

City of Sterling Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan
Community Workshop #1 Summary
August 18, 2010

The first Community Workshop for the *Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan* took place on August 10, 2010 at City Hall. To promote the workshop, three different forms of media were used for publicity including local newspapers, cable television and radio. Approximately seventy (70) residents participated in the workshop.

The workshop is the first of many face-to-face community outreach events scheduled throughout the Riverfront Redevelopment planning process. The purpose of this event was to: (1) review the purpose of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan and the planning process to be undertaken; (2) secure local views on problems, issues and potentials within the redevelopment area; and, (3) conduct a visual preference survey to solicit community feedback on potential development and land use related components.

Workshop Questionnaire

The interactive part of the workshop began with a questionnaire that solicited participants input regarding issues and concerns in the City's downtown/riverfront area, as well as community strengths and assets. The following is a summary of the thoughts, comments and opinions obtained during the workshop. (*A comprehensive list is attached.*)

1. Identify five (5) issues or concerns confronting Sterling's Downtown & Riverfront Area.

Several issues and concerns were generated by the group, covering a wide range of topics. The list of identified issues can be grouped into the following broad categories: (a) Appearance and Improved Sense of Place; (b) Union Pacific Railroad; (c) Mix of Uses and Family Friendly Atmosphere; (d) Preserving Local Character and History; (e) Public Accessibility and Trail Systems; and, (f) Economic Viability and Funding.

A summary of all issues and concerns identified and discussed is provided for each specific category below.

a) Appearance and Improved Sense of Place. A number of issues cited related to the riverfront's appearance and sense of place. Specific comments for improving the area's appearance and sense of place ranged from specific to all encompassing, including (but not limited to): burying power lines; incorporating an attractive focal point; creating a unique identity; connecting with the area's manufacturing heritage; ensuring appropriate maintenance take place; and, improving right-of-way maintenance in the area.

b) Union Pacific Railroad. Issues and concerns pertaining to the Union Pacific Railroad were identified. Specifically, attendees commented on the noise the railroad generates and how it forms a barrier between the Downtown and Riverfront areas.

c) Mix of Uses and Family-Friendly Atmosphere. Attendees would like to see a healthy mix of uses and a family friendly atmosphere created along the riverfront. A desire for a diverse mix of public and private spaces was expressed, with specific interest in the following: outdoor amphitheaters/event space; a publicly accessible riverfront; cafes and restaurants; and, cultural icons or museums. A number of workshop participants cited bringing businesses and employers back to the Downtown and Riverfront areas as a key objective. Additionally, participants indicated that the riverfront should incorporate uses for children, teens and adults, and be enhanced with a variety of public amenities such as public restrooms.

d) Preserving Local Character and History. Workshop participants made reference to or discussed the importance of preserving the City's local history as redevelopment occurs along the Riverfront. Many felt that incorporating a museum into the redevelopment would preserve the area's identity and heritage. People believed that preserving the local character could be complemented through the use of preservation guidelines. Additionally, some workshop participants suggested incorporating historic themes into educational/academic facilities.

e) Public Accessibility and Trail Systems. In general, workshop participants indicated that a general priority of the Plan should be to improve overall access and circulation in the area; and, specifically, that public access should be provided to and along the Rock River. Issues and concerns related to both physical and visual accessibility along the Rock River riverfront. Participants desired continuous multi-use trails along the riverfront, maximized views of the river; and, public gathering areas or places to "hang out" along the riverfront. Participants also desired that the riverfront be enhanced with public amenities such as restrooms and connections to Lawrence Park and the Dillon Home.

f) Economic Viability and Funding. Several issues voiced at the workshop related to the high cost of redevelopment and its long term viability. Concerns with the City's limited funding sources and the need to identify new resources available were discussed, and many participants emphasized that appropriate use of incentives should occur but not in excess. Redevelopment/development should be financially sound and economically sustainable.

2. List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.

While a diverse list of issues and concerns was generated in response to Question 1, a general consensus indicated four general categories were most important by workshop participants. These categories included the following:

a) Cost and Funding. As outlined in response to *Question 1*, concerns with the City's limited funding sources and the need to identify new resources available were expressed. Participants acknowledged that a substantial amount of money and funding will be necessary to implement the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan.

b) Long-term Sustainability. This category includes the three pillars of sustainability: economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and cultural sustainability. Workshop participants emphasized that any redevelopment that occurs needs to consider all three pillars in the long-term. They stressed that the City should not surrender too much to attract new development and that quality development with a variety of uses is necessary. Workshop participants desired redevelopment that includes green technologies, complements Rock Falls (rather than competes with Rock Falls), and incorporates a healthy mix of uses.

c) Union Pacific Railroad. Workshop participants indicated that the Union Pacific Railroad was one of the most important issues facing the redevelopment of the riverfront. The prominent location of the railroad and the negative connotations associated with it were envisioned to be priorities.

d) Appearance. According to participants, several of the issues and concerns generated pertained to the riverfront's appearance. The Riverfront area serves as a prominent gateway into Sterling and workshop participants desired an attractive appearance to reflect the City's desired character.

3. Identify three (3) specific projects or actions you would like to see undertaken within the Riverfront Redevelopment area/surrounding Downtown area.

Workshop participants identified a number of specific projects and actions they would like to see undertaken in the project study area. Desired projects and actions included, but are not limited to, the following:

- Incorporation of dining establishments and outdoor seating areas;
- Installation of a tram that would travel from Sterling’s riverfront, to Lawrence Park, to Rock Fall’s riverfront;
- Planting of native plant species;
- Incorporation of an “event area” or amphitheater;
- Construction of a community focal point/unique attraction and public gathering place;
- Development of a year-round recreational facility with a water park and ice rink;
- Combining resources with Rock Falls;
- Development of condominiums near the riverfront;
- Connecting the riverfront with Lawrence Park and other community amenities with bike/multi-use trails;
- Incorporation of an educational facility and/or museum;
- Decreasing railroad traffic and noise;
- Utilization of the river for recreational activities;
- Utilization of the river for energy; and,
- Incorporation of a hotel/lodging facility.

4. What are the primary strengths and assets of the City of Sterling and its Downtown & Riverfront?

Although most of the workshop dealt with issues and concerns to be addressed in the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, the fourth and final question focused on the strengths and assets of the City. Workshop attendees recorded what they believed to be strengths and assets of the City, its Downtown and Riverfront. The following strengths and assets were noted:

a) Location. Workshop participants believed the location of Sterling to be one of its greatest strengths as the City is situated along the Rock River, adjacent to the Union Pacific Railroad and in close proximity to I-88. Furthermore, Sterling is situated in close proximity to several surrounding communities that would provide potential visitors and shoppers for riverfront amenities and for businesses.

b) Rich history and culture of the City. Sterling’s rich industrial history was noted as an asset that should be preserved and enhanced as redevelopment occurs along the riverfront. Attendees expressed a desire for museums and cultural icons to be included to preserve this history and distinguish the area from others within the region.

c) Progressive City government. Attendees noted the City’s strong and progressive governmental leadership as a strength of the community. The City government will likely play a key role in guiding the long-term improvement of the riverfront area. Attendees also noted that the local government would play an important role in promoting stewardship and working towards the long-term success of the Plan.

d) The Rock River. Attendees described the Rock River as a unique and beautiful amenity with significant potential. Workshop participants noted that redevelopment

along the riverfront should capitalize on the river and feature recreational amenities and a healthy mix of uses that will attract residents and visitors from the surrounding region.

e) Residents. The residents of Sterling were described as involved citizens, good volunteers and skilled workers by workshop participants. Attendees identified the City's multi-cultural base and strong sense of community as an asset.

f) Large, consolidated area to redevelop. Participants identified the size of the riverfront redevelopment area as a strength because it offers a large "blank slate." Attendees noted that possibilities for riverfront redevelopment are endless once the area has been cleaned up. The importance of developing a Riverfront Redevelopment Plan was noted to ensure that the aspirations of the community are met as redevelopment occurs.

g) The existing Downtown. Workshop participants noted that the Downtown has an established character that the riverfront can build upon for success. The historic buildings and small town feel of the Downtown were identified as community strengths.

Visual Preference Survey

Following the Workshop Questionnaire, an interactive Visual Preference Survey was undertaken. A keypad polling system was used to gather input from attendees. Keypad polling is a way to engage the community, providing them with the means to instantly respond to images. Participants were asked to rank images from 1 (Undesirable) to 9 (Desirable). Fifty participants were given a wireless keypad remote that instantly transmitted his/her answer directly into the presentation. Responses were automatically and instantly tallied, and the resulting average score was displayed on screen for all workshop participants to see.

The images shown in the Visual Preference Survey were grouped into the following categories:

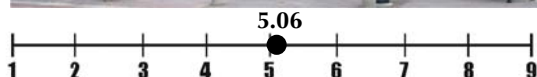
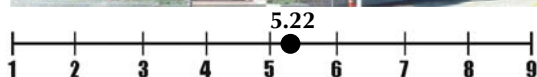
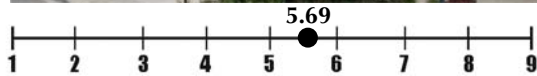
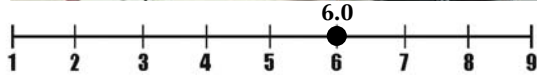
- Building Form and Architectural Style
- Roadway Cross-Sections and Design
- Crosswalks and Pedestrian Areas
- Riverfront Character

Result Summary

Different images were shown to obtain a sense of what character and types of development attendees desired. The survey included images of Sterling and images from the surrounding region that were similar in size and character to the existing Downtown.

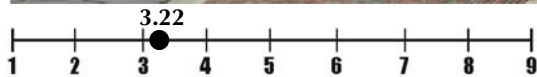
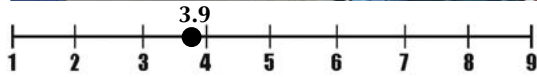
In general, photos shown of existing developments in Sterling received lower scores than images shown from other communities in the region. Components from images that received the highest scores will be used as a foundation moving forward to assist in the creation of the Redevelopment Plan.

Building Form and Architectural Style

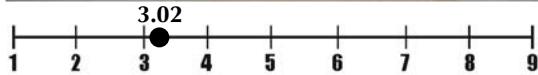
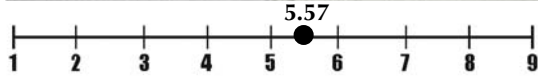
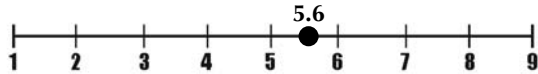


Images of buildings that were more traditional in character received higher scores than buildings that were contemporary or modern in style. Attendees indicated a preference for buildings featuring quality, natural materials, large windows and broken up facades. Buildings constructed from manufactured materials with facades lacking visual interest received lower ratings. The image of the City's existing Downtown ranked poorly in comparison to the others.

Building Form and Architectural Style (Continued)

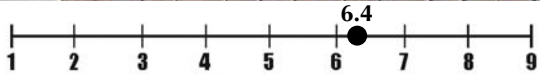
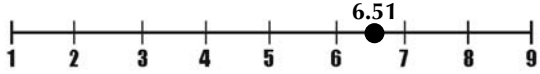


Roadway Cross Sections and Design



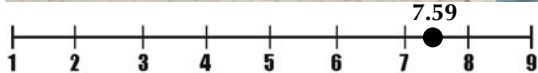
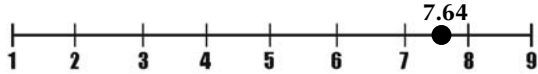
When shown images of different roadway cross-sections and right-of-way treatments, attendees preferred images that featured clearly demarcated pedestrian areas, extensive streetscaping and well-defined on-street parking areas. The existing cross-section in Downtown Sterling received the lowest score.

Crosswalks and Pedestrian Areas



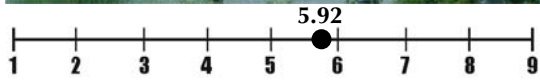
Images of different crosswalks and pedestrian-area treatments received similar rankings from workshop participants. Each image illustrated clearly-demarkated pedestrian areas that were complemented by different brick patterns and landscape treatments.

Riverfront Character



Attendees ranked riverfronts with varying intensities of built environments similarly. The highest ranking image was a natural, “park-like” riverfront, though the more active and developed riverfronts scored high as well. Each image included different levels of public access, from a multi-use trail to a brick walkway with pedestrian amenities, to a build environment with outdoor seating.

Gateway and Wayfinding Signage



Participants ranked images of traditional gateway and wayfinding signage higher than more modern or metal signs. The image that received the highest ranking featured signage geared towards both pedestrians and automobiles. The image of a modern sign oriented and designed for automobiles ranked the lowest.