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North Branch Corridor future being debated

'City's moves a major threat'

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PATRICK BUTLER

City Planning and Development officials kicked off plans earlier this month to possibly open the North Branch Industrial Corridor to uses other than manufacturing.

But a lot will depend on the community's input, deputy Planning and Development Commissioner Eleanor Gorski told a June 7 meeting at St. John Cantius Church, 825 N. Carpenter St.

It was one of several opening discussions on the future of the 28-acre site that once included the former Finkl Steel plant. The city hopes to revitalize the now-flaccid industrial climate on and around the site of the former Finkl plant. This could be the first time a Planned Manufacturing District designation will been rescinded, this one covering the 115-acre Clybourn corridor, roughly bounded by Clybourn, the Chicago River, North and Southport avenues. Some of the large parcels in the vicinity of Clybourn and Courtland have already been bought up by developers and speculators.

But according to Gorski, "the city is not initiating any zoning changes with this pro-



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"The city is not initiating any zoning changes with this process," said Eleanor Gorski, deputy commissioner of the city Dept. of Planning and Development.

cess. But there are some areas that allow different uses to coexist. This is a possibility. And that's what we're here to hear."

The city plans to get community input, digest it, start developing "land use scenarios," and return in August for follow-up discussions, then come back in the Fall with a tentative plan.

"We would then compare an "adopted land use plan" with any proposed new uses," Gorski said.

A transportation study will also be done in the Fall, she said.

"But we're not initiating any zoning changes with this process," Gorski said. Not everyone, however, was comforted

by these assurances. "We're concerned. We're very concerned," said Mike Holzer, executive director of the North Branch Works, which represents manufacturing concerns along the Corridor.

"Eleanor (Gorski) says they're doing this to address the speculation (that could come). I would argue that this is causing the specu-



"We're concerned. We're very concerned, said North Branch Works executive director Mike Holzer. "I fear it's more about accommodating development interests" than saving local businesses.

lation. We had been doing fine. Goose Island had gone from 1,000 to 5,000 workers. We could use some updates like breweries with tasting rooms, but we're doing fine."

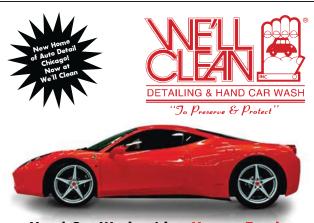
Holzer characterized the city's moves as "a major threat."

"I fear it's about accommodating development interests," Holzer said. And with the city suffering from the worst financial crisis in generations, those fears would appear to be legitimate, considering citizens are seeing city taxes and fees rising across the board.

Another man asked what incentives there would be for a factory to remain in the Corridor or to make capital improvements.

Others voiced concern about being priced out of the area while a business owner said he's being pushed out by condos being built next to his plant.

"That's exactly why we're doing this. To provide some certainty," said Gorski, who plans to return with four "draft scenarios" in August.



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