

# Eyeing the Village Green: Event kicks off planning for Pleasant Prairie downtown

January 17, 2019 By TERRY FLORES



Village Green Project Facilitator Todd Streeter, right, addresses the crowd of approximately 150 people who came to Thursday's community kickoff meeting for Village Green Center at the RecPlex.

KENOSHA NEWS PHOTOS BY DANIEL THOMPSON

PLEASANT PRAIRIE — Planning for Pleasant Prairie's downtown is now in the hands of its residents.

Thursday night, an event to kick off the nearly nine-month planning process drew more than 150 people to the RecPlex's Lake View Studio, where volunteers were told they would help shape the future of the Village Green Center, a property roughly bounded by 97th Street, 39th Avenue, Highway 165 and 47th Avenue.

The project has been the works since 1994 and had always been intended as a central destination area to foster a sense of identity for the community.

In the late 1990s, planning stopped until residential growth could accommodate a retail-based community center. Planning continued at a slower pace in 2008 due to the economic recession. Last year, the village's \$3.7 million purchase of 72 acres of land at Springbrook Road, which added to roughly 30 acres already in place, reignited Village Green plans.

"Village Green is nothing new, but it's a new take on a project that I think is really important for the village," said Village Administrator Nathan Thiel. "I'm excited about this conversation. I want to make this happen."

Consultant Todd Streeter, principal of "Community Collaboration" based in Lakeland, Minn., will oversee twice monthly meetings with a project committee and eight subcommittees. that will focus on developing new ideas, concepts and recommendations, essentially filling a "blank slate" in planning Village Green from the ground up.

### Meetings start next month

Many attending signed up for subcommittees, which will begin meeting at Whittier Elementary next month, to evaluate and plan everything from civic facilities, amenities and a smart community hub, commercial district, housing options, leisure activities through various parks, trails, open spaces and recreation, transportation and accompanying infrastructure needs.

They will create, in detail, how the downtown will look from aesthetics, branding and themes, incorporating sustainable development of land and buildings, and promoting and marketing the central hub.



Poster boards explaining the focus of the eight different subcommittees that will help with the planning of the various aspects of the Village Green Center project lined the outside of the room during Thursday's meeting.



Pleasant Prairie resident Kay Schueffer looks over one of the eight subcommittee poster boards displayed across the room of the LakeView Studio at the RecPlex Thursday evening.

Village staff will take a hands-off approach in the community-driven sessions, but would be on hand to answer questions. By and large, residents who sign up to participate in the committees will lead the discussions.

“We will take anyone who wants to participate anywhere along the ride,” Streeter said. He said all members would have an equal voice no matter what background they come from whether a high school student or an established business person.

“One caveat — the word ‘no’ doesn’t exist,” he said. “All ideas are valued ... all participants are at the same level. Everybody is equal in this process.”

As the committees do their work, he said they’ll vet the ideas “and the best ideas go forward.”

He said the process encourages “fresh ideas” and concepts and working with others even outside the process to research.

“You’ve got that freedom,” he said.

Participants will also be responsible for coming up with vision statements and guiding principles, and draw on their resourcefulness in bringing the project to life.

“You have a wonderful, golden opportunity that is not afforded to most communities to create Village Green Center into a beautiful, incredible downtown destination,” he said.

Some wondered if there was a timeline for breaking ground and whether the village had a budget for funding Village Green and even whether their committees could draw on village resources if they needed, for instance, an architect to draw up plans.



Pleasant Prairie Administrator Nathan Thiel answers questions from those in attendance about the budgeting for the Village Green Center project.



Pleasant Prairie resident Tina Peadro fills out one of the forms presented to community members in attendance where they were able to pick a subcommittee to join, selecting three in order to ensure that they have a backup in case their No. 1 choice is full.

Thiel said developers would look at the final planning product and then base it upon the project committee's collaborative work. He said developers have been inquiring about Village Green and are anxious to see what will be proposed.

Gregg and Maggie Heller, who live near the intersection of 47th Avenue and Highway 165, said they came to see what the meeting was about and wanted to join subcommittees to help plan housing options and recreation.

"We wanted to make sure they don't put an amphitheater there," said Gregg, half joking, and pointing to the area near his property.

He said it was a great opportunity to be a part of the planning.

"You have to be willing to accept it's a blank canvas," he said. "And be like Bob Ross."

Jim Michener, who lives to the northeast of the site, said while he enjoys where he's at, there aren't a whole lot of places to go to eat. He finds himself in downtown Kenosha for those activities.

Michener said he wanted to be able to go to cafes and restaurants nearby, walking to them from his home.

He said he'd love to have places like Sazzy B's or The Buzz cafe, which are in Kenosha.

Meredith Fahey, who recently moved back to Pleasant Prairie, said she, too, is excited to be part of a new way of planning a community.

"I love it. I think it's great they want to engage the citizens," said Fahey, who signed up for subcommittees handling civic facilities and branding. "It's important for the citizens to be involved and feel their ideas are important in a meaningful way."