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Groups to put together plan to revitalize 30th Street corridor

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - February 2, 2007 by Rich Rovito

An effort is under way to revitalize the 30th Street Industrial Corridor in Milwaukee, a once-thriving manufacturing center currently plagued by numerous vacant factories and high unemployment.

The Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission has taken the lead role in the development and implementation of an action plan for the corridor that aims to bring together local governments, area businesses, federal and state agencies and the 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corp., a nonprofit organization that works on economic development issues in the corridor.

"We recognize that it will take the combined efforts of all levels of government and local businesses to revitalize this critical industrial corridor," said Milwaukee County Supervisor Michael Mayo, chairman of the county's Economic Development Committee.

The corridor is a prime example of a once-thriving area with strong potential for revitalization, including underutilized industrial buildings, an untapped labor market and strong transportation links, Mayo said.

On Jan. 25, representatives from SEWRPC, along with those from Milwaukee County, the city of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Department of City Development, Milwaukee Police Department, Milwaukee County Sheriff's Department and the 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corp., signed a compact pledging to work for the retention and growth of business in the corridor with a goal of creating 10,000 new jobs.

"Working together, we can find the necessary resources for this corridor to redevelop and flourish once again," said Phil Evenson, executive director of SEWRPC, an areawide planning agency for southeastern Wisconsin.

The initiative will work to revitalize mainly industrial land within the corridor, which runs along the railroad line on North 30th Street from Highland Boulevard to Hampton Avenue. At points, the corridor extends east to North 27th Street and west to North 35th Street.

The corridor remains home to several manufacturers, such as Harley-Davidson Inc., Miller Brewing Co., Master Lock Co., Eaton Corp., DRS Technologies, Glenn Rieder Inc. and Capitol Stampings Corp.

Others, however, have disappeared, most notably A.O. Smith Corp. and later Tower Automotive Inc.

Creating vision

The joint effort will focus on creating a "consensus vision as to what's realistic and achievable" for the corridor's future, as well as identifying barriers and obstacles to the revitalization, said Ken

Yunker, SEWRPC deputy director.

Obstacles include environmental concerns, the age of some buildings and neighborhood safety, Yunker said.

Concerns regarding public safety in the corridor have been a significant impediment to the corridor's revitalization, according to initial research completed by SEWRPC.

"I don't think anybody underestimates the challenges in the corridor," said Tim Casey, president of the 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corp. board.

Nonetheless, the mission will be to create a "very targeted, very focused" redevelopment plan over the next 10 to 12 months, Casey said.

The initial step in developing the plan will involve interviews with business owners and others. Assessments will be made of the various underutilized and vacant properties in the corridor to determine how, or if, they fit with the redevelopment. Efforts then will be made to line up private and public funding and a group will be set up to oversee the plan's implementation.

"We plan to hammer out a plan in short course," Casey said.

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