



**DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

*Economic Development Division*

**m e m o r a n d u m**

**TO:** Bruce K. Walden, Chief Administrative Officer

**FROM:** Elizabeth H. Tyler, Community Development Director

**DATE:** September 7, 2006

**SUBJECT: Philo Road Action Plan Status Report – September 2005 – September 2006**

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**Introduction**

This update report covers the City's progress in completing the goals and objectives of the Philo Road Action Plan which was adopted by the City Council in February 2005. The Philo Road Action Plan was prepared in response to concerns about the economic vitality of the Philo Road Business District. The Action Plan includes extensive survey and market research and identifies action elements in the areas of image improvement, business retention, enhancement of incentives, beautification, road improvements, building reuse, marketing of available buildings, zoning and signage improvements, and development of outlots.

This Status Report covers the period of time since the last Status Report was completed in September 2005 through the present. While much progress has been made, there is still more to be done to fully address the conditions and initiatives identified in 2005. Working in conjunction with the business and residential neighborhood stakeholders in the area, the City proposes to continue to do all it can to improve the business district in line with the Action Plan and Council goals.

The following is a site-by-site analysis discussing the most recent activity, plans, or status updates of existing properties or projects in the Philo Road area, beginning with commercial/retail sites and followed by residential sites. The topics of public infrastructure improvements, community policing, neighborhood coordination, and economic development programs are also addressed.

**Commercial/Retail Developments**

- **Stone Creek Commons** – The Atkins Group is starting construction of a new 10-acre upscale neighborhood shopping center to be called The Pines at Stone Creek Commons at the southeast corner of Philo and Windsor Roads (see attached brochure). It will consist of approximately 26,000 sq. ft. of initial retail space in 6 buildings meant to blend into the character of the surrounding residential areas and to encourage a pleasant pedestrian-oriented shopping atmosphere. There will be outlots available, and features of the center

will include a boardwalk, lakeside views, and the landmark “Bear” statue. The Pines at Stone Creek Commons is poised to be the highest quality neighborhood shopping center in the region and will serve as a strong anchor on the southern end of the Philo Road area.

- **K-Mart Site** - An agreement for the redevelopment of the 8.7- acre site by developer Chris Creek was approved by Council in 2005. This project is planned to contain 30,000 square feet of commercial space and was originally proposed for up to 400 student apartments. The developer is now considering redesign of the residential component to comprise a townhouse or condominium project similar to Stillwater Landing on High Cross Road and complemented by out-parcel commercial development. The developer is identifying potential tenants for the commercial component, including possible restaurant uses. Construction of the commercial space when those negotiations conclude.
- **County Market** – The store underwent a substantial remodeling in the exterior and interior and had a grand re-opening in the Spring. An electronic system has recently been installed to keep shopping carts on-site. Landscape improvements to the parking lot are still pending. Store managers report that business is doing extremely well.
- **Sunnycrest Mall Area** – Interior improvements have been completed using the Redevelopment Incentive Program and Sunnycrest Mall is now 100% leased. The City is now working with the Sunnycrest Mall owner on façade updating and beautification plans.
- **Walgreens** is considering building a stand-alone center in front of the existing Walgreens and leasing their existing space. Another developer group is purchasing land that is part of the Sunnycrest mall parking lot just to the north of the proposed Walgreens that will be a “spec” retail building.
- **Marathon** – The new gas station/convenience store at the southwest corner of Philo Road and Florida Avenue was completed and opened in late Spring. This is the only gas station in the area that sells E-85 ethanol.
- **Former Jewel Building** – This building is currently occupied by the Friends of Police call center and indoor storage facility. Owner Paul Tatman continues to actively market the building and potential outlot/s for additional commercial tenants.
- **Jerry’s/Southgate Plaza** – EBL&S, the owners of the property out of Philadelphia, have met with City officials about possible uses for the vacant space or redevelopment of the property. The City has helped with marketing efforts. EBL&S are now considering the options of retenanting, redevelopment of the site, or sale of the property.
- **True Value** – True Value hardware store received a loan interest subsidy for a remodel of their property that was completed in Fall 2005.
- **Former Nursing Home** – The former nursing home property at 2006 S. Philo Rd was remodeled and turned into a secure indoor self storage facility by JSM Development. The new use incorporates extensive screening requirements and site improvements.
- **Former Kinder Care** – The building at Colorado and Cottage Grove was purchased and occupied by a local engineering firm. The firm remodeled the interior of the building and has begun to improve the landscaping.
- **Meijer** – Development of a Meijer store at the site at the northeast corner of Philo and Windsor Road was approved in 1995. Meijer continues to investigate their site at Philo and Windsor Roads to determine development feasibility. While they have evaluated this site annually in the past, this year brought a markedly higher level of investigation on the part of the company’s engineers.

- **CVS** – With the acquisition of Osco Drugs, CVS has reimaged and improved this property.
- **Sunnycrest Dental Building** – With the assistance of the Philo Road Redevelopment Incentive Program, building owner Clive Follmer has started a comprehensive remodeling and improvement to help attract tenants.

### **Residential Developments**

- **Prairie Winds** - Construction continues on Prairie Winds, a new subdivision on Colorado Avenue containing a mix of single-family, zero-lot line units, and senior housing. The zero-lot units have been moving quickly, with approximately 12 buildings completed thus far. The Senior Living Facility is under construction and will have approximately 75 units to be completed sometime around Spring 2007. This facility received bond funding and tax credits from the state housing authority.
- **Amber Glen** – The special Alzheimer’s facility adjacent to Canterbury Ridge opened in Spring and is now completing final landscaping.
- **Amber Pointe Apartments** – Permits were issued and construction is underway on two additional apartment buildings for this high-quality complex on Amber Lane being developed by Chris Creek.
- **Florida Avenue Apartments** – Property owner Ramshaw-Smith is proposing a major upgrade to this property to bring it up to date and improve its appearance.
- **Existing Apartments** – Local developers and others have noticed positive improvements in the quality of Sunnycrest II apartments since it underwent a change in management. An apartment building at the southwest corner of Colorado and Cottage Grove was purchased by a new owner, vacated, and remodeled within the past year. CPM has installed a resident manager at their property on Cottage Grove. The City continues to meet with apartment owners on an individual and group basis to address common issues of security, property maintenance, and tenant concerns. Police presence and nuisance and housing inspections have all been stepped up in the past months with positive results.

### **Public Infrastructure Improvements**

There are a number of current and planned infrastructure and road improvements to the area. Some infrastructure and beautification items that were identified as goals in the Action Plan have previously been implemented by Public Works or the Arbor Division, such as installation of light pole banners, business district identification signage, and planting decorative flower islands. Other items are ongoing, including stepped up enforcement of nuisances such as overgrown weeds, improper trash pickup, etc. Major infrastructure projects that are currently underway or planned include:

- **Colorado Avenue** was connected to Stone Creek Boulevard last year and will be further improved this year through a widening of the road east of Philo Road to the Prairie Winds property and improvements to the intersection of Colorado and Philo.
- **Florida Avenue** is the process of being extended to High Cross road. The City is currently beginning the design phase of the project and working with adjacent landowners to finalize the cost sharing arrangement. Once the extension is complete,

access and traffic to the Philo Road Business District will greatly improve, also improving desirability of the area for potential new businesses.

- **Philo Road** is in the process of being widened and improved south of Colorado Avenue to just north of Windsor Road. This includes installation of new curbs and gutters in place of the old ditches, new sidewalks in some places, new driveway entries, addition of a center turn lane, and improvement of the bike path along the east side.
- **Bicycle Pathways** are present or proposed along Colorado Avenue, Florida Avenue, Windsor Road and Philo Road, helping to improve mobility in the area.
- **Parks** in the area are also proposed to be improved. The Park District is studying access improvements to Lohmann Park and a playground improvement grant has been received for Crestview Park.

### **Community Policing**

Increases in criminal activity in the area in recent years has been identified as an area of concern among area residents, business owners, and developers, as well as Council members. Much has been done to begin to alleviate the activity and the concerns over the area. Most importantly, the Police Department has hired and trained three new police officers in the past year. These additional hires will allow the department to reduce the size of the beat and to increase police presence and effectiveness. The department has focused on special enforcement and additional patrols of the area in an effort to maintain a more visible presence, deter potential criminal activity, and to apprehend more individuals. While this has resulted in an increased number of local arrests in 2004, the crime rate has leveled off for 2005-06. As a result of improved enforcement, arrests have increased which should help to reduce criminal activity in the area along with the number of reported crimes. Police have also worked closely with all major apartment owners and many businesses in the area to help improve security. Presentations have been made to the Southeast Urbana Neighborhood (SUNA) group, Southeast Urbana Business Group, and Mayor's Neighborhood Safety Task Force. A neighborhood watch group is being formed at Florida Avenue Apartments.

City leaders continue to meet with and keep tabs on problem properties in conjunction with the police and have been vigilant in enforcing nuisances and violations within the bounds of the law. The Rental Registration Program and the ongoing work of the Mayor's Neighborhood Safety Task Force will be of assistance in this effort.

### **Economic Development Programs**

Economic Development staff and others have worked hard to encourage property owners in the area to invest in their properties through continued contact, monitoring project status, meeting with owners and stakeholders, retention visits, and promoting and marketing sites and incentive programs for the area. Relevant activities include:

- An extension of the Enterprise Zone to include South Philo was approved last Fall. This provides further incentive for development and redevelopment to occur in the area in the form of possible property tax benefits and sales tax exemptions on building materials.

- Staff continues to administer the Philo Road Redevelopment Incentive Program. Past recipients include True Value Hardware and Sunnycrest Mall.
- Retention visits or contacts with businesses in the Philo Road area in the past year include Baskin-Robbins, Margarita's, Clive Follmer, Sunny China Buffet, Marathon, Carle Clinic, Centru Bank, Picadilly, Walgreens, ASPCA, County Market, Osco/CVS, and Sunnycrest Mall.
- The City provides marketing assistance for vacant properties, new developments, and outlots via the City website as well as through marketing packets that are given to potential tenants or developers upon request.
- The City updated the Philo Road Business Directory, and will continue to update periodically or as necessary.
- The City refers any development or tenant leads to realtors or owners representing buildings or sites that potentially fit their needs.

### **Business/Neighbor Coordination**

City leaders work closely with individual business and property owners, the Southeast Urbana Neighborhood Business Group, and the South Urbana Neighborhood Association (SUNA) in a variety of forums. Recent contacts include:

- City staff has continued to meet with various businesses and nearby apartment owners to encourage property cleanup and good management practices.
- Local citizens and staff members participated in another area cleanup organized by Ward Councilmember Barnes.
- The City regularly holds meetings of the Southeast Urbana Neighborhood Business Group to discuss local issues and educate business owners and interested parties as to recent efforts and concerns.
- SUNA is an active participant in the Mayor's Neighborhood Safety Task Force, which has met several times to address issues including community policing, rental registration, and improved nuisance abatement ordinances.

### **Future Prospects**

With continued strong efforts in both economic development and in neighborhood safety improvements, there is every indication that Philo Road will continue to improve and succeed as a place to live, work, and do business.

From an economic standpoint, the interest of the Atkins Group, Chris Creek, Walgreens, and possibly Meijer's in investing in major new commercial developments will improve and support the entire corridor as a viable community commercial center. If all goes as planned over the next few years, this corridor will be anchored on the north by the CTC mixed use development and a redeveloped Sunnycrest Mall; centered by the highly successful businesses of County Market, Walgreens, Osco, and Family Video; and anchored on the south by the areas' most upscale neighborhood shopping center in the Pines at Stone Creek Commons. Supporting this development will be new single family homes at Stone Creek, Southridge, the Vistas, the Ridge, Prairie Winds, Eagle Ridge, and Savannah Green; new condominium/townhomes at Stillwater

Landing, Prairie Winds, the Kmart site, and Stone Creek; and new apartments/senior housing at Amber Pointe, Canterbury Ridge, and Prairie Winds. Existing residential neighborhoods and apartment residents will enjoy the benefits of an increased police presence in the area, high levels of nuisance enforcement, and tougher requirements for problem rental properties.

However, even with the success of these proposals, there are still many challenges to be addressed. Among these are the completion of the retenanting of the Jewel Building, improvement or redevelopment of the Jerry's IGA property, development of outlots, and improved maintenance and upkeep of older properties. Continued improvements to the appearance and safety of the area is also essential to its success.

Prepared by:

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Attachments:

Area Map

Pines at Stone Creek Commons Flier

# PHILO ROAD BUSINESS DISTRICT



Updated September 6, 2006 by RLB, City of Urbana Community Development Services

- Available Bldg/Land
- Upcoming/Current Projects
- Road Projects
- Business District Boundary

