



Agenda Item:

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COUNCIL COMMUNICATION City Manager's Office

GENERAL INFORMATION

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Roll Call

Submitted by: Larry Hulse, Community Development Director

SUBJECT—

Approval of Forest Avenue Corridor Strategy and approval of negotiating and authorizing a professional services agreement with Economic Research Associates of Chicago, Illinois to conduct a market assessment along the corridor.

SYNOPSIS—

The Forest Avenue Corridor Strategy is an approach developed by stakeholders to redevelop and revitalize Forest Avenue between Second and Beaver Avenues. The stakeholders developed a mission statement and preferred future for the corridor as well as implementation strategies to achieve its goals. Negotiating a contract with Economic Research Associates (President Patrick Phillips, 20 East Jackson, Chicago, Illinois 60604) for a market assessment along the corridor is one implementation step in the strategy.

FISCAL IMPACT—

In November 2003, the City Council allocated \$300,000 of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to begin revitalization efforts. Stakeholders and staff will attempt to leverage those funds with private investment, but may request additional funding in the future depending on the redevelopment sites chosen and results of a market assessment. The market assessment for \$25,000 will be funded from the CDBG funds.

RECOMMENDATION—

Approval

BACKGROUND—

In August 2002, Councilman Tom Vlassis initiated a study of the Forest Avenue Corridor from 2nd Avenue to Beaver Avenue and invited leaders from area neighborhoods, businesses, and Drake University, as well as governmental and non-profit organizations, to serve on a planning committee. The committee has developed a strategy to guide future developments, redevelopments, and City investments along Forest Avenue.

The Committee, working with staff and Councilman Vlassis, developed a mission statement and evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the corridor. The Committee reviewed basic demographic, physical, and economic data and chose to focus its strategies for redevelopment between Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway and Drake University. Redevelopment and revitalization of this neighborhood commercial area will have a big impact on the River Bend, King-Irving and Drake Neighborhoods and will help achieve the committee's preferred future for the corridor.

The goal of the Forest Avenue Corridor is to address the needs for housing/retail development and the appearance of blighted and vacant buildings by assembling parcels for redevelopment. The committee recommended sites along Forest Avenue that would best address that goal, but determined that additional market research information should be obtained prior to proceeding with purchase of property and development.

The committee developed a request for proposals (RFP) for distribution to local and regional market research firms. Economic Research Associates has submitted a proposal that meets the criteria of the RFP and will analyze market demand and supply for retail and commercial development and for different types of housing for that portion of Forest Avenue between Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway and 25th Street and its nearby market area.

- The assessment will specifically look at sites/opportunities on Forest Avenue for redevelopment but will consider the development of University Avenue in its market analysis.
- The assessment will include a recommendation of the kinds and sizes of commercial or retail uses that could be successful on Forest as well as examining different housing options such as, but not limited to, mixed-use buildings and college oriented housing.
- The assessment will also include preliminary financial analysis and proposed financing options to encourage development of housing and/or retail/commercial development.

After the market research is underway, the Forest Avenue committee will continue its implementation activities with the creation of an Urban Renewal Plan, if necessary.

The Neighborhood Revitalization Board (NRB) reviewed and approved the Forest Avenue Corridor Strategy at its August 4, 2004 meeting. At its September 13, 2003 meeting, the NRB had recommended to Council that \$300,000 of CDBG funds be allocated to begin redevelopment along Forest Avenue. Redevelopment of Forest Avenue was a goal of the Carpenter/Drake Park Neighborhood Action Plan. The commercial portion of that plan had not been addressed and this was seen as a crucial implementation step in order to make Carpenter/Drake Park a Charter Neighborhood.

This is an important time to begin implementation of the Forest Avenue Corridor strategy. During the development of the strategy, the committee worked on activities that resulted in funding from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for assessment of underground storage tanks. Less petroleum pollution has been encountered than anticipated and the DNR is identifying additional funding sources for future testing and removal of petroleum hazards. The Committee also worked with the Plan and Zoning Commission and City Council on rezoning

Forest Avenue to a Neighborhood Pedestrian Commercial Zoning Classification (NPC). Additionally, a 50-unit low income housing tax credit development for housing is ready to break ground on Forest Avenue between Martin Luther King Parkway and 19th Street.