

# **SMALL** Business Times

## Reviving Milwaukee's NEXT GREAT CORRIDOR

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By *Eric Decker*, of SBT

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Milwaukee's 30th Street Industrial Corridor – an area that runs roughly from North 27th to 35th streets and from Hampton Avenue to Highland Boulevard – will be the city's next major redevelopment project.

Using the experience gained in the ongoing redevelopment of the Menomonee River Valley, city officials want to spur manufacturing, light industrial, commercial and residential redevelopment in the corridor, according to Mayor Tom Barrett.

The goal is to bring more jobs to the central city.

“We're working with many partners, and the effort will take significant resources, similar to the long-range efforts that went into the revitalization of the Menomonee Valley,” he said. “I believe Milwaukee's continued renaissance will depend on our abilities to build upon our assets, and the 30th Street corridor offers strategic sites for companies to grow near other successful companies, an eager workforce and major transportation routes.”

Barrett has named the project the city's “Greenlight District,” and has said the city will use tax incremental financing and other economic development tools to attract businesses, with an emphasis on “green” industries.

The corridor already is home to several healthy and growing manufacturers, which should help the redevelopment process. Some, such as Harley-Davidson Inc., Miller Brewing Co., Master Lock Co., Eaton Corp. and DRS Power & Control Technologies, are well-known, established companies.

Others, such as Astronautics Corp. of America, Capitol Stampings Corp., United Milwaukee Scrap LLC and Glenn Rieder Inc., have added large numbers of employees, dramatically

increased revenues and added new locations within the corridor in recent years, but are not as well known, in part because they are privately held.

Despite the growing and expanding businesses, the 30th Street Industrial Corridor has its share of problems – crime, unemployment and several high-profile vacant industrial properties.

One of the largest stretches of vacant land in the corridor is in the former A.O Smith and Tower Automotive site, a 150-acre parcel bounded by Capitol Drive, 35th, Hopkins and Townsend streets.

However, that land might not be vacant much longer.

City officials are negotiating to buy the eastern half of the site, about 86 acres, from the Milwaukee Industrial Trade Center (MITC), said Richard “Rocky” Marcoux, commissioner of the Department of City Development. MITC purchased the land in November 2006.

“We’re negotiating on a daily basis now,” Marcoux said.

If the city buys the property, most buildings there will be razed. One of the few buildings that the city plans to keep is the eight-story office building.

“Most of them are not from a practical standpoint reusable,” Marcoux said. “There are certain industries that could work, but we feel they’re not labor-intensive enough on a jobs-per-acre basis.”

Milwaukee Alderman Willie Wade, whose district includes the Tower site, agreed with Marcoux. Concentration of jobs is one of the city’s main priorities when redeveloping the site, he said.

“We want to use as much space for job creation (as possible), the most job-oriented businesses,” Wade said.

The northern end of the property, particularly the northwest corner, is best suited for retail uses, Marcoux said.

“We know that retail can do well on Capitol, and the neighborhood needs to be served by more of it,” he said. “We envision the area on Capitol to be mixed-use with a heavy emphasis on retail. And then what lies behind it will be mostly light manufacturing.”

The area best-suited for retail is not owned by MITC, Marcoux said. That portion is still owned by Tower Corp and has significant environmental contamination.

If the city completes the purchase of the eastern half of the site, it will control about two-thirds of the site, Marcoux said. The city already owns about 20 acres of land on the Tower site, occupied by the Department of Public Works, which moved from the Menomonee Valley in 2005.

“In essence, we will have 100 acres in our possession of the 150 acres there,” Marcoux said.

The city is also considering buying several adjacent parking lots owned by MITC, Wade said, which could be part of the redevelopment project.

### **Changing perceptions**

*If the city completes the purchase of the eastern half of the Tower site, Marcoux predicts significant progress on the site in 2008.*

*“I think what we’ll see in the next year or so (is that) we’re going to have a marked improvement in the perception of the area simply by all of the resources that we’ve deployed over the last year and the ones that we are going to deploy in 2008,” he said. “They are going to start turning people’s heads in terms of actually seeing work going on there.”*

*Because of the high traffic counts on Capitol Drive, 27th Street and 35th Street, perceptions about the area will change quickly, Marcoux said.*

*Public opinions about the Menomonee Valley changed quickly once the city began knocking down buildings and cleaning up properties, Marcoux said. Extensive property acquisition, demolition and environmental cleanup, along with projects such as the Sixth Street viaduct, the expansion of the Potawatomi Bingo Casino and the attraction of Palermo Pizza helped change minds about the valley.*

*“Ten years ago, most people didn’t want to go into the Menomonee Valley, either,” he said. “And the valley’s gold now.”*

*The city’s work in the 30th Street corridor also is not a short-term project, Marcoux said.*

*“Moving forward with the Tower site is going to be huge, but with the work we envision in the corridor, you’re talking about a 15- to 20-year build-out,” he said. “The Menomonee Valley Land*

*Use Plan was adopted in 1999, and it's 2008, and we're not near finished in the valley. And you're dealing with a much larger land mass in the (30th Street) corridor."*

*Part of the long-term redevelopment process will be planning a passenger rail stop on the Tower site, Marcoux said. Railroad tracks pass through the property.*

*"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out if we're going to put a train there someday, we better be planning for that stop right now," Marcoux said. Wade agreed.*

*"One of the things most valuable is getting rail to move actual people through the corridor," he said. "Being able to get people to and from jobs is huge. It also empties into the (Menomonee) Valley. I think it (the Tower site) will be one of the most important places, as far as getting people back to work."*

*Art Arnstein, one of the owners of United Milwaukee Scrap LLC, a scrap metal processing business with six locations in the corridor and about 130 employees, acknowledged that the revival will take time.*

*"We can't tear all the buildings and houses down," he said. "We've got to find businesses that are willing to move here - incentives are important. That's phase one. Phase two is the DCD and city needs to go to the companies (here), visit with them and learn about them, ask if they are planning to relocate and solidify the businesses here to find out how much room they need to expand here."*

*Using its eminent domain powers, the City of Milwaukee and its Redevelopment Authority are now working to acquire several properties currently owned by Bee Bus Lines in the 4200 block of North 35th Street and the 3400 block of West Hopkins Street, to be used for an expansion of Integrated Mail Industries Ltd. If the land is taken through eminent domain, Integrated Mail will pay all acquisition expenses.*

*According to city documents, the buildings on the properties are in fair to poor condition and are not used by Bee Bus Lines for operations. Negotiations between Bee Bus Lines and Integrated Mail Systems have not been successful, the documents state.*

*The city documents further state that Integrated Mail has a critical need to expand its operations on Hopkins Street to relocate digital printing operations from outside of Milwaukee. If it is able to expand, the company plans to add 50 new jobs and retain its current 120 employees.*

*Officials with Integrated Mail could not be reached for comment by press deadline.*

## **Resources deployed**

*Three DCD employees have been assigned to work on the 30th Street corridor on a full-time basis, Marcoux said. During the Menomonee Valley redevelopment process, the department also had an employee assigned to the area.*

*"There is no other portion of the city where I have three full-time dedicated employees working," Marcoux said. "Aside from all of the other people that they are leveraging within the department, this is their only job."*

*Significant city, state and federal dollars have been deployed to spur redevelopment in the corridor (see accompanying chart).*

*"There's a ton of money here," Marcoux said. "The mayor was serious when he put forward this commitment to the corridor, and he's following through on a daily basis."*

*The city also is working to improve the residential areas in the corridor through its Targeted Investment Neighborhood (TIN) program, Marcoux said. Residents who own their homes in TIN areas are eligible for city assistance to structurally and aesthetically improve their homes.*

*Several housing projects are underway in the corridor, including a joint venture between Gorman & Co. and the Milwaukee Urban League, who are building 30 new rent-to-own homes in the Metcalfe Park neighborhood, and plans by the Bishop's Creek Community Development Corp. to build new homes on the site of a former tannery near West Hampton Avenue and North 32nd Street.*

*"You're seeing single-family homes go up on lots that have been vacant for decades," Marcoux said. "To see this new housing go up is a strong message for not only the folks in the neighborhood – that's a great message for them because it says that the city believes in them and they stuck around and now help is on the way – but also for people who want to move into the neighborhood."*

## **Business buy-in**

*With city assistance, businesses located within the corridor are helping to improve the area. The 30th Street Industrial and Economic Corridor Business Improvement District is pursuing a streetscape improvement project and a rebranding campaign, said Brenna Holly, executive director of the 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corp. (ICC) The organization formed the 30th Street BID in 2005 with assistance from the city.*

*The streetscape project, scheduled to start later this year, will include decorative crosswalks, street furniture, new trash cans, harp lights, enhanced gateways, traffic calming street bump-outs, signs, rain gardens, trees and other landscaping amenities along Capitol Drive between 27th and 35th streets.*

*The 30th Street ICC recently sent requests for proposals to marketing firms, Holly said, to create a new marketing plan for the area.*

*“We want to create a business destination in the area, with logos or a slogan, something that says you want to go here or move your business (here),” Holly said. “We will want to have a plan, a way to get out the good news, a way to create a niche for the area. We need to do something like that for the industrial area we have here.”*

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### **About Eric Decker**

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