

Waukegan lauded for downtown vision

City wins planning award for cleanup and revitalization proposal

By Mick Zawislak
Daily Herald Staff Writer

Posted Monday, October 24, 2005

They remain more idea than action, but Waukegan's big plans for its lakefront have garnered regional attention for foresight.

The city on Wednesday will be awarded the Metropolitan Planning Council's Burnham Award for Excellence in Planning at the respected group's annual meeting in Chicago.

"What happens there is really critical for the region as a whole," said Scott Goldstein, MPC's vice president of policy and planning.

"It's a very bold plan. It's a long-term plan. It's not about tinkering around the edges."

Once a base for heavy industry and peppered with contaminated sites, the two-mile stretch of Lake Michigan shoreline represents a glaring missing link between the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, through Chicago's 27 miles of open shoreline north to Milwaukee.

Waukegan leaders in 2002 met with development experts and spent a week considering the future of the 1,400-acre site, which includes the downtown area. The recommendation included phasing out industrial uses, cleaning up environmental pollution and building a "harbor city" along the shore with a mix of recreational, residential and retail uses.

Slowly but surely, progress is being made. Last week, the city council finalized a plan for about 200 condos at Sheridan Road and Washington Street. The bulk of the site is a city parking lot.

The city council also has sent requests for proposals to develop the old Academy Theater site across the street from the renovated 1920s-era Genesee Theater.

And, the city is in the final stages of a \$27 million cleanup of a former Coke plant and plans to send out requests for development as a mixed used residential project between the beach and Waukegan Harbor.

"That was one of those sites. Five years ago, people said, 'That will never happen,'æ" said Ray Vukovich, the city's director of governmental services.

MPC is a nonprofit coalition of business and civic leaders involved in a variety of issues, including planning and transportation, in northeastern Illinois. The Burnham Award, named for visionary architect Daniel Burnham, has been awarded the past 18 years in recognition of innovative plans and projects.

"Big dreams are admirable; however, what earned Waukegan the 2005 Burnham Award for Excellence in Planning is that the city went a critical step further to guide the creation of a feasible, long-term plan for preserving, rehabilitating and redeveloping this regional gem," MPC president MarySue Barrett said in a statement.

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