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Second Street Re-Construction

South Second Street Turns into a "Complete Street"

In 2007, the city started the planning process for resurfacing South Second Street from National Avenue to the River. At the time, city engineering felt strongly that the traffic count would increase significantly with planned new condo developments and renovations of buildings like the Pritzlaff. Juli Kaufmann, a local property owner and proponent for more pedestrian and bike friendly roads, contacted Alderman Witkowiak and asked for help in reducing drive lanes and adding bike lanes. Several meetings with DPW staff were held and the reception was not positive – we were told repeatedly that reducing traffic lanes was not an option.

The street was originally budgeted for resurfacing only. However, numerous complaints from property owners who reported their buildings shaking as a result of heavy truck and bus traffic sparked an investigation by DPW. A foot below the street surface, long abandoned trolley tracks and other buried infrastructure were exerting pressure on the adjacent building foundations. It became clear the removal of the tracks and a full reconstruction of the street was necessary.

By midyear 2008, as the decision to reconstruct the street was made, residents and property owners saw renewed opportunity to push for a redesign of the street as a "complete" street. The street would be narrowed to one driving lane in each direction, keeping the existing parking lane and adding a bike lane in each direction. This also allowed for widened sidewalks and inclusion of street trees. However, the city's traffic count from 2002, and their projections continued to be an issue of reducing the driving lanes. It took a number of community members to do a manual car count during the busiest times in the morning before the engineering department agreed to authorize a new traffic count. As expected the count was significantly lower and lane reductions became more feasible.

Through our media contacts, Urban Milwaukee ran an initial story. From the discussion around that, we generated interest in drawing our own picture of what the street should look like. A volunteer (who we have still not met to this day) drew a picture that was good enough to take second place in a national competition. We used that national publicity to generate a story in the Milwaukee Business Journal. Those efforts, helped exert pressure on public servants and officials who eventually became willing to listen to public input.

At some point, all the critical stakeholders stopped resisting, and then we had a full set of advocates that were able to optimize together. Street reconstruction started in spring 2010 and was completed by fall 2010. We also credit Ghassan Korban (before he became Commissioner) and Jeff Polenske, City Engineer, for being significant behind the scenes advocates.

Advocacy initiatives undertaken by community leaders and the Walker's Point Association were:

- Strong advocacy (calls, meetings, emails) of local alderman, DPW and city engineering
- Advocacy with State Representative Pedro Colon (state funding was paying for 80% of the reconstruction).
- Involvement of local media – Urban Milwaukee and Business Journal
- Public organizing, public meetings and petition drives

The planning for this project, and the community activism and involvement, took over four years from the initial repaving project to the completed redesign. It illustrates what individuals and groups of community visionaries can accomplish.



Excerpts from an article from Urban Milwaukee:

S. 2nd St., in Walker's Point, is another street in Milwaukee that is more than ready to go on a diet. In fact, there is an effort by a group of local business and property owners to have S. 2nd Street in Walker's Point rebuilt as a transformative catalyst to build momentum in an area of Milwaukee where the disparity between potential and reality is vast. The street already has "great bones," meaning it has pedestrian-scaled buildings with timeless architecture, local business operating on the street, and the urban fabric is still fairly well intact, which makes this street an attractive candidate for this kind of revitalization. Green features such as additional street trees, rain water retention strategies, lighting powered by renewable energy, and additional plantings have been high on the list of improvements desired, but the concept goes much further by reducing the street from four to two lanes of motor vehicle traffic, the addition of bike lanes and curb bumps outs, the use of enhanced pavement materials, and the widening of sidewalks.

The goal behind the plan is to help create an identity or brand for the area, to bring more life and vibrancy to the business district, and in turn spur further economic development in the area. Clearly, this is not just a good idea, but one that could help transform a street into the next vibrant Milwaukee district.

Mission

Walker's Point Association (WPA) serves as a voice for all stakeholders and influences development that honors its history and that aligns current reality with the envisioned spirit of Walker's Point. The priorities for green and sustainable development include craft industries, fresh water industry, mixed housing and initiatives that support the economic and social diversity of the neighborhood.

WPA also serves as a resource and information hub for ALL stakeholders.

Vision

Walker's Point Association is the connector and advocate among residents, businesses, and city officials creating a truly unified community.