



# VANDEWALLE & ASSOCIATES INC.

**Date:** October 1, 2015

**To:** Black Earth Economic Development Committee

**From:** Scott Harrington, Principal Planner

**CC:** Shellie Benish, Clerk-Treasurer  
Ashley Robertson, Assistant Planner  
Jackie Mich, Assistant Planner

**Re:** Summary of Public Open House and Project Priority Recommendations

---

## Public Open House

Roughly 15 people attended the open house and after a short presentation, they excitedly poured over the materials. The analysis was well received with several residents expressing how impressed they were with the depth of analysis and commenting on how exciting it would be to have the identified projects and uses in the Village. The idea of a new brew pub and outdoors retailer were particularly popular. Others were interested in understanding the implementation process and were encouraged by the Village's commitment to sparking economic growth. Overall, the community was excited to see projects and programs that would help Black Earth thrive in a way that maintained its rural charm, while still maximizing its economic potential.

Although only one comment form was turned in, several attendees indicated they would complete their form at home and drop it off at City Hall within the next couple of days. We also will be working with Shellie to have all of the information posted on the Village's website along with a downloadable comment form. Further, we left all of the display boards and Shellie will talk with the library about displaying them there. As additional comments are received, we will review and summarize those for the Committee as well.

## **Priority Recommendations**

As we discussed at the Committee meeting yesterday, we are at the point in the process where we have identified several potential catalytic projects and programs for your consideration. The next step is to create a detailed action plan for advancing these initiatives, but before doing so it's important that we receive direction on which of these are of most interest/importance to you and the extent to which the Committee/Village is willing to take action and incur some risk in order to advance them.

Given the large number and diverse set of potential projects, it's understandable that you need more time to evaluate them and to discuss them with the entire Village Board. While all of the projects have merit and potential, some certainly will have greater catalytic impacts than others. Likewise, some are easier and less expensive to achieve, but may not have the same level of impact as others will.

Based on the analysis we've conducted so far, our professional experience and judgement, and the Committee's stated desire to take concrete action, we recommend the following projects be given serious consideration as top priorities. We appreciate the fact that some of these are ambitious and that the Village does not have significant experience in implementing redevelopment plans. However, with the right professional assistance, we believe these are achievable and will have the types of positive and lasting impacts sought by the Committee and members of the community.

### **1. Redevelopment of the Former Dealership on Hwy 14**

This site has been mostly vacant and grossly underutilized for quite some time. It is blighted and highly visible creating a significant negative impression of the community along the Hwy 14 corridor. On the other hand, it's relatively large and adjoins DNR-owned property along the creek to the east, and could attract a wide range of uses that would take advantage of the significant traffic volumes on Hwy 14 and the Shoe Box's large customer base. Capitalizing on this site's full potential, though, will require the Committee to play a strong role in developer/business recruitment, which will likely involve some cost and risk. However, of all of the projects we've identified, this one has the greatest potential to make a dramatic and lasting positive change both in terms of appearance and economics and to serve a catalyst for additional redevelopment along Hwy 14 and even in the downtown.

### **2. Redevelopment of the Vacant Co-Op Site Behind the Historic Depot**

This is the only vacant site of sufficient size in the downtown to support a larger-scale project of any type. As such, we believe it has potential for multifamily housing (garden apartments or townhomes, etc.) marketed toward young professionals and active empty nesters – housing that is not currently available in the community or general area. Like the former dealership on Hwy 14, the Committee will need to take an active role in recruiting a developer. Unlike the Hwy 14 site, though, this site is owned by the Co-Op, which means that gaining formal site control (and the expenses and risk associated with it) may not be necessary.

### **3. Trail to the High School/Wolf Run Trail**

The completion of the Wolf Run Trail between Mazomanie and the high school has generated a lot of excitement and created significant momentum for continuing it on to Black Earth. The partners that helped fund the trail are very happy with the result and are supportive of moving ahead with an extension to the Village. However, the funding partners would prefer that the Village play a leadership role in planning and constructing this segment. Although volunteers and community members need to be a part of this project, the Village will likely need to run point in bringing people together and moving this forward.

### **4. Gateway and Streetscape Improvements Along Hwy 14 and the Downtown**

Outside of the Show Box, the Village lacks a strong, positive identity along Hwy 14. If travelers are not stopped by the traffic light at Mill St., they may very well pass through town without even realizing it. Further, even if they are stopped by the light, there are no cues indicating that the downtown is a mere three blocks away. In addition to creating new destination uses like those described above, improvements like gateways, wayfinding signage, and streetscaping can all assist with communicating an authentic, positive image for these areas and the entire Village. Fortunately, there are various grant programs that support these improvements, but creating some initial concepts and providing matching funds will be required in order to submit competitive grant applications. Some of the funding potentially could come from the tax increment finance (TIF) districts that cover these areas with increment generated from the above redevelopment projects.

Several of the other potential projects we've identified involve working with specific property owners and/or businesses to advance them, and we have not yet had an opportunity to share these ideas with them. However, we plan to do so soon and depending upon the responses we get, some of these may also rise to the level of a priority. Nevertheless, the priorities identified at this stage in the process should be those that the Committee believes have the greatest potential to make a positive impact and are those that the Committee is most willing to take the lead on and dedicate itself to moving ahead. The remaining projects will not disappear, it just means that the level of attention given to them by the Committee will be less than the priorities until conditions change that make them more ripe for the Committee's attention.

Once we receive your direction, we will quickly prepare a step-by-step action plan and get that back to you in order to advance the implementation of your priorities as quickly as possible. As requested, we'll also prepare a scope of services and budget estimate for assisting you in moving the projects forward.