

From the Milwaukee Business Journal:

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Downtown Milwaukee BID launches effort to attract development along streetcar route

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A major downtown Milwaukee business group is rolling out a new promotional campaign to leverage the streetcar project to attract more companies and development.

The Milwaukee Downtown Business Improvement District No. 21 created an online system mapping out the parking lots or available building spaces along the streetcar route. It helps market spaces ranging from small storefronts to the 100,000 square feet in the 330 Kilbourn office building the U.S.

Federal Bureau of Investigation will vacate this year, said Matt Dorner, Downtown BID development director.

“Proximity to the streetcar should be part of your rhetoric in selling those spaces,” Dorner said.

The streetcar system’s initial downtown loop will begin construction this year and begin service in 2018. Construction of the main line will go out for bids within 90 days. A planned extension to the downtown Milwaukee lakefront is being engineered, and could open for service in 2019.

The streetcar already has encouraged activity downtown. Northwestern Mutual cited it as a factor in the decision to develop an apartment tower on North Van



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Rendering of the Milwaukee streetcar to be manufactured by Brookville Equipment Corp.

Buren Street. Johnson Controls has expressed interest in the project as it explores a potential office project on the downtown lakefront, and the Chicago buyers of the downtown Milwaukee U.S. Postal Service building also said the streetcar was a positive.

The Downtown BID's latest "Streetcar Development & Investment Guide" seeks to capitalize further off the streetcar. It features only properties within a quarter-mile of the streetcar route, and cites the streetcar as an economic engine, Dorner said. The online system could go live on Friday, he said.

Other properties featured in the guide include a three-acre property at 412 N. Plankinton Ave., a parking lot at Water Street and St. Paul Avenue at the gateway to the 3rd Ward, and the parking lot at Michigan and Second streets. Coincidentally, a Cambria hotel development was announced earlier this week for a portion of that block at Michigan and Second.

The city has supported the BID effort, but the association took the initiative on the project independently, said Milwaukee development commissioner Rocky Marcoux. That means the message may resonate more strongly than if public officials were doing the talking.

"Because it's basically been created by a peer organization it has the credibility," Marcoux said. "Certainly city publications have credibility, but people will say, 'That's the city saying that, of course they are going to back it, it's their project.' This is why we're very, very excited."

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