

May 18th, 2005
Fighting the Blight Organizational Meeting

The first part of the meeting was spent hearing from **Brian Pahud**, principal with Landmark Properties. Brian acquired the strip center that occupies the SE quadrant in the Fall of '03. He is pursuing a grocery anchor and is still somewhat hopeful he will land a Kroger or comparable. He is in Vegas this week at the big convention for retailers and developers to meet with prospects.

Brian has re-zoned a portion of the site and obtained a "right-in/right-out" curb cut permit on Binford. He may or may not demo the existing in-line center building. It will depend on tenant requirements. He had a hard time getting the dentist out of the building to the North on 71st. That tenant is now out and he intends to demo that structure ASAP to improve the sight lines of the center and start marketing to out-lot tenants or build-to-suit users. He is hoping for typical out-lot users like a CVS and a bank. He showed some renderings of the site. Brian was very forthcoming with information and he has good reputation in the industry. For example, he revitalized the center at 96th and Meridian that houses Kroger and Kona Jacks.

Ruth Ann Walker, professional developer and personal turnaround artist on the east side of town, presented a compelling case about the value of cleaning up the area in order to make it more attractive to developers and users. She also shared a long list of vital information that needs to be researched and collected to present to prospective businesses plus a sample booklet of information and photographs to hand out. **Ann-Marie Predovich**, head of the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center, also volunteered the resources of her organization to those attending this meeting.
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There was also some discussion about the NE quadrant, which is primarily owned by Mr. **Bob Carr**. Apparently he too is trying to attract a food store anchor. He has agreed to meet with a small group of neighbors but will not come to a public meeting.

Kevin Sifferlen, head of neighborhood revitalization for the City, discussed zoning issues and ways in which community development groups and local residents can positively help influence the kinds of businesses that developers, such as Brian Pahud, are trying to attract.

Bob Wilch, of the Department of Metropolitan Development-Division of Planning, stated that it is fine to think about attracting national retailers to the 71st Street and Binford Boulevard commercial area, but small business and local property owners need to be involved in redevelopment efforts, also. There are some very good locally owned businesses in the area now.

Bob noted that the advantage of attracting national retailers is that they are usually well funded, and they do a good job of attracting other retailers and shoppers to the area. The disadvantage that sometimes comes with national retailers is that their decision making is often done at a national level and has little to do with the local area. Stores

can change or close with little local input. Store designs are often a "one-size-fits-all" national model.

Small, locally owned businesses can be more loyal to a location, Bob observed. They seem to be more willing to work with existing buildings and local communities when it comes to making business decisions. Their disadvantage can be that they may not be as financially sound as the national chains. In addition, they may not attract a significant amount of additional retail to an area.

Bob suggested that residents remain open minded regarding new development proposals in the area. Even though the residential areas surrounding 71st Street and Binford Boulevard are still strong, they probably will not have the luxury of selecting from a wide range of retailers newly attracted to the area. Most retailers are attracted to newer housing in the Indianapolis metropolitan area.

He recommended that Taskforce members who concentrate on talking to existing retailers in the area will probably be helpful. In addition, talking to some tenants that have left the area should be beneficial. Recently it seems that professional offices have started to leave the area. The City can make available copies of past tenant surveys used in other areas as examples of questions to ask.

Bob also noted that surveying residents regarding the types of stores that they would like to see attracted to the area may be interesting, but retailers usually will only trust their own research. In addition, it should be remembered that retailers generally decide on new store locations with their own criteria and may have little to do with where people say they will shop in the future.

The meeting concluded with folks volunteering to become members of one or more of the following Taskforces:

1) General Administration Taskforce.

This includes helping to set up a 501c3 organization, developing and maintaining a website, grant writing, recruiting new businesses, marketing of the area, and researching other communities' revitalization efforts and sharing them.

2) Beautification along Binford Boulevard and East 71st Street from Shadeland to Allisonville Road Taskforce.

This includes clean-up campaigns, tree and garden planting efforts, development of pedestrian/bicycle sidewalks and overpasses, connections with the Monon, parks and green space in the improved retail/commercial areas.

3) Communication with Business Operators and Owners Taskforce.

This includes helping to develop the Fast Facts booklet and undertaking continuing contact with operators and owners to help make improvements.

4) Communication with Commercial Property Owners Taskforce.

This includes helping to develop the Fast Facts booklet and continuing contact with owners to help make improvements.

5) **Liaison with all Neighborhood Civic Associations** about the results of our meetings and efforts Taskforce.

This includes coordinating efforts to survey residents of all surrounding neighborhoods and area businesses about new ideas and issues.

6) **Liaison with Government Officials Taskforce.**

This includes close communication about zoning issues, grant opportunities, rail and highway transportation and economic development plans and issues.

**The next meeting for all Taskforces is set for June 1
at the Epworth United Methodist Church on Allisonville Road at 7 pm.**