

# Downtown employers push 'walk-to-work' plan

## Businesses will meet to discuss effort known as Initiative for Urban Living

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**PEORIA** - A plan to encourage people working in the Downtown area to move to Peoria's older neighborhoods will be advanced April 1.

Caterpillar Inc., Bradley University and the two Downtown Peoria hospitals will be represented at the 3:30 p.m. meeting, which, for now, is being tabbed the Initiative for Urban Living. When the proposal was first introduced last fall, it was called the "walk-to-work" program for revitalizing neighborhoods.

The idea is to further enhance the new urbanism goals of the Heart of Peoria plan, to draw families back to neighborhoods within walking distance of Downtown, where an estimated 20,000 people work.

"Bradley, Caterpillar, Methodist and OSF have all appointed high level representatives to the policy group and the plan is to lay out what the goals are," said 2nd District Councilwoman Barbara Van Auken, who will co-chair it with her colleague in the 3rd District, Bob Manning.

The initial focus would be the West Bluff. Eventually the plan will be extended to other employers and neighborhoods on the East Bluff, the North Valley and South Peoria.

Subsidies for home improvements and other offers are all part of the discussion now, including those like the down payment assistance plan for first-time homebuyers that the city already offers.

"We have convinced Cat and all these other businesses that they will benefit when strong neighborhoods surround them," Van Auken said. "We're also appealing to their sense of responsibility, although some of them already have some incentives in place."

The idea for this approach really took shape during the major snowstorm of a year ago that ground the city to a halt. When that happened, Van Auken said, "Councilman Manning thought how much more helpful it would be to these

businesses if their employees just walked to work. Bradley already has a lot of them."

City staffer Chris Setti, the project leader on this initiative said, "We're taking an incremental approach. We've asked each of them to come prepared to study this issue as a way to promote ownership in this area."

He emphasized that this is not an official committee. While there are several first-time homebuyer programs available, there are no second-time homebuyers plans or incentives for the moderate income group, who "are not necessarily the middle class."

The meeting will be at City Hall.

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