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Seven years later, a gentler approach to developing downtown Riverside

Tuesday, March 19th, 2013 10:00 PM

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By Editorial

What a difference seven years makes. Back in April 2006, Riverside was on the verge of accepting a comprehensive plan for the village's central business district — one that called for increased multifamily residential properties. The plan specifically called for four-story mixed-use buildings to create a bustling downtown whose residents would use Metra —which paid for the plan — to commute to the Loop.

The ambitious plan even contemplated a parking structure and a boutique hotel where the old Youth Center still sits. And to fund the implementation of the plan, the authors suggested a TIF district.

It was, in many ways, the embodiment of the real estate bubble economy. And the so-called transit-oriented development plan burst along with the economy.

A year ago, Riverside embarked on another comprehensive planning process for its downtown, this time led not by a commuter rail agency with increased ridership in mind, but the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning as part of its Local Technical Assistance program.

While some of the plan, which was on display yesterday evening at the township hall, is familiar to those who remember the TOD — improving signage and leveraging the village's history to promote tourism, for example — its touch is relatively light and fits more closely with CMAP's goal of creating sustainable communities.

For one thing, the scale envisioned by the CMAP plan is nowhere near that imagined by the TOD. It supports "context-sensitive redevelopment," bed-and-breakfasts instead of a hotel, a more pedestrian-friendly business corridor and a green approach to both tourism and promoting commuting by train (something which should still make Metra happy).

The plan is at its most ambitious in its support for developing tourism for the village by expanding support for the Riverside Museum, the possibility of a water tower observation deck and the potential for constructing a community/recreation center at the Youth Center site.

While those kinds of recommendations may seem pie in the sky at this point, they reflect the difference in focus that the CMAP plan has compared to the TOD plan. While the TOD plan urged large-scale private development, the CMAP plan focuses strongly on the role of public development to help revitalize the private commercial district.

It's the kind of development a community can more closely control and mold to its vision of itself instead of having that vision imposed on the community. Of course, Riverside will forever debate exactly what its shared vision is going to be, and not everyone is going to agree.

The CMAP plan can at least serve as a new starting point for that discussion — without TIF districts, four-story buildings, parking garages or Swan Pond gazebos getting in the way.

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Vision Guy from Riverside

Posted: March 21st, 2013 4:51 PM

I attended those mtgs. in 2008 and recall the Planners pushing condos. Four-story buildings are not so bad—we have

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I'm going to the meet and greet. I HAVE QUESTIONS FOR THEM OH YEAH!...

By THANK YOU

Posted: March 25th, 2013 9:14 AM

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R U KIDDING. THAT GUY COULD NOT GET ELECTED DOG CATCHER IN OAKBROOK. HE WOULD...

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By Oakbrook Resident

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@Triceratop - My thoughts exactly. That intersection is already a mess. Once...

By Frosty

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I would really like to see your calculation of the RB salary increases, the...

By To Lisa Aulerich - Maciniak

Posted: March 25th, 2013 8:43 AM

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Kosey's IRS 990's for RBEF fails to disclose officers but an old Illinois...

By Do right or move on

Posted: March 25th, 2013 8:39 AM

On: District 208 board member touts...

How is it that the former mayor who has moved out of North Riverside (I guess...

By I still don't understand?

Posted: March 25th, 2013 7:51 AM

On: Court OK's expedited appeal for...

I was at those Board of Ed meetings, and that statement is pure Skinkis. The...

By To: It's For the Kids

Posted: March 25th, 2013 5:36 AM

On: Riverside-Brookfield High School...

The IRS 990 I saw lacked officer disclosure. Said 501-C-4, that means...

By Tom K...

them now. Replacing paved lots and substandard buildings with new buildings and covered parking would attract tenants and small business to our downtown. I can quickly count 5 buildings that don't fit plus a couple large asphalt lots that could stand to be redeveloped over time.

By iax time

Posted: March 24th, 2013 11:29 PM

On: District 208 board member touts...

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