

NEWS-LEADER

SPRINGFIELD

June 4, 2009

Downtown future discussed

When city planners sketched the future for downtown Springfield a decade ago, no one saw the coming of a research center.

Now, the Roy Blunt Jordan Valley Innovation Center on Boonville Avenue is poised to influence the growth around it, especially after Missouri State University -- which owns the research center -- said it wants to establish an extended campus called IDEA Commons around JVIC.

On Wednesday, a panel of three architects, one marketer and one city planner shared their thoughts on what IDEA Commons could --and shouldn't --become.

Ralph Rognstad, director of planning and development for the city of Springfield, said MSU's extended campus should not turn into a single-use area such as the government plaza, where a monoculture excludes other uses.

"It needs to be integrated into the downtown," Rognstad said. "We need to create diversity so there are activities 24 hours a day."

MSU architect Terry Rowland said bars and restaurants -- privately developed -- are among the venues for congregation. Space also can be set aside for public parks, Rowland said.

Springfield architect Tim Rosenbury championed the concept that the use on the ground floors of downtown buildings should flow onto the streets to help create a public realm.

"The streets are the commons," Rosenbury said.

MSU first proposed IDEA Commons last year when it announced plans to buy several city properties in the vicinity of JVIC.

IDEA, which stands for innovation, design, entrepreneurship and arts, provides the overarching theme for the development of this extended campus, which university officials say will encompass 30 acres eventually.

University officials say the Commons can help spur more private development projects such as lofts, restaurants and bars in the neighborhood.

Public-private partnerships are crucial to the success of IDEA Commons, Rowland said.

Rognstad said the city would continue to provide gap funding to assist private developers while improving public streets.

The city has identified Boonville Avenue as a main corridor, and it has been improving the street , said Martin Gugel, a professional engineer with the city's public works.

The city has completed the work between Olive and Tampa streets -- not only having made aesthetic improvements above the ground, but also updating underground utilities lines and adding new storm-water systems, Gugel said.

The city now is moving to work on Boonville near Commercial Street as well as between Tampa Street and Chestnut Expressway, Gugel said.

The city also considers Phelps Street a street for improvement, as it connects Campbell to Sherman avenues, though the street has no funding source at this point, Gugel said.

Phelps borders the university's JVIC on the south side and the Willow Brook property on the north side.

Last month, MSU bought the 3.5-acre former poultry plant downtown property, where the university intends to set up its technology and construction management programs.

On Wednesday, the public was invited to tour the ground of IDEA Commons and adjacent new businesses, such as Inveno Health Inc., a spin-off venture from JVIC; the upscale home décor store Obelisk Home; and the apartments in the Oberman building, which was refurbished with low-income housing tax credits.

Edgar "Rock" Hagens, who runs a clothing shop a few doors down from Inveno, popped in to see his new neighbor and was impressed.

"It brings more people here," he said with a big smile.

Cynthia Lipscomb, an architect who works downtown, was on the tour.

"It's wonderful," she said of IDEA Commons. "It's great for the city. It draws people here, and it helps downtown."

Nancy Crandall, who is semi-retired, said she liked what she saw on the tour but wished for one more thing.

"It just needs a little market where you can get meat and produce," Crandall said.