

From: Janice Durand [mailto:jdurand3296@charter.net]
Sent: Friday, February 03, 2012 10:25 AM
To: Martin, Al
Subject: 100 block proposal

To members of the Urban Design Commision:

As a long-time business owner on State Street , I wish to express my apprehension as to some possible unintended consequences of the proposed redevelopment of the 100 block of State Street. For thirty-one years, up to last fall when I sold my business, I operated two retail stores on the 200 block. From that vantage it is clear to me that the street is a major economic asset that the city needs to protect.

In the 1980's and '90's I opened stores in urban marketplaces in Milwaukee and St Louis built by the Rouse Company. Ironically, Rouse worked hard and spent millions to create what we naturally have on State Street, a concentrated pedestrian length of largely local and regional specialty stores and restaurants. The charm of the old buildings and most importantly, the small affordable spaces make a great natural incubator for local start-ups. It was a pleasure to work with the Rouse company, an early innovator and the first to use small specialty stores to anchor their projects. They valued small businesses like mine enough to woo them with subsidized construction. We seem to be going the opposite direction these days, with increased property values and rents. If this proposed project replaces the current spaces with larger, more expensive ones and displaces current occupants, it could weaken the street.

In business timing is critical, and I feel that the last thing State Street needs right now is another major construction project. The Overture construction, with its extensive demolition of the civic center , plus a concurrent reconstruction of the street and mall, ran to almost four years in total, with a major impact on the businesses on the 100 and 200 blocks. When the dust of the new construction settled, some businesses had closed, and others had suffered significant sales declines. The market of the street had been changed: with the elimination of three popular eating spaces, lunch hour business from the Square died, and many people had simply stopped coming to our part of the street because it was so unpleasant. After Overture opened it took years to get sales back up and by then everything was more expensive, including rent.

People are coming to State Street in greater numbers than ever, on their own volition, just as they have come and will continue to come to urban pedestrian streets in every other city in the country. Some of the buildings on the 100 block are in major disrepair, due to years of bad fortune and neglect. Renovate as needed, but leave the spaces small and affordable for local businesses. One of the reasons my business did well was because I had a great landlord who maintained the building beautifully and kept the rent reasonable.

As for the view from Overture, I for one am not offended by the backs of handsome well-kept buildings, especially when they are part of one of the street's unique flatiron blocks.

Fooling with a street as valuable , unique and well-loved as this one is a dangerous thing. The street is strong. It just needs to be treated gently for awhile.

Respectfully,

Janice Durand, 504 Wisconsin Avenue