



CUDAHY DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

Downtown Business Owner Focus Group Summary

Meeting Conducted August 13, 2006, 12:00 – 2:00pm

Cudahy Library, 15 Downtown stakeholders in attendance

The following summary represents the general theme of the discussion at the Downtown Business Owner Focus Group held on August 13th; these thoughts will contribute to the Downtown Master Plan recommendations and implementation strategies.

- Improving Cudahy’s image with residents, and surrounding/regional communities (removing the “stigma”) and improving Cudahy low self-esteem should be a top goal. Existing businesses need to work hard to differentiate themselves from stereotypical Cudahy businesses to draw customers. A start to improve image could be large attractive gateway features and noticeable streetscape improvements.
- Participants discussed wanting downtown to resemble other urban business districts. Examples provided included: Brady Street, Third Ward, Water Street, South Milwaukee, Bay View. It was suggested that Cudahy already has the open-air mall concept communities are trying to create – it just needs to be cleaned up and made more vibrant. The Downtown Master Plan could target key areas (such as wards or districts) and focus on or “finish” one area at a time.
- Recognizing downtown is not likely to have a big box appeal – too far from interstate – prefer to focus on shopping and destination attractions like the bike shop, the old hobby shop and businesses that draw from a larger geographical area. Desired downtown uses were discussed and included: businesses complementary to bike trail and lakefront users; uses that generate foot traffic; an anchor tenant surrounded by niche businesses and services that can thrive despite large-scale competition; diverse retail and restaurants, since downtown currently has a lot of service uses; businesses to attract the higher end of Cudahy’s market—these residents are now spending elsewhere; an updated Post Office.
- Redevelopment progress has been made – and that is evident – however there is a sense that many projects were started, buildings removed without progress. At the same time further acquisition is discussed which has property owners wondering if their building will be next. This may be creating a disincentive to property improvement/upkeep.
- Participants felt the City is challenging to work with because it does not have a process in place for working with business and property owners. Businesses new and old in the community have not had success in communicating with or getting information they feel they need. More communication is desired and they hope the new economic development processes being discussed, and economic development staff can assist in this area.
- It has been difficult to work with the Zoning Code, TIF, façade improvement grant, the development review process in Cudahy. (The city was compared to other cities that they felt were

easier to work with in these areas). In addition, the sign code seems unfriendly to business operations, potential customers cannot see business name because signs lie flat against the buildings – can this be more flexible?

- Issues discussed concerning downtown viability include: a feeling that the downtown business district suffers because it is split in two by industrial uses; Wal-Mart will either detract from downtown or attract more shoppers to the area; businesses need to have consistent hours to thrive off one another.
- Other specific considerations included a discussion on the rise in insurance costs due to vandalism and theft, it was discussed that a youth center or activities might help curb incidents; apartment rental rates are significantly cheaper in this area compared to surrounding communities, this is not good for downtown.

New Resident/Homeowners Focus Group Summary

Meeting Conducted August 13, 2006, 6:00 – 8:00pm

Cudahy Library, 5 new residents/homeowners in attendance

The following summary represents the general theme of the discussion at the New Resident/Homeowners Focus Group held on August 13th; these thoughts will contribute to the Downtown Master Plan recommendations and implementation strategies.

Attraction to Cudahy

The residents in attendance were predominantly originally from outside of the Milwaukee area, only one person was originally from Milwaukee's south shore area. When asked what attracted them to homeownership in Cudahy they responded:

- Tremendous housing value per square foot compared to other areas they considered.
- Location on Lake Michigan, walkable with parks and lakeshore paths.
- The Cudahy School District which they have more confidence in than Milwaukee Public Schools.
- The undiscovered small-town feeling—more akin to a “classic” community than an urban community (like others they considered Wauwatosa, Bay View, East Side).
- Access to jobs and other amenities in Milwaukee (downtown) via Lake Parkway.
- Investment in the new library and maintenance of a lakefront park show civic areas are valued assets.
- Feeling of safety and family-oriented neighborhoods.
- Sense that Cudahy is similar to Bay View 10 years ago, and buying a house in Cudahy now allows them to get a great deal before the property values rise.
- The neighborhoods north of Layton are most appealing where the houses and lots are larger and have better access to neighboring communities and downtown Milwaukee.

Vision for Downtown:

A vibrant Packard Avenue with family-friendly, daytime activities. *This group is not looking for active nightlife in Cudahy.*

Areas for Improvement or with Potential:

The attendees were generally surprised by the negative image Cudahy is suggested to have in the greater Milwaukee area and feel optimistic about Cudahy's future. Areas in which they thought improvement is needed include:

- The realtors they worked with were not familiar with the Cudahy market; they had to bring their realtors to Cudahy.
- The community is a hidden gem, but a lot more could be done to showcase, brand, and market the traditional community appeal.
- Currently they need to leave Cudahy to meet virtually every daily need. If there were businesses to walk to they would. The wish list for new (or updated) uses include: café, coffee shop (Starbucks!), bakery, and lunch spot with convenient hours; pharmacy, specialty grocery (Sendik's/Groppi's), hardware store, flower shop, ice cream shop, bookstore, theater, farmers' market with weekend hours.
- They are a minority as young couples in their neighborhoods – they would like to see more young people in their neighborhoods.
- The City, community groups, or neighborhood groups could increase formal and informal communication (newsletter, listserv) with residents (they wondered if there was already something that they just aren't aware of).
- Improve Layton's first-impression—you don't get the sense that you're entering a community. Layton and Packard should be more pedestrian & bike-friendly, with streetscape. City and commercial property owners should maintain vacant lots (as homeowners maintain their lawns).
- Residential rental rates are too low in Cudahy compared to the metro area, duplex floorplans are too small as well, potential strategy might be to encourage new homeowners to come to Cudahy by encouraging multi- to single-family residential conversions (down-zoning).
- More inspections and better code enforcement of bars and restaurants is needed – unkempt properties contribute to the negative image. Some businesses are unwelcoming and would encourage new business if the exterior were more up-to-date or approachable.
- Younger residents (20-somethings) not likely to be attracted to Cudahy now, the future KRM stop and the location of Cardinal Stritch in St. Francis might change that – and might provide new renters.