

Changes to Downtown Elm Grove through Redevelopment

Being an octogenarian, I reflect back to the earlier times of Elm Grove (pre-Village) when I was born and raised on Katherine Drive, reminiscing the days when you could easily walk around Elm Grove as I frequently did to attend the four-room schoolhouse of St. Mary's. I came to know my neighbors while travelling the Village on my bicycle delivering the newspaper. This was only the start of a long work career within the Village. While attending Pius High School, evenings, weekends, and summers were spent at the Elm Grove Milling Company owned by my father, Roland Reinders. Work entailed unloading 100-pound bags of grain from rail cars, as well as delivering feed to the Elm Grove/Brookfield farmers and homeowners that raised chickens. After returning from a stint in the Navy during the Korean War, I saw Elm Grove changing from a farm community to residential homes. It was this observation of "growth and change" that led me to transition the family business from farm & feed supplies to a retail garden store with lawn mower sales/service. I was dedicated to being a resident and business owner within the Village and providing goods and services to my neighbors. My brother Richard G. Reinders joined my efforts and helped launch the commercial lawn care supply business catering to landscapers and golf courses.

I always had strong feelings to support and give back to my community, and did so by:

- Volunteering for the Elm Grove Fire Department, being a charter member.
- Became a Post 449 Legion Member of the now relocated "Legion Post", and was a post commander.
- Active participant as a member of the former Elm Grove Kiwanis Club.

Throughout the 1970's-2000's our wholesale distribution business continued to grow requiring larger facilities which we built and added on to, totaling 40,000 square feet of office and warehouse. This growth of facilities helped support Village services through a substantial increase of tax base within the commercial district.

In the early 2000's the Village was interested in what our future plans were for the site. Our commitment at the time was "when we relocate the Reinders corporate headquarters, we would approach the Village with a development for the site". We recognized this location may not be the best long term location for our wholesale operations business due to the hundreds of semi-trucks coming and going every week.

In the meantime, many changes on our property were taking place, often with initial skepticism from residents:

- Significant improvements in redeveloping the 1950's garden store façade into the "Early American" styled Mill Place building. Initially, people weren't

sure of that “look” for downtown Elm Grove, and now we receive ongoing compliments from patrons.

- Against some public sentiment, we removed a small lannon stone building at 13420 to pave the way for a more open and accessible site, accommodating future development.
- We purchased and renovated a failing out-dated office building (Plank Rd. Plaza) bringing it back to full occupancy from 70% vacancy.

There have been many gradual changes to Elm Grove over my lifetime but are quite significant when looking at the totality of those changes;

- Farm fields turned to subdivisions allowing many more homeowners into the Village, including me where I built a new home on Lee Court and raised six children.
- Long time businesses eventually closed, including our garden store and consumer power equipment, while new ones moved in, continuing the cycle of turnover.
- Modest homes where I used to deliver my newspapers as a child have been torn down and mansions built.

The landscape of Elm Grove continues to change and improve.... I suppose this is deemed progress. Without a driving force, it would stagnate. The proposed multi-family project that our development partner and we have worked so hard to create is the catalyst to ensure a vibrant community well into the future. A community where residents will want to live, socialize, and patronize the downtown area. This is a recipe for sustaining high demand (and value) for homes in Elm Grove. I truly hope the Village approves the plan as presented. Although it may be more of a change in a shorter period of time, it is no different than the significant changes that have already taken place gradually over decades. This is a rare and unique opportunity for a momentous improvement over an existing condition.

While I now reside in a condo in Pewaukee, I often contemplate the possibility of returning to Elm Grove and living in a luxury apartment on the third floor overlooking the “cave road”. Even after 84 years I still consider Elm Grove “home”.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Reinders
Partner
R&R Investments of WI, LLC
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