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West End improvement plan moves forward

By JACKIE MAJERUS , Press staff



A plan is set to transform the West End.

BRISTOL - Work on a plan to improve the West End is moving forward, with the committee next looking at specific properties in the area when they meet again in early September.

The former IGA site, the former Chic Miller auto dealership and the central intersection of the West End - where Routes 69 and 72 meet - will be the focus of the next session of the West End Neighborhood Advisory Committee, according to City Planner Alan Weiner.

Though those sites are private property, any development or changes on those parcels could greatly impact the neighborhood, said Weiner, and there is a public interest in what happens with them.

The old IGA site, is "a key piece of property in the neighborhood," said Weiner of the site once considered for a new school.

The same kind of impact is also true for the former car dealership, according to Weiner.

Those three sites, including the 72/69 intersection that involves West, School, Park and Divinity streets, emerged from the work with the consultants as areas of particular interest to the West End, said Weiner. He said the discussion at the September meeting will be about new and alternative ideas for further development of those properties.

City Councilor Ken Cockayne, a Republican who represents the West End, said he thinks poverty is the neighborhood's biggest obstacle, with people living just "paycheck to paycheck."

"We really need to attack the poverty down there," said Cockayne. "We need to bring in services to help the people so they could build better lives."

Education and jobs are needed to give poor residents a boost, according to Cockayne. He said the city might be able to help with jobs programs or at least provide a central community bulletin board where local employers could post job openings.

It would probably be best to locate it in a place where parents stop in to collect their children, said Cockayne, such as a school or club.

The city's new administration, said Cockayne, is tuned in to the neighborhood, and residents know that they're being heard.

People want to help, Cockayne said, but they need leadership to get things going.

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"They want to change Bristol," said Cockayne. "The ball is now rolling."

The intersection of Routes 69 and 72 is an important, central point in the neighborhood, said Cockayne.

Many small businesses are located either at the intersection or within a block of it.

The task ahead, Cockayne said, is to get newcomers on board to help turn the neighborhood around.

"The core of the West End really needs to take pride in the neighborhood," said Cockayne, who said new residents and business owners need the same sense of pride as some of the old timers have for the West End. If that can take hold, it will bring the vision closer to reality, he said.

"It's not going to be an easy task," said Cockayne.

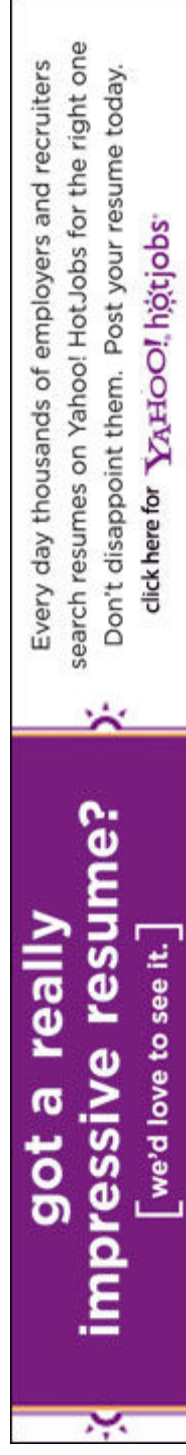
But he said a cleanup effort he organized about six weeks ago drew more than 30 people, including youth groups, veterans, city leaders and business owners.

"It went well beyond my expectations," said Cockayne. "It was unbelievable."

It showed that people want something better for the West End, Cockayne said.

"They are serious about getting it cleaned up and moving in a different direction," said Cockayne.

The committee will have a public meeting with the consultants Sept. 8 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Imagine Nation children's museum.



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