

A community by any other name ...

- By Woodstock Independent
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- Guest Column



By Terry Willcockson

... simply wouldn't be Woodstock.

A recent thread on a local Facebook site asked viewers which community their family should move to – Woodstock or McHenry. While a few folks preferred McHenry, the majority of responses quickly came back in favor of Woodstock. What was even more gratifying was the volunteered reason for their choice: the sense of community found here. There are few places that can claim Woodstock's sense of warmth, connectedness, and caring camaraderie – those attributes that often define "community."

There are now three major opportunities for residents to weigh in on developments that could shape Woodstock's sense of community for many years to come: 1) the Chicago Hubs-WellQuest transit-oriented development offering multi-family housing, senior independent apartments, and an assisted living facility, on the downtown "Die Cast" acreage owned by the city, designed to serve the growing demographic of those over age 55; 2) interest by national non-profit developer Artspace to provide a 40-unit loft-style live-work residence for creative individuals, supporting Woodstock's musicians, performers, and artisan entrepreneurs; and 3) **the Lennar Riverwoods development of 320 residential homes, proposed in an environmentally sensitive area, with lack of proximity to city services and neighborhood conveniences.**

As a result of the celebrated T-Mobile Hometown Techover award, the city was the beneficiary of an in-depth study by urban planners Smart Growth America. The report offered decisive documentation concerning the costs to build homes and infrastructure, and to provide ongoing maintenance and public safety services, to homes in outlying areas. Such large developments do bring “rooftops” attracting more retail, but they also provide high numbers of children to be educated, along with significantly more traffic, and resulting environmental impact.

Downtown infill developments, in contrast, rely on existing infrastructure, requiring less taxpayer investment, while creating an increased sense of social vibrancy that conveniently supports commerce and events with shoppers, employees, participants, and volunteers.

The Chicago Hubs-WellQuest development has been initially approved and is finalizing design plans, timelines, and funding options.

Artspace developers will be in town again Wednesday, Feb. 7, with a presentation of previous findings for all interested, at Woodstock Opera House from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

The Lennar Riverwoods development was recently voted against by Woodstock Plan Commission; however, the Plan Commission is an advisory group, and the recommendation against can still be overridden by Woodstock City Council at a future meeting.

City Council members represent every citizen in this town. Call, write, or email Mayor Mike Turner, Deputy Mayor Darrin Flynn, Gordie Tebo, Tom Nierman, Bob Seegers, Melissa McMahon, and Natalie Ziemba about how your tax dollars should support these potential contributors to Woodstock’s future. Verbal comments at City Council meetings, or sent prior in writing, directly impact decisions made. Do your research, ask questions, and become part of the process to help keep Woodstock’s treasured sense of community strong.

Terry Willcockson is the retired grants manager for the city of Woodstock, a member of the Board of Directors for The Land Conservancy of McHenry County, and a strong advocate for the proposed Artspace Woodstock project.

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