

Redevelopment Takes “Next Steps”

A month or so ago, while walking down Williams Avenue with an engineering team, a shop owner stopped me to inquire what we were doing. I replied that we were preparing to make some infrastructure improvements in that area. She said, “Oh, I have heard that before, but it seems nothing ever really gets done.” The PSJRA plans to replace that perception with action.

At a special board meeting last Thursday, attended by one City Commissioner and several members of the advisory committee, the board unanimously voted to retain two consultants, Land Design Innovations and WIM Associates, to provide next-step services in redevelopment.

What do we mean by “next steps” and what is the difference between a redevelopment plan and a master plan?

For our purposes, the redevelopment plan is a broad overview (casting a wide net) to allow for more specific, detailed future projects to be outlined in a master plan. Any expenditure of PSJRA funds must link to a program listed in the redevelopment plan. It is rather like hosting a dinner party and deciding to serve a meat, a vegetable and a starch. If you add dessert to the original menu, you can later spend part of your budget for the dessert. If you do not include it, then dessert is off the table (in a manner of speaking). The redevelopment plan is the menu, and the master plan is deciding which recipes to use to create the final presentation.

Land Design Innovations (LDI) has successfully completed the redevelopment plan revision, which will be made available shortly in final form for public review and City approval. We have extended their service agreement to create the more detailed urban development and design guidelines document for the downtown/Marina areas. You will have the opportunity to be included in many of the same type of public processes over the next six months, specifically meetings between the consultants and public/private entities and additional workshops.

WIM Associates will work specifically with North Port St. Joe to assist that community in creating their own master plan—their community as they would like it to be. WIM Associates, headed by Walter Miller, was introduced to the PSJRA by Sabu Williams, President of the Okaloosa County Branch and Area Director of the NAACP. Mr. Miller brought his team to town for a public interview on Monday, March 12. The reviews were very positive, and he and his team further demonstrated their knowledge through their remarks during the redevelopment-plan-review workshop, held that evening.

The PSJRA will “run point” to ensure the plans coordinate and that at the end of the day, we have a cohesive, transparent, workable, sustainable and practical plan, created through consensus, for our redevelopment area.

Now back to Williams Avenue—where we started—the survey has commenced and should take five to six weeks until completion. At that time, we will have the information we need to apply for a UDSA grant to provide infrastructure improvements and to specifically stop the flooding! A secondary benefit will be streetscape improvements such as landscaping and resurfacing. When we can determine how far the funds will stretch, we will let you know the entire scope or work!

If you would like to become involved, please consider joining our advisory committee or simply attend our board meetings. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Thursday, April 5, at 5:30 at the Fire Station. The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, April 12, at 5 PM at the Fire Station. In the meantime, feel free to contact Gail Alsobrook at 850-229-6899 or gail@CelebratePortSaintJoe.com.