

Moms won't walk on the wild side

West Bluff residents want to see more friendly, 'walkable' neighborhood

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PEORIA - A group of West Bluff residents wants the area to return to the days when neighbors knew each other and people would stroll and visit with one other on the streets, developing relationships.

The Campaign for a More Walkable West Bluff is having a meeting at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at Bradley University.

The initiative was started by three women, Anne Bartolo, Jennifer Brady and Lisa

Ferolo. They live in the Uplands neighborhood and decided to do something in line with the goals of new urbanism.

"We are all mothers with young children, and we're frustrated because we see so much potential in our neighborhood and enjoy living here," Lisa Ferolo said.

"We want to make it a more friendly environment, which is what the Heart of Peoria plan is all about," Brady said.

In 2002, when Andres Duany and the design team from a Miami-based town planning firm spent a week talking with residents about how to make the downtown area an exciting, active place again, Brady was a faithful attendant.

It was the Duany team who crafted the Heart of Peoria plan with the emphasis on New Urbanism which basically harks back to the past when cities had wide sidewalks in front of storefronts, two-way streets to encourage shopping and small retail centers tucked within neighborhoods.

"We thought if we could get something going, we could do it in phases," Brady said.

So armed with "The Great Neighborhood Book" by Jay Walljasper, she is looking for ideas that could be applied to the West Bluff.

"We've got the logo and we've had two meetings so far and now we want to get the word out to other people in the West Bluff to join our efforts," Ferolo said. "So we're

gathering voices, educating ourselves and talking to all the people" needed to help move the project forward.

Second District Councilman Barbara Van Auken is elated at the group's proposal because it is coming from the community and not by city government.

That kind of conversation among residents is the way to successfully change things because compromises have to be made, she said.

"I find that there are some competing goals in the West Bluff," Van Auken said. "We've spent 20 years trying to keep the traffic on Main Street and away from the neighborhoods. That's the reason for the stop signs in there to deter people from cutting through the neighborhoods."

At the same time she said if the West Bluff community wants to bring back the vibrant Main Street she recalls of her childhood, people are going to have to give up some things for the larger goal.

"A walkable West Bluff is a powerful vehicle for the neighbors, and if they can get together and figure out their priorities and how they want to achieve this, it will be great for everybody," Van Auken said. "It's something that I can't decide and the city can't come in here and say it should be this way."

Van Auken also commended the group for its initiative and the way the members are handling it.

"I'm enormously impressed with the professionalism with which this group is starting the project," she said. "They are very well organized and seemed to have a good action plan, and frankly, I think that such a group of neighbors talking with each other with businesses and the institutions there in the West Bluff is the way to go."

Although the women will need money for their campaign, they're not ready to accept any donations just yet but are open to in-kind items and services.

"We'll need a lot of paper and posters to get the word out," Ferolo said. "Our goal is to be able to communicate with the people who have shown interest in our project. We're trying to do it with as little money as possible."

While they have yet to formally approach businesses in the area to explain their goal, they plan to do so as well as meet with organizations such as Renaissance Park, the West Bluff Council and the Heart of Peoria Commission.

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