



Dardenne Prairie schedules sessions to design new downtown

By Nancy Cambria
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DARDENNE PRAIRIE — It's time for this little city to put its big ideas for a Main Street down on paper.

Starting next Thursday, Dardenne Prairie officials will conduct the first of seven public meetings to design a town center to be built along Hanley Road.

If all goes as planned, the week of meetings at the Knights of Columbus Hall will yield a full picture of what the 85-acre town center and some 200 acres on nearby roadways will look like.

That vision will be presented at the final meeting April 25, Mayor Pam Fogarty said. At that point, the city of about 7,000 people will have a full set of drawings to market to developers, she said. Advertisement

"Our residents need to understand that if you show up to these meetings, you will be making a difference in how this actually turns out," Fogarty said.

About a year ago, Dardenne Prairie pitched the town center to the Miami-based planning firm of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., which designed New Town in St. Charles.

Dardenne Prairie has since invested about \$450,000 to develop the master plan.

Duany Plater-Zyberk is a nationally

recognized proponent of new urbanism, which emphasizes architecturally unified communities with pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods that mix shops, restaurants, offices, parks and housing.

For Dardenne Prairie, the company was first asked to evaluate a stretch of Hanley Road, mostly between Highway N and Feise Road, that is home to a patchwork of fields, some homes, a ballpark, the city's town hall, Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and the United Services child care facility.

The city has since increased its scope, and the firm is now evaluating 285 acres including frontages on N, Feise and Technology Drive along Highway 40.

The week of meetings — called charrettes — is designed to quickly gather information and ideas from the community.

During the week, a team of about 10 planners from the firm will put the ideas on paper.

The initial drawings will be presented at a "pin-up" meeting April 22. Planners will present three or four separate proposals created from various ideas. Participants will be able to evaluate each idea and then decide on a final design. The planners will then use the next three days to put the finishing touches on the design, which will be presented at the closing presentation on

April 25.

The project has already generated a lot of discussion about what themes or concepts would work best for the town center, said Alderman Scott Kolbe (1st Ward), who originally pitched the town center to Duany Plater-Zyberk. Designing a "restaurant incubator" area for local chefs and entrepreneurs is one of the ideas on the table.

Kolbe said the city has set up an advisory team of local consultants to ensure that the final plan will be marketable to developers and investors. The group includes Greg Whittaker, the developer of New Town and the Plaza at Noah's Ark, a commercial-residential complex planned in St. Charles.

Whittaker, who isn't an investor in the Dardenne Prairie project, is a passionate advocate for new urbanism, Kolbe said.

Kolbe said Fogarty and city staffers plan to take the final town center concept to the International Council of Shopping Centers' annual convention in Las Vegas next month. At that convention, developers and communities from around the nation try to woo retailers.

"We're already seeing interest," Kolbe said. "We're getting a lot of inquiries from home builders."