

Development studies of Walker's Point, King Drive would look to capitalize on streetcar extensions

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There's more activity bubbling up on North Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive north of downtown Milwaukee, but the area's development potential hasn't been closely studied in six years.

However, a new market analysis is in the works to offer recommendations on what businesses and what types of new housing are needed. That study could provide guidance, for example, on how to redevelop the Department of Natural Resource building at King Drive and West North Avenue after the state agency moves out, said Deshea Agee, executive director of the Historic King Drive Business Improvement District.



Deshea Agee stands on King Drive.

It also could provide market data to help the BID attract more companies to King Drive storefronts, he said.

"Our goal is zero vacancy, so that market study is going to help us be able to better understand what businesses can come into the district and be successful," Agee said.

Agee on Wednesday spoke to Milwaukee's Public Works Committee about the upcoming study. It is among the work the city will finance with a \$750,000 federal grant secured this fall.

That grant will focus on ways to leverage public transit, especially the streetcar, to promote development on King Drive, and in Walker's Point south of the 3rd Ward. Both areas could be served by future extensions of the downtown streetcar system.

The market studies can be used to promote the neighborhoods. But the tie-in to transit is another example of how the city officials intend to use the streetcar system as an economic development tool.

City planners partnered with the King Drive BID and the Harbor District Inc. on the studies. The Public Works Committee on Wednesday endorsed spending \$20,000 in city money to match the federal grant.

The market studies will gauge the demand for housing and certain types of businesses in the neighborhoods, said Sam Leichtling, long range planning manager in the Milwaukee Department of City Development. They also will study the potential on large redevelopments sites, such as the DNR building, along the envisioned streetcar extensions.

"Funds are generally difficult to come by for that," he said.

Some of the study results could be applied citywide in areas served by major transit routes, including buses, Leichtling said. That includes ways to rezone land near transit stops to encourage development.

In Walkers Point, the study could focus on First and Second streets, said Dan Adams, planning director for Harbor District Inc. Those are both corridors where the streetcar eventually could run. It would complement the Harbor District's ongoing land-use planning, which is more focused on waterfront properties east of First Street along the harbor, Adams said.

"This will be a very big opportunity for us to stitch our planning process into work and planning in the larger community," he said. "This planning effort is going to allow us to dig a little deeper, investigate a little further."

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