

Maryville DREAM Program
Building Design Focus Groups
February 18th, 2009

CITY CODE ENFORCEMENT AND INSPECTION STAFF

The three employees we met with were very open and willing to discuss the City procedures. It was noted that there is no inspection process for commercial or residential property in place, only for new construction as it is occurring.

The Staff felt that the theme of the Downtown should follow the theme already established by the improvements around the County Courthouse. Staff also noted that, according to their interpretation of the 2006 International Building Code and State Law Section 327 an architectural and engineer stamp is needed on a property in a commercial zone undergoing improvements more than 30% of the value of the building. Staff sees this as a problem, but needs to enforce the laws and is trying to keep buildings safe. Other hindrances were noted with ADA and sprinkler requirements.

The code office sends out a policy letter indicating expectations when a property is to be improved.

Staff has noted that issues in the City include Council overturning Planning & Zoning recommendations, difficulty in reaching out-of-town landlords, and growth on the outer edge of the City not paying City taxes but receiving City services. Another issue was the bar life in the evening. It was also noted that there is a mix of facades Downtown with newer masonry mixed in with older architecture.

Staff felt Downtown could look like areas in Kansas City and Nebraska and that people wanted plazas and outdoor spaces like in those Cities.

Market on the East side of the Courthouse Square was suggested as the sample block.

OFFICIALS AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

The Mayor, a Council Member, City Clerk, City Manager, and Assistant to the City Manager joined us for an informative session.

The group felt issues with Downtown property owners had to do with the clearness of the process and the communication of the expectations required by the City codes. There was some discussion of necessary codes and permitting procedures, Downtown signage, and Downtown zoning. Another concern was the appearance of vacant storefronts and how they detract from the appeal of walking around Downtown.

Housing remains a large concern and generates many complaints throughout the City. Rear facades require better maintenance as do parking areas.

It was generally felt that the merchants understand how important the Students are to their businesses, but they don't always provide special promotions for the Students. They also felt parking was adequate, but not always properly used. Wayfinding was

noted as an aspect that could be improved. There was also discussion of establishing more defined 'entrance corridors' to the City and Downtown and how wayfinding could be used in this respect.

The group felt that a Farmer's Market and Antiques stores would be good additions to the mix of Downtown businesses and they liked the businesses found in Savannah, Washington, and Clinton, Missouri.

The West side of the Courthouse Square and the South side of 3rd Street from Main to Buchanan were suggested for the sample blocks.

DOWNTOWN PROPERTY OWNERS AND PUBLIC

There were about 15-20 attendees in this group. Many also owned a business Downtown and a few were interested residents only.

The first issue discussed was that there is no cohesiveness or common thread that links the Downtown together. It was also noted that there is a lack of communal spirit, not just a physical deficiency.

The lack or, or perceived lack of, parking was discussed. It was felt that there are issues with apartments on upper floors that take up the parking spaces, absentee building owners don't make their tenants park where they should, and that the public parking lots are too small. The owners did acknowledge that this can be a perceived problem, but it still has an impact on their businesses as people want to park as close to a shop as possible. They also felt there were 'slumlords' and out-of-town owners that caused problems. There were some instances where upper and lower floors were owned separately.

The owners wanted to see the streetscape finished and felt that the project has gone on for too long.

Code issues were noted to be a problem in rehabilitating buildings. The costs of architectural and engineering reviews were deemed prohibitive. There were also issues noted with Police enforcement and the Student population.

The group thought a boutique hotel would be a good addition.

There was some agreement to the idea of helping to maintain the streetscape elements and forming an incentive district to help with Downtown revitalization.

The group felt that 4th Street between Main and Market would be a good sample block.