

Cambridge downtown revitalization meeting Sept. 22

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Press release provided by the city of Cambridge

Cambridge residents, businesses, downtown property owners, and organizations are invited to assist the city and its Downtown Task Force in developing fresh opportunities to retain and attract new businesses to our historical downtown.

Details of the six-month revitalization initiative will be presented at a Community Kickoff gathering on Thursday, Sept. 22 at City Center Mall. The evening will start with a social hour from 5-6 p.m. A presentation follows at 6 p.m. outlining the formation of the downtown revitalization working group, community engagement process, project goals and group activities. All interested persons are encouraged to attend and learn how their knowledge and talents may contribute to the group's success. The evening concludes with group participation sign-up.

The goal of the process is to generate a wide variety of ideas, concepts and marketing opportunities the city can adopt and begin implementing with ongoing community and businesses participation, guidance and support.

"We are asking our community to come together, work together and plan a new future for our downtown," said Lynda Woulfe, city administrator.

This special working group will be charged with developing ways to re-establish downtown as a center of activity for youth, adults, families and seniors. The goal is to establish downtown as the place where community gathers morning, day and night, seven days a week. The diverse participation of the work group will be instrumental in creating new activities, identifying desired businesses, integrating arts and events, rebranding, and new services and amenities.

The city has hired community engagement experts, Todd Streeter, principal, Community Collaboration, and Hans Muessig, chair, MN Design Team, to assist in the revitalization efforts. The working group's activities will be previewed at several community presentation opportunities for additional input and idea generation. The process will conclude with a formal presentation to the City Council in late winter.

"What I like about the consulting team's new approach is that the city officials step back and let the community dream away without consideration of what staff may think. It will truly be liberating for the community and the city," Woulfe said.

The working group will include subcommittees that may focus on beautification and ambiance ideas, traffic, parking, biking and pedestrian concerns, business mix considerations appealing to ages 8 to 80, multimodal opportunities, future redevelopment, rebranding opportunities, downtown marketing, events, arts, and history.

This revitalization effort is the result of the Minnesota Design Team visit in April. During their visit, team participants, including professional planners, architects and engineers, learned of the prevailing assets, opportunities and issues involving new Highway 95 renovation plans, housing, aging population and new big box development occurring east of Highway 65, to name a few.

“Revitalizing downtown is a major concern for the city. Increased competition from big box stores, internet shopping and the potential move of the library all play an important role in downtown’s future economic viability and relevance to the community,” Muessig said.

The Design Team recommended keeping the library downtown as a means of retaining the estimated 500 daily users downtown.

“We drew from the Gates Foundation study that showed library users spend approximately \$5 per visit on businesses surrounding library locations. This translated to approximately \$1 million in economic benefit the library brings to downtown,” Muessig said.

The library board reviewed the move’s long-term impact to downtown and decided to expand at its current downtown location.

“We understand this was a difficult decision for the board to make, but it affirms the importance of keeping community centric services and amenities downtown. The goal now is to increase interest and momentum in reenergizing downtown as the place where community gathers,” Streeter said.

In addition to generating exciting opportunities to reposition downtown, the working group will seek innovative ways to harness community resources to play a major role in supporting and funding ideas.

“The greatest resource any city has exists in its own back yard. Through this process, we hope residents, businesses, community leaders, organizations, and perhaps the creation of a community foundation will join together to invest in the working group’s opportunities that initially stimulate and then support downtown’s new direction,” Streeter said.

By stepping back and letting the community shape downtown’s future, the city hopes the new approach creates stronger relationships with businesses and residents. The working group’s recommendations are timely as they may be included in the city’s Comprehensive Plan as a means to ensure their work is considered in future city planning.

For additional information and committee participation opportunities, interested participants are encouraged attend the Kickoff gathering or contact Lynda Woulfe at 763-552-3201, or by email, lwoulfe@ci.cambridge.mn.us.