Green by Design

By Ken Harwood

A few months back I wrote a column suggesting that incorporating environmentally friendly design into new construction was not only good for the long-term bottom line, but could also increase productivity and employee satisfaction. This month I am suggesting that entire communities may need to get involved to encourage the type of design that will create great places to work, shop and live, while placing less demand on energy. It still costs more to design and build a green facility than it does to build a traditional building. This cost is a strong deterrent for developers faced with financing costs, construction timelines and potential holding costs.

What if a community could encourage green design by working with the developers to offset some of this cost? I believe they can. Communities could buy and hold land (as many do now) for industrial or office park development. This land could then be designated as “green by design” and released to developers conforming to a set of environmental design standards at attractive rates. A tax incremental financing district could be established where funds are only available to companies that build green.

Communities could agree to purchase and develop parks, schools and other public spaces in neighborhoods using green design. Finally, a community could lead by example, incorporating green elements into their own schools, city halls, safety buildings and public works facilities.

The option I am omitting is a green design mandate — this is intentional. I believe that if one community legislates design standards, another community just down the road will get all the new projects. If Wisconsin chooses the big green stick, Illinois or Minnesota will get the next manufacturing plant or new corporate headquarters. We need to work together to encourage what is right for our residents, employees, children and earth. I believe we can.

Major projects

Two nonprofit groups, and to some degree the mayor, are floating the idea of a $19 million, year-round public market as part of a mixed-use development on a city-owned parking lot just off the Square.

Another panel recommended that Madison build a “first-class urban park,” including a skate park and “great lawn” for festivals. The $30 million Central Park would relocate rail lines that bisect the 17-acre park site in the East Washington rail corridor.

The City Council approved the Capitol Gateway plan along East Wash. The plan allows new buildings up to 15 stories tall if developers earn “bonus stories” by including amenities such as affordable housing, pedestrian plazas, onsite daycare, ground-floor retail, underground parking or rooftop greenspace.

Phase 2 of Metropolitan Place is back on track, including the second Willy Street Coop. The project was delayed after financial setbacks.

The rats of Madison will be living in style as the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery, a biomedical research complex, has added a 10,000-square-foot “vivarium” — a facility for live animals for observation and research. The vivarium added $20 million to the $150 million first-phase price. University of Michigan rats have filed a class action suit requesting similar digs.

Commercial/Office

Brown Shoes is considering Madison for a combined headquarters. This international shoe giant is currently located outside St. Louis and its Famous Footwear division is already in Madison. Ron Fromm, Brown Shoe CEO, has both Madison and Milwaukee roots. He once ran the Famous Footwear division and is a Marquette grad.

The Madison Children’s Museum’s expansion is progressing nicely. The relocated facility will increase from 8,000 to 41,570 square feet and open in 2010.

Homes/Condos

Sequoya Commons, a mixed-use development on Midvale and Tokay boulevards, has opened a model condominium. The project includes retail and residential units in a well-designed urban facility and should be occupied this summer.

The markets remain less than stellar, but good projects are finding good buyers.

Retail

Middleton is bringing baseball indoors as Jeff Haen, a former UW baseball player, plans a $5 million, 68,000-square-foot complex on Deming Way.

Expect to see some very nice bikes downtown. Trek Hospitality, a subsidiary of Trek Bicycle, has purchased a downtown landmark, Mansion Hill Inn, to house its guests. The facility will still be available to the public as well as special guests often named Lance and wearing yellow.

David Yankovich, once a partner in Ovens of Brittany, is moving LaBrioche bakery from Midvale to University Avenue and will incorporate an 80-seat restaurant into the facility.

Conclusion

The Greater Madison area may be able to succeed in the very challenging market that lies ahead. It has the potential to work with developers to encourage green projects, attract new businesses and build great public spaces. The key will be cooperation, planning and teamwork. Mandates — not so much.

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