

CRE Guide: Community Spotlight - Avenues West

Feb 14, 2012, 6:00am CST

Kathy Bergstrom, Special to The Business Journal

Businesses and institutions are investing in the city of Milwaukee's Avenues West neighborhood, but some leaders say additional change awaits improvements to North 27th Street.

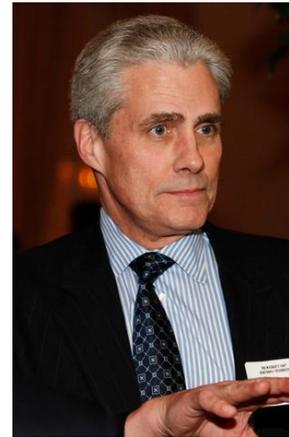
The neighborhood is bounded by Interstate 43 on the east, North 27th Street on the west, Interstate 94 on the south and West Highland Avenue on the north. It includes Marquette University, nonprofits such as the BloodCenter of Wisconsin and Milwaukee Center for Independence and apartment buildings, said June Moberly, executive director of the Avenues West Business Improvement District.

One development opportunity is a city-owned block at the northeast corner of North 27th Street and West Wisconsin Avenue. The city acquired the block and razed a former hotel building in hopes of creating a development on the site, but it remains vacant.

Milwaukee Ald. Robert Bauman, whose district includes the neighborhood, is advocating a plan to create a widened boulevard on North 27th Street from Michigan to Wells streets to tie in with Wisconsin Department of Transportation plans to reconstruct North 27th Street from St. Paul Avenue to Highland Avenue in 2013. The improvements would enhance the site's attractiveness, he believes.

The boulevard plan requires city acquisition of additional property at the intersection at North 27th Street and West Wisconsin Avenue, including a Mobil station. At a recent Zoning, Neighborhoods and Development Committee meeting, Department of City Development Commissioner Rocky Marcoux told the committee the price for acquiring the station is too high.

Bauman's proposal to amend a tax incremental financing district to include the property was tabled until the committee's Feb. 22 meeting.



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Bauman continues to push for the boulevard plan.

“Incremental and small-scale attempts at improvement pretty much accomplish almost nothing and just end up wasting a lot of money, because you’re not reaching the critical mass of change that’s necessary to reverse course,” Bauman said in an interview.

“We have all recognized that the 27th street revitalization along with reconstruction is one of the primary things that the neighborhood needs,” Moberly said.

“If we have our choice, we would rather have a dramatic statement there, and that is our preference,” she said of reconstruction plans.

Bauman said he also will file a proposal for DCD to issue a request for proposals for the private development of a police headquarters building on the vacant block at North 27th Street and West Wisconsin Avenue.

Other current or planned commercial development in the neighborhood includes:

- The Ambassador Hotel has plans for a \$25 million expansion that would include converting an apartment building on the block into suites and constructing an elevated structure between the two buildings to house banquet, conference and office space. Owner Rick Wiegand is looking for project financing.
- City on a Hill, a faith-based nonprofit agency, is seeking affordable housing tax credits from the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority to help finance construction of 32 duplex and townhouse units at 2303 W. State St. The project would be a co-housing development with green space and a 4,000-square-foot community center.
- Ogden Homes LLC has completed remodeling of a 30-unit apartment building at 940 N. 25th St. The company also acquired the nearby former Oxford Apartments lot for use as green space and parking.
- Hennessy Group has remodeled the SoHi Building at the southeast corner of North 27th and Wells streets.
- Maures Development Group LLC is completing work at a housing development at North 27th and Wells Street.
- The Pabst Mansion has acquired an 11,800-square-foot building at 2017-2023 W. Wisconsin Ave. The building continues to be leased by Assata High School and was purchased to preserve options for future expansion.
- Rick Walia plans to build a service station and strip center at West St. Paul Avenue and North 27th Street.