

2020 turns gaze to 4th Street corridor

By JENNIFER TRANMER Staff writer | Posted: Friday, April 15, 2016 4:00 pm

BELOIT — The Beloit 2020 redevelopment group is expanding its vision — and crossing the river to the West Side.

The committee and city officials are inviting the public to come to a “4th Street Charrette,” an opportunity to give input on the development of Beloit’s near West Side, specifically the 4th Street corridor.

“There will be public involvement. The City of Beloit and the school district are public entities, so you need citizens to comment,” said Jeff Adams, a Beloit 2020 committee member. “The people who are going to be developing the vision are our design team and developers from outside of the community, and the plans need to be subjected to a local test.”

After a full day of planning and brainstorming on what developments could help to enhance 4th Street from Grand Avenue to Maple Avenue, the plans will be unveiled from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 20 at the Beloit Public Library in the Eclipse Center. Presenters, including developers, stakeholders and consultants will present this reimagining, and afterwards will be available for questions, comments and feedback.

Members of the public are asked to attend this intensive planning session to collaborate on the vision for the development of this area.

There will also be a presentation at noon on Thursday, April 21 at the library from Donovan Rypkema, president of PlaceEconomics, a real estate and economic development consulting firm based in Washington, D.C.

“The firm specializes in services to public and nonprofit-sector clients who are dealing with downtown and neighborhood commercial district revitalization and the reuse of historic structures,” according to information on its website.

Rypkema is well known in his field and will be speaking to what is on the horizon for Beloit and cities like it, Adams said.

“(Rypkema) is kind of a big-think guy for small towns: What are our challenges, what’s coming?” Adams said, adding that Rypkema will participate in the charrette as well.

Rypkema is familiar with the transformations that have occurred in Beloit — downtown and along the Rock River — having visited the community multiple times over many years in collaboration with previous Beloit 2020 projects.

Adams said the intent of the speaker and the charrette is because it's time to move forward with the plan, and expand it to the other side of the river. He said the focus area will be 4th Street as it connects Grand Avenue to Maple Avenue.

“At the north end of this, you have arguably the most important community institution ... Beloit Memorial High School is very important to us for all kinds of reasons and we would like to present it well,” Adams said. “The high school is a very important part of the decision for many people to come.”

He said while the southern part of downtown is anchored, the 4th Street stretch could use some improvements to complement the development at the IronWorks complex. And with 2020 only four years away, the time to do the leg work for development is now, he said.

“It's time to build on that initiative to bring more investment into the space,” Adams said. “This is one of the most heavily trafficked areas, so, how do you present yourself?”