

**City of Sterling Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan**  
**Project Initiation Workshop Summary**  
**Riverfront Redevelopment Task Force**  
**June 18, 2010**

On Friday, June 18, 2010, a project initiation meeting was held with the Riverfront Redevelopment Task Force at City Hall, to set the foundation for the planning program and review and discuss the overall direction and policy issues facing Sterling's Downtown and Riverfront area. The meeting reviewed overall project objectives and concluded with a Project Initiation Workshop. The workshop solicited the views of the Task Force regarding their concerns and aspirations for the downtown riverfront redevelopment area and served as the "kick-off" meeting for the *Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan*.

## **Workshop Questionnaire**

The project initiation meeting concluded with a four-question workshop that focused on 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 recorded and voiced verbally during workshop dialogue.

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

A number of issues and concerns, covering a wide range of topics, were identified by the Task Force at the Project Initiation Workshop. The list of identified issues can be consolidated into the following categories: (a) Redevelopment of the Downtown Riverfront Area; (b) Clean-up Environmental Issues/Contamination; (c) Connectivity Concerns; (d) Economic Development & Viability of the Area; (e) Preserving the History of the Area; (f) Diversity of Uses; and, (g) Funding. A summary of all issues and concerns identified and discussed is provided for each specific category below.

**a) Redevelopment of the Downtown Riverfront Area.** The Task Force agreed that redevelopment of Sterling's Downtown and Riverfront area was the primary concern and focus of the project. The underlying priority identified was replacing vacant and deteriorating structures with new uses that attract residents from the Sterling community and the greater region.

**b) Clean-up Environmental Issues/Contamination.** The Task Force identified cleaning up environmental contamination on redevelopment sites as a priority to be addressed before redevelopment can occur in the Downtown and Riverfront areas.

**c) Connectivity Concerns.** The Task Force identified the lack of connectivity between the Downtown and Riverfront as a key issue to be addressed in the *Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan*. Much of this disconnect was attributed to the Union Pacific railroad that divides the Downtown and Riverfront areas; however, they acknowledged a lack of pedestrian connections as well. The Task Force indicated that a general priority of the Plan should be to improve overall access and circulation in the study area; and, specifically, that public access should be provided to and along the Rock River. The Task Force also expressed concern regarding boat connectivity and accessibility on the Rock River due to the two dams in the area that prohibit movement upstream and downstream.

**d) Economic Development & Viability of the Area.** The Task Force expressed concern over the number of jobs that have been lost in the area as industrial businesses have closed or relocated, and many stressed the importance of bringing businesses back to the Downtown/Riverfront. The Task Force also discussed the importance of economic viability studies to determine what the market capacity of the project study area is.

**e) Preserving the History of the Area.** The Task Force discussed the rich industrial history of the Downtown Riverfront area and cited it as a primary strength of the City. Preserving this history and any unique, salvageable architectural features was identified as a concern. The Task Force proposed incorporating a museum(s) in the Plan and maintaining structurally intact historic structures (such as the original limestone wall from Northwestern Steel and Wire) as a way to preserve the area's history.

**f) Diversity of Uses.** The Task Force expressed concern over the future mix of uses in the project study area and indicated a desire for a diverse mix of public and private spaces. Restaurants, retail and mixed-use buildings were identified as most desirable in combination with green space and public gathering places.

**g) Funding.** Several issues and concerns voiced at the workshop dealt with the City's limited funding sources and the need to identify new resources available. The Task Force identified state and federal grant money as potential future funding sources.

**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 one, a general consensus indicated three specific items were considered most important (in no particular order):

**a) Increase Public Support & Cooperation with Rock Falls.** Public apathy and a lack of community involvement was a concern amongst the Task Force. Through community outreach, maintaining the momentum of the project and coming up with a visionary and feasible redevelopment plan, the Task Force believed that stewardship for the Plan could be fostered and public support increased. Additionally, the Task Force identified that better communication and coordination with Rock Falls needs to occur to ensure the success of the Plan.

**b) Identify Alternative Funding Strategies.** As previously mentioned, several concerns identified at the workshop related to the availability of funding. The Task Force believed that alternative funding sources such as state and federal grants would be essential to realize the *Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan* and that a priority throughout the planning process should be to identify potential funding sources.

**c) Improve Public Access to the Riverfront.** Public access to, and along, the Rock River was believed to be one of the most important issues pertaining to the *Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan*. The Task Force felt that continuous trail connections, clearly marked pedestrian crossings and pedestrian amenities should be a key component of the Plan.

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

When asked to indicate specific projects or actions they would like to see undertaken within the Village, the Task Force generated a list of ideas. These ideas have been consolidated into the following list of projects and actions:

- Clean redevelopment sites and make them “development ready”;
- Incorporate a museum(s) as a way to preserve the area’s historic past;
- Promote adaptive reuse of historically significant buildings;
- Provide parks and open space with multi-use trails along the riverfront;
- Generate additional revenue/sales tax dollars for the City;
- Eliminate blight/unattractive appearance;
- Create attractive gateways/entryways;
- Improve collaboration and coordination with Rock Falls;
- Capitalize the potential of Lawrence Park;
- Incorporate recreational amenities such as a splash pad or kayaking; and
- Create a destination that City residents and visitors from the larger region would like to be.

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

Although most of the workshop discussion dealt with issues and concerns that should be addressed in the *Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan*, the last question focused on the strengths and assets of the City. The following strengths and assets of Sterling were mentioned by the Task Force:

- Rich industrial history of the City;
- Momentum gained from Downtown beautification efforts;
- Union Pacific Railroad;
- Sterling murals;
- Lawrence Park and its proximity to the Downtown Riverfront area;
- Abundance of old building materials (bricks in particular);
- Relatively strong retail and Downtown;
- Involved government leadership and proactive leaders;
- Geographical location of the area and its proximity to major metropolitan areas; and,
- People and community pride.

**Next Steps**

The next step in the planning process will be a community workshop. This workshop will be the first of many face-to-face community outreach events scheduled throughout the planning process. The purpose of this first workshop is to allow residents to share their ideas and opinions before plans and recommendations are made. The workshop will: (1) review the purpose of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, the planning process to be undertaken, and the schedule for the study; (2) secure local views on problems, issues and potentials within the redevelopment area; and, (3) conduct a visual preference survey. Additionally, key person interviews will be conducted and community surveys and issues mapping will be made available for residents and businesses.