

DOWNTOWN PEORIA

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2022

DDC Activities

Two-way Street Conversion

At our February board meeting, Cindy Loos of Hanson Engineering, presented plans for the pending one-to-two-way street restoration in downtown Peoria on Adams and Jefferson Streets from Walnut Street to I-74. The restoration will include extensive street improvements, such as bump out curbs at the beginning and end and permanent on-street parking. The project will begin soon and will take approximately two years to complete. The restoration will benefit retail stores and businesses in the area with better traffic flow and pedestrian crosswalks.

Downtown Wayfinding

The DDC Board approved spending close to \$7,000 to engage consultants for a downtown wayfinding implementation plan. For the past several months, a Wayfinding Implementation Committee has been working on this initiative for the downtown, and the DDC has agreed to make an investment to get to the next phase to position us to accelerate and develop a prototype. The Downtown Advisory Commission (DAC) asked the DDC to sponsor the initiative, and we have been working on behalf of the City along with the Peoria Riverfront Association, Discover Peoria, corporate leaders, and the DAC. We believe this initial planning phase will benefit the City when they address the full-scale roll out in the future.

Property For Sale/Lease

1335 SW Washington St.



In the popular Warehouse District, this 127,000-square-foot 6-floor warehouse/office building has onsite parking and adjacent parking lots, 10-12' ceiling height with 20' x 20' column spacing, 1200 Amp service, freight elevators and docks. This building is also available for lease.

Property highlights include:

- Open storage space & restrooms on all floors
- 1st floor office: private offices, open lobby area, storage & warehouse area (21,000 sq. ft.)
- 2nd floor office: private offices, & large open storage & warehouse area (20,500 sq. ft.)
- 3rd floor office: private offices, conference room & large open area for cubicles (20,500 sq. ft.)
- 4th - 6th floors offer open storage/warehouse space (16,300 sq. ft. each level)

Asking price is \$1,590,000. To inquire about this commercial opportunity, contact Jason Miller at Maloof Commercial, jason@maloofcom.com or (309) 693-3000.

New Development

Parking in the Warehouse District

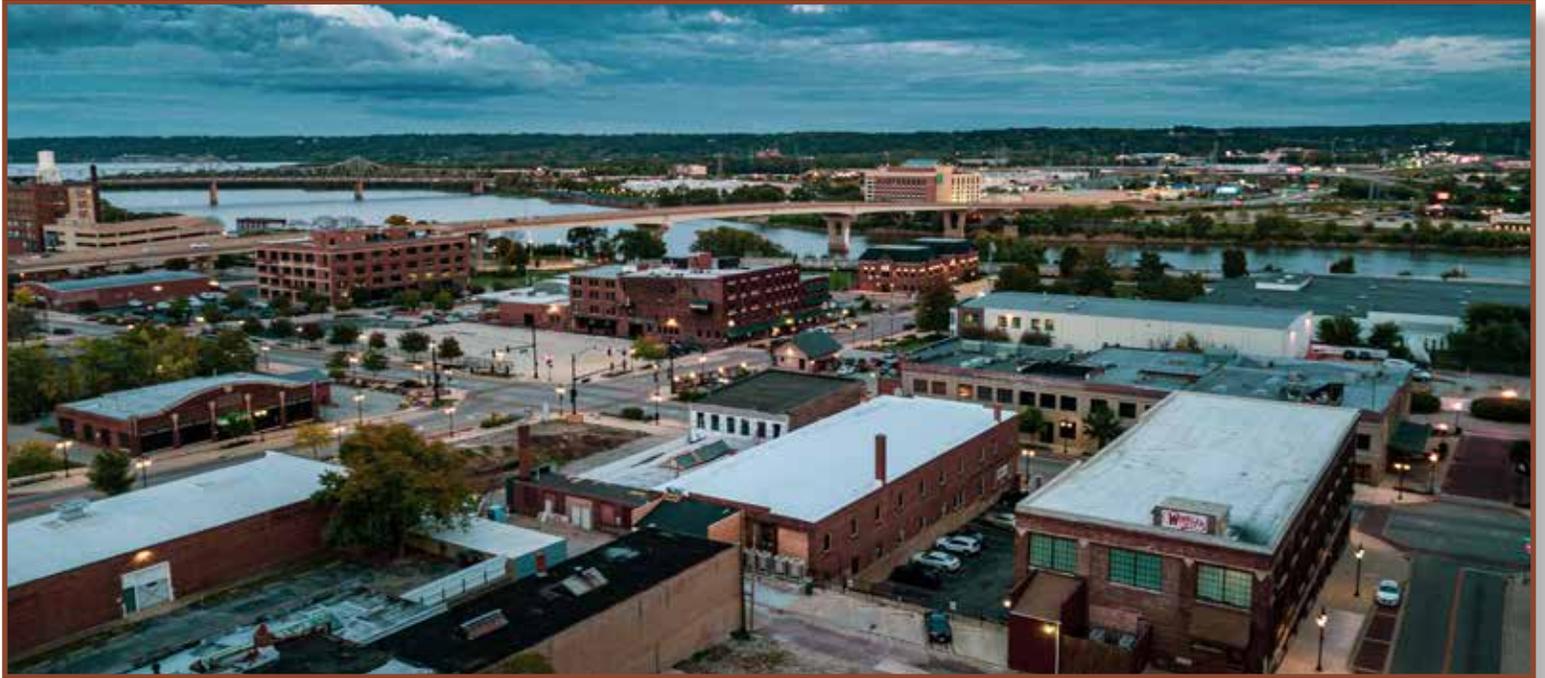


Photo credit: www.chriskhouryproductions.com

Good news! According to a recent report from Central Illinois Proud, the Peoria City Council has approved a purchase agreement for additional parking in the Warehouse District. Michael Freiling, President/CEO of the DDC, said the Warehouse District is crucial for downtown growth. This comes as projects such as the 812 Lofts are underway, which will provide an additional 126 living units at 812 Washington Street. Freiling also said two other projects are in the works that would also provide around 100 units each.

“Study after study, example after example shows in order for a downtown to be revitalized, you need people living in the downtown,” Freiling said. But one issue has plagued the area, the amount of parking available for a possible influx of tenants. **“A parking study was done several years ago which showed that we had a deficit of at least 800 cars,”** said Freiling.

Tuesday, Peoria City Council approved a land purchase agreement with J.P. Riverfront LLC for an old rail property behind the 800 to 1000 block of Washington Street. The city bought the land for nearly \$1.7 million using Warehouse District TIF. The property will give the city a new tool to address parking in the area. **“The purchase of this land will allow us to put in a surface parking lot to service all of the buildings in the Warehouse District in that stretch,”** said Patrick Urich, Peoria city manager. At-large city councilman Sid Ruckriegel said the land purchase fulfills a promise made to busi-

nesses and residents in the area. **“To provide the amount of parking that we know we need, that will not only help current tenants but be able to keep that furnace really going there,”** Ruckriegel said.

Freilinger said the land purchase helps address an immediate need. By making the Warehouse District more attractive to developers, he said it’s beneficial for the entire city. **“We’re going to see 10’s and 10’s of millions of dollars invested in Peoria through the revitalization of these buildings,”** Freilinger said. We are hopeful that construction will begin later this year.

Bob Michel Bridge Project



Did you know that there are no barrier protected pathways for pedestrians across the Illinois River within 270 miles of Peoria? To the north, the closest one is across the river in Marseilles, Illinois; and to the south, the closest one is across the river in St. Louis. Thanks to current construction on the McCluggage Bridge and to the efforts of Ray Lees, Planning Program Manager at the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC), that is about to change, and what a welcome change that will be! The McCluggage Bridge will soon have a 14-foot barrier protected pathway on the south side of the bridge, while the Bob Michel Bridge will have an equally wide barrier protected pathway on the north side of the bridge, which will link both sides of the river, Peoria and East Peoria. These two pathways will connect the trail system, riverfronts, commercial/retail areas and residential neighborhoods on either side of the Illinois River. The Bob Michel Bridge pathway project’s scope of work also included planning for the terminus on the East Peoria and Peoria sides of the bridge.



All of us who have crossed the Bob Michel Bridge have observed that there are many pedestrians, bicyclists and occasional motorized wheelchair on any given day in any type of weather crossing the bridge. Socioeconomic circumstances for those not able to afford transportation or own a vehicle prompt most folks to walk or ride their bike across the narrow, elevated sidewalk or on the painted shoulder of the bridge deck. Seeing their vulnerability, Ray thought of ways he might be able to address this issue within the structure of the TCRPC and relationships with IDOT.

An engineering feasibility study was the first step to determine if such a pathway could even be constructed on the bridge. Ray turned to retired IDOT engineer and current Associate Vice President of Terra Engineering, Eric Therkildsen, PE, for advice on the path forward. Eric's experience and insights were invaluable in helping Ray properly frame the complex engineering response to this regional need, first with the feasibility study and then with the planning, design and construction of the modifications of the bridge to accommodate a pathway. Neither the estimated cost of the feasibility study of \$50,000 or subsequent implementation planning (\$2 million) and construction (\$18 million) phases were in the prioritized queue for TCRPC or IDOT District 4's planning or capital projects. If this project was to proceed, it needed significant regional support not only from stakeholders throughout the Tri-County area but elected officials as well.

While not a "slam dunk", Ray knew that most of the folks representing over thirty public and private stakeholders located throughout the region he planned to contact on both sides of the river had observed the same people crossing the bridge. From municipalities, park districts, bike/fitness businesses, chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, healthcare providers as well as bike and running clubs, to a person, they and their organizations and businesses understood the need and supported the exploration of such a pathway and the initial feasibility study. This group, by the way, included the Downtown Development Corporation. With that universal support, Eric and Ray proceeded to knit the story together to present to the

general public and get their response. It was quite clear that everyone shared a personal empathy for those having to cross the bridge on foot or bike. And, something should be done!

As mentioned earlier, Ray reached out to our municipal, county and state elected officials throughout the impacted area with information on the plans and huge base of support. Certainly, the message was clear but the funding was more than a heavy lift at \$20 million, if at all feasible. In the political realm, sometimes timing is everything. In this case, it was the development and promotion of the infrastructure capital funding bill Rebuild Illinois. With the quite evident socioeconomic impact benefiting those less fortunate, the significant improvement in safety for those crossing the bridge on foot or bike and the diverse and widespread public and private regional support, the project met many of the criteria the state set for capital funding.

State Representatives Ryan Spain and Jehan Gordon-Booth were aware of the very positive beneficial attributes this project brought to the region and submitted the project for funding under this new program. To everyone's surprise, the entire \$20 million needed for the feasibility study, Phase I and II Planning/Design and construction was awarded. Representative Spain adds, "The modernization of the Bob Michel Bridge is an important project for our region. State lawmakers on both sides of the aisle advocated strongly to fund bridge deck improvements and expand the riverfront trail system for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the Illinois River."

Due to the fact that the Phase I and Phase II Engineering Services and construction for this project are fully funded by legislated action in the Rebuild Illinois program, its schedule has been accelerated with planning and design services to be completed in time for a Spring 2023 construction bid letting. To expedite the construction, IDOT plans to close the bridge to all motorized traffic for one year yet will provide a pedestrian and bike pathway across the bridge during the construction period. The bridge is proposed to be re-opened to all traffic in 2024.

The project scope includes a 14-foot pedestrian pathway with a barrier and reengineering of the terminus of the Bob Michel Bridge on both the Peoria and East Peoria sides. The pathway upgrade will be included in the two-way traffic restoration plan for Adams Street in downtown Peoria, ensuring that it is connected to the riverfront path. We applaud Ray Lees for his vision for a safer pedestrian pathway across the Bob Michel Bridge, Eric Therkildsen at Terra Engineering for the dedicated, pro bono effort and expertise, the community supporters on both sides of the river, Representatives Spain and Gordon-Booth who submitted the proposal to secure Rebuild Illinois funds, and to IDOT for carrying this project forward for the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists who utilize the Bob Michel Bridge. Together, we can Rebuild Illinois!

Downtown Resident Spotlight

Alicia M. Calderon



Meet Alicia M. Calderon, Community Engagement Coordinator for Discover Peoria. Alicia also shares her talents as Public Relations Chair for the Peoria Women's Club. She was born in El Salvador and grew up in Los Angeles, California. She currently makes her home in downtown Peoria in an apartment on Water Street where she has lived since May of 2021.

We love to hear from downtown residents and hope you are inspired by our conversation below:

DDC: What brought you downtown?

AC: I fell in love with Downtown Peoria from my first visit and always wanted to live in this area. Downtown was perfect for me and my lifestyle.

DDC: How did you find out about downtown living options?

AC: I did a lot of research online and in-person before I found the right place. I think walking the buildings in person is very important when you are choosing to move to the area because you have to see what building is the right fit for your lifestyle. Downtown has different options, and you want to make sure you find the perfect fit so you get the most enjoyment of the downtown experience.

DDC: Do you prefer renovated old buildings or modern new buildings downtown?

AC: Renovated old buildings are definitely my preference. The buildings have so much charm and history to them, it would be a shame to lose that. The brick walls add so much character to our rooms and were a definite selling point.

DDC: Is the price of living in the city affordable?

AC: The price is affordable, and the quality of life that you get is priceless. Being within walking distance from all the cool, fun things the city has to offer all year round is a huge benefit.

DDC: Is there a sense of community?

AC: There absolutely is a sense of community. You run into neighbors all the time from different buildings who always wave hello. The local coffee shop knows your order when you walk in and are happy to see you and concerned when you are gone for a couple of days. I make an effort to support local businesses around me on a weekly basis, and this in return has helped me build relationships with everyone working in these businesses.

DDC: Are there enough food/beverage options?

AC: There are plenty of options and food is amazing at all of them. All the restaurants offer something different and unique, and this keeps me coming back. I believe there is always room for more.

DDC: Do you plan on staying in your current residence downtown? What do you love most about it?

AC: I want to live downtown for as long as I can. I cannot see myself living anywhere else in the Peoria area. I love that I can walk to restaurants, coffee shops, and my local bars for a night of drinks. The summers are extra fun with the farmers market at my front door. Entertainment is just around the corner with either dueling pianos at the Broadway Lounge, live bands at Martinis, or the Riverfront Museum playing a movie, not to mention all the festivals that take place from Fiesta del Rio to the Art Festival and everything in between.

DDC: What do you think about the new development and new businesses opening in Downtown Peoria? How will that affect/benefit you and your business?

AC: I love the development that is happening in our downtown area. I think it is very important for the growth of our city and the quality of life for everyone that lives downtown. A busy downtown can draw new residents and visitors alike. More foot traffic downtown will help current businesses thrive and help new businesses have a successful experience in our Peoria area.

DDC: What effect has the DDC had on downtown improvements and/ or you and your business?

AC: The DDC has done a great job in making sure that our area looks good and that we keep growing. The growth has drawn in new residents and investors that want to

be part of these improvements. I love Peoria and promote our wonderful city everywhere I go. The DDC needs the help of all residents to market the great work that is being done and the great work that is to come.

DDC: What do you most like about living and working downtown?

AC: What I like the most about living and working downtown is the ability to walk everywhere. Our streets are clean, and I always run into a friendly face.

DDC: What new businesses and services would you like to see?

AC: I would like to see a grocery store downtown. I think that residents would benefit the most from it, but people working downtown would have an option to get some shopping done before heading home. A pharmacy would also be helpful.

DDC: What is your vision for downtown Peoria?

AC: My vision for this city is that more residents and locals take time to appreciate and experience downtown. I would want more events during the summer that get locals and visitors downtown. One of my ideas in the past was a movie at the park on the riverfront. Local businesses can sell food and drinks while residents enjoy summer evenings under the stars. This event can be for everyone and anyone.

We would like to thank Alicia for her insights and vision for downtown Peoria. To learn more about downtown living options, visit our website at www.downtownpeoria.us.

Living Downtown

According to a recent article in the Peoria Journal Star, 2021 shattered the homicide record in Peoria. In 2021, 34 people were victims of homicides, breaking the 2019 record of 25 homicides. We should also note that homicides were up across the country in 2021.

As an advocate for downtown Peoria, one of the questions the DDC is frequently asked is, “Is it safe to live in downtown Peoria?” Of the 34 homicides in Peoria, only one occurred within the boundaries of the DDC’s definition of downtown. That was a stabbing that occurred on the very edge of the near north downtown at the 700 block of NE Jefferson. Our boundaries stop at Wayne Street (the 800 block), and this homicide was just inside that boundary. The Medical, Riverfront, Central Business, and Warehouse Districts experienced ZERO (0) homicides in all of 2021. Plus, there were no fatal shootings in any of the districts of the downtown; the one homicide was a stabbing. Business owners and downtown residents said they have been fighting this misper-

ception of downtown not being safe for over 30 years. A downtown resident told us, “As far as safety goes, I have no concerns at all. I find Downtown to be safe. I often walk to restaurants and take evening walks when the weather is nice. I never had any concerns for my safety or the safety of others. I believe our police department does a great job with patrolling our area, they are always very vigilant and friendly. The park district also does a great job of keeping our riverfront area clean and presentable. I believe that extra effort makes a difference in the safety of our community. A clean downtown is a safe downtown.” Result, living in and visiting Peoria’s downtown is safe. We hope to see you soon!

Downtown Activities

60th Annual Fine Arts Fair

Apply Now! - It’s the new year and the Peoria Art Guild is already starting to plan for the 60th annual Fine Art Fair to be held September 24-25, 2022. In January, the application opened on ZAPP. The Guild is looking forward to another successful Fine Art Fair and invites you to apply to be one of the 130 artists this year. As one of the oldest art events in the country, the Peoria Art Guild Fine Art Fair is nationally recognized for its organization, event marketing, and for putting artists’ needs at the top of the priority list. Some of the artist perks offered are affordable hotel rates, convenient artist parking, “grab ‘n go” breakfasts each morning, boxed lunches, Friday night homemade pizza party, Saturday Artist Award Party, snacks in the Artist Breakroom, cold water and hot coffee, along with 200+ enthusiastic volunteers to take care of any artist need. The art fair was voted #2 in the Top Art Fairs in the Midwest for 2019 and #20 in the nation by Sunshine Magazine in 2020! So, join the best and send your application in today: www.zapplication.org/

Visit Downtown Peoria!

The DDC web site is a wonderful resource for development resources and things to do in downtown Peoria. From markets to festivals to concerts and more, downtown Peoria has multiple offerings every month of the year. In collaboration with Peoria Riverfront Association, visit our web site at www.downtownpeoria.us/play.

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