

Downtown Revitalization Plan Steering Committee Meeting and Workshop Summary

August 26, 2009

On August 26, 2009, a meeting was held with the Revitalization Plan Steering Committee (RPSC) to set the foundation for the Downtown Revitalization Plan's planning program. The purpose of the workshop was to review the objectives of the Downtown Revitalization Plan, review the planning process and schedule, establish the role of the RPSC, and identify key issues, concerns and assets for the Downtown. The workshop provided the RPSC with the opportunity to voice their opinion on the future of Downtown Huntley and to identify concerns and aspirations.

This report provides a summary of the results of the RPSC Meeting and Workshop. The summary reflects the opinions and comments stated during workshop dialogue, and includes a summary of participants' responses to the workshop questionnaire.

Workshop Questionnaire

The Revitalization Plan Steering Committee Meeting concluded with a workshop session where RPSC members were given a questionnaire to fill out and discuss. The questionnaire included five questions that touched on issues/concerns in the Downtown, key future projects, desirable versus undesirable development and the Downtown's key assets.

Identify five (5) issues or concerns confronting Downtown Huntley.

Issues and/or concerns confronting Downtown Huntley were identified by the RPSC. The location and availability of parking was the most commonly cited issue or concern, followed by the Downtown's lack of identity along IL Route 47 and the need to attract new business to the downtown. The large majority of RPSC members felt that these were the three most important issues that the Downtown Revitalization Plan needs to address.

Other key concerns and issues identified by the RPSC included concern with overall traffic circulation, preservation and maintenance of historic buildings, and streetscape improvements.

Traffic Circulation. Concerns regarding traffic circulation were apparent among those who participated in the workshop. Specific areas of concern included the intersection of Woodstock and Main, and the intersection of Church and Main. Concerns over post office traffic and the traffic flow near IL 47, specifically left turns at IL 47.

RPSC members also expressed a desire for additional parking as well as concerns over location and availability of current parking areas.

Historic Buildings. Those who attended the workshop mentioned a need to preserve and maintain the historic buildings throughout Downtown. Generally speaking, these buildings are viewed positively and RPSC would like to see more continuity between the historic areas of Huntley and the new areas under development.

Streetscape. A lack of a uniform streetscape was a significant concern amongst the RPSC. A desire for streetscape improvements and pedestrian enhancements was expressed.

List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

As previously indicated, the location and availability of parking in the Downtown, the Downtown's lack of identity along IL Route 47, and the need to attract new businesses to the downtown were the three most important issues identified at the RPSC Meeting. The large majority of RPSC members felt that these were the three most important issues that the Downtown Revitalization Plan needs to address.

Identify three (3) projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken in Downtown Huntley.

With top issues and concerns identified, the RPSC listed a series of specific projects or actions they would like to see undertaken within Downtown Huntley. Many of the projects reflected the previously stated issues and concerns.

The projects desired for the Downtown included the following: Main Street and IL 47 widening project; implementation of a one-way street around the Village Square; infrastructure improvements; construction of gateway features to announce one's arrival into the Downtown; tree replacement; creation of incentive programs to attract new businesses; redevelopment of the Catty property; and, improved zoning regulations to generate pedestrian activity and an active streetwall.

The RPSC generally felt that infrastructure and traffic circulation should be amongst the first projects or actions undertaken, to improve the downtown's accessibility and support local businesses. It is believed that an improvement in traffic flow near the IL 47 and Main Street intersection will greatly improve the traffic problem in the rest of Downtown. These projects and others identified would improve Downtown Huntley and enhance the Downtown experience for Huntley residents and visitors.

What uses/development do you want to see in Downtown Huntley?

RPSC members indicated an aspiration for a pedestrian friendly shopping and entertainment district, with the possibility of outdoor dining and community events to take place. They would also like to see small specialty shops such as a bakery/ice cream parlor, family restaurant and variety store. Generally, workshop attendees believed that specialty shops would help differentiate Downtown Huntley from surrounding shopping areas because of the unique atmosphere that would be created.

RPSC members emphasized that uses/development in Downtown Huntley should be sensitive to the Downtown's historic character; thus, modern office buildings and service uses were identified as undesirable land uses in favor of quaint store fronts with historic influences. However, a desire for redevelopment and/or reuse of the Catty property was expressed as this property is situated in a prominent location near the CBD Historic Preservation District and IL 47. A specific use for this site was not identified and would be further discussed at the Downtown/Community Workshop. The RPSC was not opposed to redevelopment in the Downtown, so long as it is done in a sensitive manner.

RPSC members also expressed an interest in enhancing the entrance to the Downtown near IL 47 through the installation of additional landscaping, unique gateway features/signage, and uses that would draw people off of the State Route. There was a general consensus that in its current state, the Downtown is not capitalizing on its exposure from IL 47. By creating a more attractive gateway with unique specialty shops, new clientele could be attracted and enhance the liveliness of Downtown Huntley.

What uses/ development do you NOT want to see in Downtown Huntley?

RPSC members expressed a strong opinion on the types of uses and development they do not want to see in Downtown Huntley. A dislike for modern buildings which go against the historical motif of the Downtown was expressed, along with objections to taverns and tattoo parlors, office and service uses at the street level, above ground utilities and national chains.

In regards to office and service uses on the ground floor of downtown buildings, Committee members felt that lawyer and realtor offices specifically were undesirable in the Downtown because they do very little to generate pedestrian activity or attract shoppers for other businesses to benefit from. These uses could be desired on the upper levels of buildings, because their employees could patronize specialty shops during lunch hours or after work.

Chain businesses were identified as objectionable land uses in the Downtown because they could detract from its quaintness and character. RPSC members preferred to see these uses located on commercial, auto-oriented corridors such as IL47, so that unique, family owned businesses could locate on the Square.

Other uses/development deemed undesirable by the Committee included adult uses, auto-oriented uses and manufacturing uses. It was believed that these uses are more appropriate in other areas of the Village and would not attract pedestrians.

Downtown Huntley's Assets

As a final exercise, RPSC members were asked to identify the main assets and strengths of the Downtown. Traffic, although identified as a concern earlier in the meeting, was also identified as an asset to the Downtown due to the high volumes of people that travel through, or past, Downtown Huntley. Committee members commented that traffic, in conjunction with the Downtown's regional location near IL 47 and I-90, could significantly influence the future of the Downtown. RPSC members also commented that Huntley currently has an active economy compared to surrounding municipalities due to these assets.

RPSC members identified the Downtown's historic buildings and historic character as the Downtown's main assets as well. The centralized Village Square, combined with quaint buildings that surround it, provides a unique environment that is highly desirable and difficult to replicate. Historically significant amenities in the Downtown should be preserved and enhanced to maintain a distinctive atmosphere.

Lastly, Committee members commented that high building occupancy rates were assets to the Downtown because they express a sense of stability and indicate that businesses are attracted to the quaint, historical atmosphere. However, they also stated that opportunities to expand the Downtown's current clientele could result, producing a more stable and larger business environment.