetics of South Front pedestrian environment
- Connections
 - Strengthen connections to Core in particular

Central/Core Area

- Maintain financial/business focus
- Library a big draw for families
- Support large projects that draw traffic – children’s museum/library
- Need to focus on positive aspects of Core
- Take roof off mall
- Complete atrium
- A need to open up traffic (Peds) from Cherry St Ramp & Library
- Need bicycle emphasis in core
- Do better job cleaning up in AM, CCP serve as advocate with businesses

North Riverfront Area/Shops on Riverfront

- Some buildings need upgrading to give positive atmosphere, present in several parts of North Riverfront
- Business owners, like designation of “Old Town”
- Opportunity to connect stronger to Riverfront Park and activities there
- Goal is to create a family friendly atmosphere of shops and eating establishments
- Connection to library & children’s museum would strengthen family friendly atmosphere and encourage traffic
- Consider how crossing of Riverfront could be made safer and more pedestrian friendly
- Advocate regular CCP/Business issue discussions