

Residents tell planners how to make Algonquin more inviting

ALGONQUIN – Residents said they wanted to see more sidewalks to encourage people go to downtown during a workshop Thursday that's part of a downtown planning study.

It was the first of two hands-on planning workshops to obtain public comment about maintaining and enhancing the downtown. The second public input session is expected to take place in the fall, said Ben Mason, a planner for the village.

About 70 people attended the workshop, including residents, village trustees, planning and zoning commissioners, historic commission members and village staff.

The Downtown Planning Study comes as the Illinois Department of Transportation constructs a western bypass to divert traffic, such as heavy trucks and through traffic, from the intersection of Routes 62 and 31.

The study is being paid for with a \$90,000 federal grant the village received from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Part of the study included an online survey that showed there was a desire for dining, shopping and entertainment in the downtown area.

Sara Mason, 36, who lives in the historic district of downtown, said she would like more sidewalks and pedestrian routes for residents to come downtown.

"The primary reason I'm here is for pedestrian pathways into and out of downtown," she said. "I'm interested in seeing what the [village] is planning and what they're thinking about doing, and I want to be a part of the process. I'm very interested specifically in the ... recreational facilities, the parks, the bike paths and the river, and how we can enhance those features of our town."

Some residents said they would like to see angle parking along Main Street, instead of the current parallel parking. People said they wanted to see parking that was more inviting.

Residents also said signage to guide people around the downtown can be improved.

To help make the place a destination, people said the village should take advantage of the Fox River and have more boat access, with boat slips or a place to rent kayaks.

"The hope is we attract the type of businesses that will make it a destination," said Trustee Bob Smith.

Some residents even suggested tennis courts and a skate park in the area.

The planning process will conclude with a final study report at the end of the year. It will outline a series of recommended short-term and long-term improvement priorities for the downtown.

Ann Clarton, 48, lives in the historic area and said she likes the old-town feel of Algonquin's downtown.

"I like the character that's there," she said.

The workshop included a survey in which people rated their preferences for architectural styles, building heights, types of signs and parking arrangements. The examples included sites in Algonquin and other communities.

Bruce Zange Sr., 72, who lives on the east side of town, also serves on the village's Historic Commission.

He said he didn't like modern, tall buildings, and prefers the village stick with buildings that are two or three stories tall.

"This is not downtown Chicago, this is little Algonquin," Zange said. "[Tall buildings] don't belong in a community this size."