

Milwaukee Bucks Can Learn from Titletown

By Pat Small

Rumor has it that the City's subsidy package for the Milwaukee Bucks is a done deal. Thus, concerned citizens may be wasting precious time and energy suggesting alternatives for a subsidized parking garage and entertainment mall. But, maybe not.

The Bucks aren't the only Wisconsin sports team expanding their turf. Bill Glauber's September 6th *Journal Sentinel* feature detailed how the Green Bay Packers designed Titletown District, a mixed-use development (on 34 acres the team purchased near Lambeau Field). It demonstrates how an economic feasibility study and ongoing civic engagement launched a dynamic community project. The Packers and local government leaders committed to several guiding principles:

1. Build a vibrant neighborhood with desirable amenities and local businesses--not just bars and a "boring mall."
2. Respect other local businesses and don't replicate what already exists.
3. Include a substantial public space (10 acres) designed for everyone's enjoyment, not just paying customers or passersby.
4. Create development that "gives back to the community"--after determining what the community actually needs and wants.

In contrast, "public spaces" within and next to the proposed Bucks arena-mall would be used to generate revenue *exclusively* for the Bucks (as mandated by the state). Their courtyard/performing space would likely be a mere platform to sell beer and brats--not an all-welcoming public park.

In April, with great fanfare, the Bucks presented glitzy sketches of their dubious "Live! Block" based on the overly subsidized Kansas City Live! The Bucks have yet to release a detailed written proposal. Perhaps more-specific plans have been revealed privately to deal makers. If so, why hasn't the public seen them? The Bucks need to show a business plan with specifics, like any other developer. Just what are their intentions for *our* downtown?

Milwaukee taxpayers are being asked to pay 100 percent of costs to construct so-called public plazas and an unnecessary replacement city parking garage. Don't we deserve at least a sneak peek before the deal's final nail is hammered down?

Of course, project details will eventually be required, but these important downtown decisions could well continue being made in secret and in piecemeal fashion. Willy-nilly decision making precludes big-picture planning.

The Wisconsin Center District, which promotes and operates three Westtown convention-related properties, will be required by the state to pay \$213 million (with interest) for arena construction. That's an albatross around its neck, nixing potential convention center expansion. Consequently, Milwaukee's convention business will likely continue to disappoint.

Unlike Titletown's *inclusive* process, the Bucks and the City of Milwaukee only allowed public comment *after* this deal was fully hatched and presented as a *fait accompli*. That's despite public input being customary in Milwaukee and a cornerstone of successful major public projects.

Perfunctory presentations at "town hall" meetings and a city-hall public hearing have been for show-and-tell--not to elicit public input to help craft the project. The public is being treated as a piggy bank. It has not mattered to city and Bucks officials what taxpayers may want on North 4th Street and in Park East. Nor has there been any official commitment to *not* duplicate or cannibalize existing businesses in downtown's most concentrated entertainment zone.

No credible data supports claims that the Bucks' mammoth bar complex will not hurt about 70 businesses on Old World Third Street, Water Street and near the arena. Blithely saying it won't happen will not make it so. Milwaukee's entertainment market cannot magically grow overnight.

When planning Titledown, the Packers wisely chose to create "something that was new, different and complementary." What the Bucks propose, and city officials endorse, does not adhere to such conscientious guideposts. The Packers' plan is the organic result of a from-the-ground-up process--not a top-down demand--from visiting billionaires, no less.

It's not too late to adopt principles for developing the 30 acres of *free* public land the Bucks will receive. City officials and the Bucks have a moral obligation to ensure that this land is used for the greater good, not just the Bucks' private gain. Senator Herb Kohl, the recipient of community largesse for 25 years by virtue of free Bradley Center rent, could also insist that the public's interest be protected. Doing so would preserve the noble legacy of Kohl's generous \$100-million arena contribution.

In exchange for accepting public assets, the Bucks must guarantee specific community givebacks, as team owners do in other cities. Such commitments cannot be left to the whims of the Bucks' owners. Vague promises of trickle-down prosperity will not suffice.

Green Bay and the Packers are successfully relying on public involvement to build Titledown. Milwaukee city officials could insist on a participatory process for ancillary development, rather than a "Bucks-Know-Best" approach.

Treating taxpayers equitably will benefit both the Bucks franchise and democracy. Cavalier deal making will undermine both.

About a mile away from the Bucks arena, Brady Street residents and merchants are opposing a single tavern that would replace a hardware store. They want to keep a healthy mixed-use balance in their vibrant historic neighborhood.

Oddly, there has been neither endorsement nor rejection by owners of arena-area bars and restaurants regarding the potential poaching of their trade by bar mall businesses. What might their silence mean?

The Bucks could handily win Common Council approval to build their mall that could recklessly flood a thriving hospitality market. But, really, how will a hulking bar mart improve our downtown economy? Will it just end up being an out-of-place, over-sold boondoggle?

Why rush to approve their nebulous scheme? The Bucks' arena groundbreaking deadline is self-imposed and contradicts the one set by the NBA.

This mall could be an empty--and costly--legacy for Mayor Tom Barrett and the Milwaukee Common Council. There's still time to avoid jeopardizing local businesses and needlessly paying \$35 million for a new garage. Those savings could be applied to dramatically reduce staggering construction debt imposed by the state Legislature upon the Wisconsin Center District.

Pat Small of Milwaukee is a lifelong Milwaukee Bucks and Green Bay Packers fan and semi-retired real estate investor.

2860 N. Shepard Ave., Milwaukee, 53211

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Packers' Tiletown District targets Green Bay brain drain



Mark Hoffman

By Bill Glauber of the Journal Sentinel

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Ashwaubenon — It's not very often that you hear NFL executives talk about the importance of place, quality of life and the need to help stem a potential brain drain of kids going off to college and leaving their hometown behind.

But then, the Green Bay Packers aren't your average team.

"We're not going to change the world," Green Bay Packers President and CEO Mark Murphy said last week as he discussed the team's planned Tiletown District, a 34-acre, mixed-use development west of Lambeau Field and due to open by the fall of 2017.

Yet in a big way, the Packers are out to change their piece of the world in northeastern Wisconsin.

They're poised to create what amounts to a new neighborhood, a place for fans to visit on game days but also a daily gathering spot for those who call Green Bay, Brown County and the surrounding area home.

"We look at this as one of the best ways we can give back and help the community," Murphy said.

And one of the ways the Packers say they want to help is to provide the kinds of amenities that attract and retain young, college-educated and skilled people, as well as elements that appeal to other residents, from young families to empty-nesters.

"If this community slips, we slip," said Ed Polley, the Packers vice president and general counsel. "As goes Brown County, so goes the Green Bay Packers. It's in our interest to make sure we're looking to the long-term health of this community."

Three years ago, the Packers commissioned a study to see how a development might fit in with Brown County. The study looked at the

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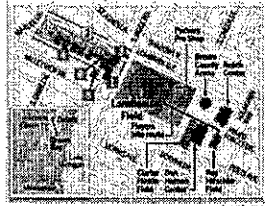
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Green Bay's leaders hope the Green Bay Packers' plans for an entertainment district, which includes a hotel, sports medicine clinic and restaurant and craft brewery, will help Green Bay retain and attract young college educated and skilled people.

Titledown District:
 (1) LODGE KOHLER HOTEL (2) RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS
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feasibility of a development, Policy said, as well as other issues, including a brain-drain of young talent that might slip away to larger cities and what the Packers could do to help stop the loss.

Policy said the team looked to create a new "social and commercial amenity that would provide some return for the Packers but also hopefully retain and attract those young people."

The Titledown District won't be a silver bullet. But it will be another piece in a puzzle to make the area an attractive destination.

The first tenants will include Lodge Kohler, a Kohler Co.-owned and operated luxury hotel, a Bellin Health Sports Medicine Clinic and the Hinterland Restaurant and Brewery. Additional commercial and retail development will follow during the build-out. And there will be housing, too, 30 to 50 townhouses.

The centerpiece is a 10-acre public plaza that will feature an ice-skating rink in the wintertime and events year-round.

Rossetti, a Detroit-based architecture design and planning firm, is a consultant for the project.

"We have an opportunity to create a special little neighborhood," said Matt Rossetti, president of the firm. "This will be an electric place once we get the combination of neighborhood, retail, bars and restaurants, and hotel. There will be a nice little synergy."

The Packers' brand will help drive the project.

"The draw of the Green Bay Packers is pretty staggering," he said.

Rossetti said having one-third of the project devoted to a public plaza is unusual. He said the Packers "are contributing a whole lot of dollars on this public realm without getting nearly as much return."

The amount of leased square footage provides the team with a return on its investment, he said.

Policy said the team worked to provide something unique in the area. For instance, there's already a major shopping mall nearby, so the Packers didn't want to cannibalize that business. Nor did they want to create something entirely urban, since downtown Green Bay has been revitalized with apartments along the Fox River and snazzy headquarters for Schreiber Foods and Associated Bank.

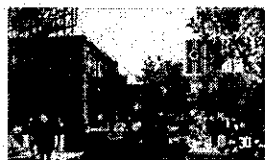
"We were trying to make sure we had something that was new, different and complementary," Policy said.

Right now, it's all a blank canvas. But the development can be more easily imagined now that an old Kmart has been removed, along with a Big Lots store, two gas stations, a hotel, a Hardee's, a tire dealer and a few small shops.

The Packers spent \$28.6 million on the land where the Titledown District will rise, according to the Green Bay Press-Gazette. All told, the team will invest \$65 million in Titledown.

The team's first commercial development on other land in the area was

Ed Policy



Green Bay Packers

A hotel, brewpub and public plaza will anchor the Titledown District, which the Packers hope makes the city more attractive.

for outdoor retailer Cabela's.

Younger residents are certainly up to speed on the Packers' plans, which were announced last month.

David Roy, a graphic coordinator from De Pere, said the development may contain "too much park area and not enough nightlife."

"Hinterland is a good start," he said. "But they need to build from there."

Anne Fritsch of De Pere said to keep people in the area "they have to make places where young people can go out on the weekends."

Alex Honzik of Mishicot said younger people aren't just looking to be entertained. They're also looking for good jobs. After graduating from Marquette University, he landed a job in sales with a local company.

"I wanted to come back home," he said.

After living in Minneapolis for 15 years, Kelly Deininger returned home to the Green Bay area in May with her husband and two small children.

She was stunned by the transformation of Green Bay's downtown and is hopeful the Packers development can continue the area's momentum.

"The more opportunity that we can give people to move back to the Green Bay area will help the city as a whole," she said.

Jeff Mirkes, executive director of Downtown Green Bay Inc., said the city has seen a remarkable resurgence that includes 200 residential units under construction along the Fox River and an expansion of the KI Convention Center.

"We think we have a national story to tell," he said. "We're part of something unique and cool. When the national sportscasters say, 'Put this on your list, you need to see this place,' that's an open invitation to come to downtown."

Garritt Bader, a local real estate developer, said the Titledown District, combined with the downtown boom, can "raise the idea of who we are in Green Bay and how people perceive Green Bay. It's almost like a coming of age for our community."

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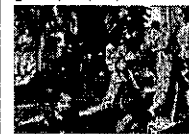
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Kevin Quinn, dean of the Schneider School of Business and Economics at St. Norbert College, said the Titledown District could help attract newcomers, too.

"We hire people from all over the country," he said. "One of the most challenging things we have found here is trying to get people to apply. They think Green Bay is what they see on television in December. What they don't understand are the festivals and this fantastic river that comes through here."

By making the project unique, Quinn said, the Packers have a great chance of success.

"The Packers could have gone in the wrong direction on this one," he said. "They could have just built up a mall. That's pretty boring. I think younger people are looking for unique experiences."

He also saluted the Packers for not attempting to pull business from existing areas.

"They are adding to the quality of the community," he said.

And the team is also building on its history. As plans for the project took shape, Policy's wife looked at photos of the development area in relation to Lambeau Field, and realized it seemed familiar.

Look closely, and there in your eye and heart you see the outline of the Vince Lombardi Trophy.

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About Bill Glauber

Bill Glauber is a general assignment reporter, focusing on profiles and politics.

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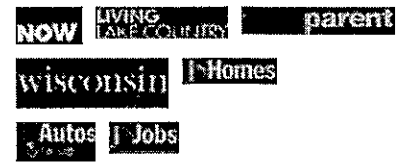
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