

# Embracing the Rock

Janesville appears ready to use the Rock River downtown as an attraction

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JANESVILLE

After years of giving the cold shoulder, Janesville appears ready to snuggle up to the Rock River.

Residents have shunned the natural resource that many planners have said could and should become the city's major attraction.

Doors of downtown businesses face away from the river, for example. Only one business, Main Street Saloon, takes advantage of the view with a back deck.

Concrete walls keep floodwaters away, but they keep residents out of the river, as well.

A majority of residents who gathered in April for a downtown redevelopment meeting identified the river as the area's most important attribute, said Ryan Garcia, economic development coordinator for the city.

The focus is 240 acres stretching from Traxler Park south to the Jackson Street bridge—an area with more than four miles of riverfront and one dam.

A meeting Thursday will be the second of three and will offer maps for residents to see alternative uses for six redevelopment sites.

The Rock River as an attraction appeared to be a common denominator of many of the suggestions from residents during the first meeting, Garcia said. Most of those who attended want to figure out ways to get people to and in the river, he said.

Suggestions include a river rapids course for kayaking or an arcade in the lower level of the Olde Towne Mall that leads to a pedestrian river crossway and public space on the other side.

At the meetings, the consultants from SAA Design Group of Madison—a landscape architecture and civic engineering firm hired with a \$200,000 federal grant—urge people to think in different ways, Garcia said.

The resulting plan will outline how the city could put the redevelopment plan into action, including the costs of suggested projects, available grants and changes in zoning, Garcia said.

"This is an action-oriented plan," Garcia said. "This is what you have to do to make it happen.

"What we're trying to do is create something behind their (business) buildings so they take it upon themselves to reorient themselves to the river," Garcia said.

"It becomes another front door."

Creation of a town square was another common focus, and the plans identify areas where that could happen.

Each plan addresses the removal of the downtown parking plaza over the river. Residents believe additional parking must be provided near high-traffic areas, Garcia said.

Anyone is invited to the second meeting, and Garcia said he hopes to see people who were at the first meeting, as well.

Residents will be asked to suggest options for land use, such as preferred areas for public and commercial spaces and entertainment. For example, an area designated “naturalized” rather than “urban” might mean the concrete river walls would eventually be removed, Garcia said.

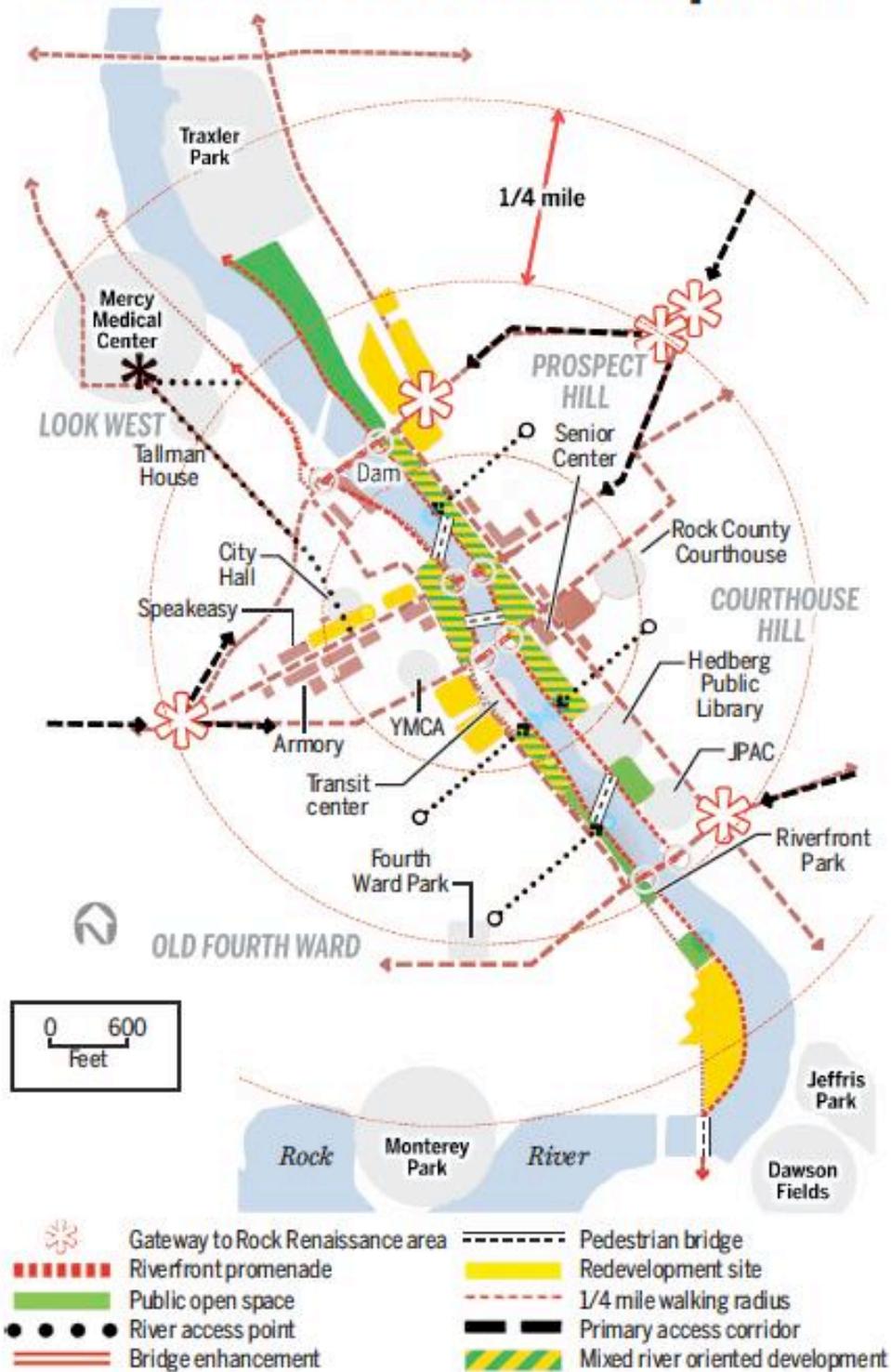
A third meeting will be scheduled the week of July 18. The final plan will be presented to the plan commission in September and to the Janesville City Council in October.

## IF YOU GO

What: A meeting seeking public input on strategies to improve Janesville’s downtown riverfront. The event is being organized by Janesville city staff, the SAA Design Group and the Downtown Revitalization Committee. It is the second of three planned input sessions. When: 6 p.m. Thursday Where: Craig High School cafeteria, 401 S. Randall Ave. Details: Attendees will be asked to work in small groups to evaluate and give input on alternative redevelopment strategies for the riverfront and downtown. All community members are welcome. To share your thoughts: Residents can also provide opinions by contacting David Schreiber or Bruce Morrow of SAA Design Group at 608-255-0800 or [dschreiber@saa-madison.com](mailto:dschreiber@saa-madison.com), or Ryan Garcia, Janesville economic development coordinator, at 608-755-3180 or [garciar@ci.janesville.wi.us](mailto:garciar@ci.janesville.wi.us). A website with a community comment section is available at [saa-madison.com/cc/janesville/overview](http://saa-madison.com/cc/janesville/overview).

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# Potential riverfront development



SOURCES: SAA Design Group, K. Singh & Associates, Place Dynamics

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