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Riverfront access, aesthetics keys for downtown Riverside

Residents brainstorm ideas at 'visioning' session

By BOB SKOLNIK
Contributing Reporter

Nearly 50 people came to the Riverside Township Hall last week for a "visioning exercise" to try and come up with ideas to improve the town's sleepy downtown.

The evening was sponsored by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) which has been hired to develop a plan to improve Riverside's central business district.

After an introduction by CMAP planner Nora June Beck, the attendees split up into five different groups for an hour to brainstorm ideas. Then a representative from each group presented the top three ideas their group came up with to improve downtown Riverside.

Ideas ranged from encouraging more use of the riverfront and Swan Pond with kayak rentals, trails and perhaps even a restaurant that people could access by kayak.

One person even suggested, perhaps facetiously, installing a zip line from the Hofmann tower in Lyons across the river to Riverside.

Better signage was a popular suggestion, as was making the downtown more attractive. One group recommended making East Burlington and East Quincy one-way streets.

A former village president, Jack Wiaduck, said that his group suggested better landscaping and improving the view that train commuters riders get of downtown Riverside. Wiaduck also suggested that a bed-and-breakfast would be a "great addition" to the downtown area.

He also suggested connecting Swan Pond to the Swinging Bridge.

"The input that we received was fantastic," said CMAP Senior Planner Trevor Dick. "Now we get to the difficult part to try and actually create a draft plan and recommendations that help move the community in the direction they want to go over the next 10 or 15 years."

After the ideas were presented, the participants used a hand-held device to vote on their favorite ideas.

After the results were tabulated, the most popular idea turned out to be to expand access and recreational use of the riverfront. The second most popular idea was streetscape and trainscape beautification. Attracting more tourists was the third most popular idea.

The least popular idea was turning Burlington and Quincy into one way streets.

The planners will take the input they received at the forum and spend the next few months working together with the steering committee overseeing the project to put together a draft plan that it will present to a public open house where community members can offer feedback.

Dick said that the goal is to present a final plan to the village by March, 2013.