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Residents share their vision for Romeoville's east side



By Joseph Ruzich Special to the Tribune Sep. 29 at 10:02 a.m.



Romeoville residents Don Hornig [left] and Christopher Benigno use a map to pinpoint potential locations for new businesses for the east side. (Photo by Joseph Ruzich)

Romeoville resident Christopher Benigno would like more of an old-style look for the east side of Romeoville.

“Maybe cobblestone streets with nice restaurants and businesses,” said Benigno, 44.

Benigno and dozens of other residents shared their ideas and vision for the East Side, mostly industrial and undeveloped open space, at a workshop meeting Sept 28.

The East Side has a lot of potential, according to village officials, who have also been pushing for a Metra train station there.

Earlier in the year, the village entered into a technical assistance agreement with the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) to fund a transit study for the area. The RTA funds 80 percent of the \$100,000 study.

The village recently selected Teska Associates Inc. as the lead consultants. Teska officials Todd Vanadilok and Konstantine Savoy, who were at the workshop, asked residents to vote on scenarios they prepared for the East Side and place stickers on maps indicating possible locations for development.

From a quick vote tally, many in the audience wanted to see more restaurants in the area, along with pedestrian friendly shops, boutiques and recreation trails. The map exercise showed that they would like to see businesses and some residences near and south of the Citgo oil refinery at 135th Street and New Avenue.

An online survey of over 300 residents also indicated similar ideas, with 74 percent wanting restaurants, 73 percent voting for retail businesses and 48 percent suggesting more open space and parks.

An area just south of 135th Street and New Avenue has already been set aside as an open space and is sanctuary for the endangered Hine's Emerald Dragonfly. The village also hopes to connect and coordinate the East Side plan with a planned downtown redevelopment on Route 53.

Vanadilok said development in the area will be long term and told the audience that change isn't going to happen overnight.

“Right now the economy is down but it's always good to plan ahead,” said Vanadilok. “When things get better, developers will want to talk.”

Vanadilok said Teska will use the information to come up with two plans that will be presented to residents and village officials. Those plans will then be condensed down into one final plan that should be complete next spring.