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Aurora residents talk about future

By Justin Kmitch | Daily Herald Staff

Contact writer

PRINT E-MAIL STORY

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Buzz up!

Several Aurorans took a real hands-on approach to revitalizing their near east side neighborhood Tuesday night.

Armed with labeled building blocks and aerial maps of two near east side intersections, a few dozen residents (less than a quarter of them actually residents of the neighborhood), modeled several redevelopment schemes with an emphasis on lowering density and increasing land values.

Mixed use commercial with upstairs residential and rear green space lining the northeast corner of Jackson Street and North Avenue? Could happen.

A solid core of three-story commercial buildings wrapping the southeast corner of New York and Root streets? Also a possibility.

The residents were participating in the second in a series of three meetings, held at the Fred Rodgers Community Center, 501 College Avenue, at which they worked with representatives from the Metropolitan Planning Council and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning to design the continued revitalization of their neighborhood.

The neighborhood, roughly bounded by Lake Street, Liberty Street, North Avenue, and East Avenue, has been designated a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development since 1999.

"The city has chosen to concentrate on this area to put its block grant dollars to work and they're looking for feedback," said Joanna Trotter, project manager with the Metropolitan Planning Council. "It may not be tomorrow or next year but these folks working here tonight are charting a course for the future of this neighborhood."

The NSRA is a program created by HUD to revitalize distressed community areas and is funded through Community Development Block Grant funds. CDBG provides communities with resources to address a wide range of needs including affordable housing, services to people in need and job creation and retention.

How they come about that however, is no easy answer.

Every block building participant had a different theory on how to revive the near east side.

"We need to lower the density here and focus on retail," said community leader Sharon Jacobs while working with her team to redesign the northeast corner of Jackson Street and North Avenue. "The last thing the schools and this area needs is more density."

Resident Mary Kreski, however, reminded her group that retail and commercial wont come without high density.

Working on the intersection at New York and Root streets with another group, resident and Curator of the Aurora Regional Fire Museum David Lewis piled on the multistory commercial to focus on bringing in tax dollars.

"Parks and green space are essential in every neighborhood, but they don't pay the bills," he said. "We should be looking to get the most bang for our development buck."

The third meeting on July 22 will include an analysis of the attendees' views along with the ideas of the developers that will be integrated into a final plan that will be submitted to HUD for approval in August.

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