

Group walks Main Street, surveys pedestrians

BY PAT OLDENDORF

More than 10 people gathered on Main Street last Saturday morning to take part in a walking audit.

The people were residents of the West Bluff neighborhood and members of the Campaign for a Walkable West Bluff. Their goal was to photograph and record conditions on Main Street and interview any pedestrians to find out their views of what Main Street should be.

West Peoria resident and group member David Pittman said his vision for the corridor went beyond Main Street.

"I'm hoping they'll go along Western [Avenue] to the Radisson as well," he said. "Ring Bradley with walkable areas. Bradley Avenue should be a gateway to the university."

The group was separated into three teams, one for each "node" of Main Street.

The first node, the university node, spans from about Main Street to Sheridan Road. The second, the technology node, anchored by the PeoriaNEXT Center, spans from about Sheridan to Glen Oak Avenue. The third, the medical node, anchored by the hospitals, spans from about Glen Oak into downtown.

As the teams returned from the audit, there were several common complaints.

The complaints ranged from narrow walkways, lack of cross-walks, short cross-walk times, cracks in the sidewalks and cars driving too close to the sidewalk.

The group's goals for the university node include retail shops, restaurants and more public areas such as parks, Lisa Ferolo, co-organizer for the WWB said.

"Students use Main as much, if not more, than residents," she said. "There should be trees to buffer the sidewalks from traffic. There should be wider sidewalks. We want to make it not only pedestrian friendly and safe, but to change the infrastructure as well."

Freshman psychology major Hayley Braatz said she also wants to see safer conditions and small retailers along the street.

"I hate that you feel like you're about to get hit by a car every time you walk on Main," she said. "I think opening some new businesses would be a really good idea. There are only restaurants now, and it would be nice to go into a small shop from time to time."

Ann Bartolo, another co-organizer, said she has been in contact with Student Body President Jordan Ticaric, who she said has informally surveyed students about Main Street.

"We have excitement and vision for Main Street," Bartolo said. "It seems that students have the same wants as the residents, such as a book store and a coffee lounge. More services like hair and nail salons – things like that. And people also say they want retail, almost any kind of retail, especially like you would see around other campuses."

Ferolo said her group isn't expecting any big-box retail stores to relocate to the area because that wouldn't be a good fit.

Freshman photography major Dana Mashek said she thinks the section of Main Street close to campus needs to be renovated.

"I would like to see more shops that are open and welcoming to the public instead of all these rundown buildings that are always closed and uninviting," she said. "I would also like to see better looking sidewalks. They're pretty dirty."

Ferolo also said she hopes with the city's study of vehicle traffic on Main and her group's study of pedestrian traffic, there will be many ideas to improve the street.

The next meeting will take place Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. in Bradley Hall 139. Ferolo said students are encouraged to attend.