

## Revitalizing Downtown Elm Grove

I was born and raised in Elm Grove, spending most of my life in this community. As a paperboy my route took me from St. Mary's School down Watertown Plank Road through the business area on my way home to my parents' house at 1005 Katherine Drive. I had 30 paper customers in "the Grove" starting at age 10 and got to know each and every one of the shops, stores, garages, and saloons on my route. At the time, we were a vibrant business area despite our small population, where you could choose from several barber shops, two grocery stores, two pharmacies, local dentists, several doctors, dry cleaner, feed store, hardware store, and many more. We could catch a train to downtown Milwaukee twice a day. Even buy a new Ford at Ray's auto service or a Chevrolet at the Elm Grove garage.

We were a thriving little community that eventually incorporated as the Village of Elm Grove. I became a charter member of the volunteer fire department devoting time to emergency calls; daytime dryer and grass fires, and nighttime house and barn fires. When a representative of the business community was needed on the Village board, I ran and served for four years prior to moving to my country farm, but still commuted daily to our Elm Grove business that I ran with my brother, Robert R. Reinders.

Over the ensuing years progress and vitality from surrounding development- Brookfield Square, Bluemound Road, and Mayfair- swept away many of our local shops even though our resident population had grown significantly. Seeing the lack of local patrons, the shop owners 'moved to higher traffic areas'. Those that remained struggled to be profitable. We experienced this first hand with our retail garden store and power equipment business. Not giving up the fight to maintain a local business presence that provided goods and services to our community, we created a downsized version of the garden store. Many long time residents will recall the "Old Elm Nature Store". Eventually, the writing was on the wall, we could not continue to make a go of a business in a community with a limited customer base. As a member of the Elm Grove Business Association, we championed slogans like "support your local businesses". We were the first ones to be asked to donate to community causes, yet forgotten when "shop local" was needed. When surveys were done periodically, it was discovered that more customers were coming from Wauwatosa, Brookfield, and New Berlin than from our local Elm Grove residents. Several attempts I was personally involved in was to bring clothing shops to the Village (Alfonso's, David Moore, a bridal shop, Frillz boutique, Fashions at Large, and Suiters). Try as they might, they could not generate sufficient local traffic and either folded or moved to better locations.

It became obvious to us that to support a great residential community with a high quality of living, we also needed an equally great downtown business and service district. Therefore, when my brother and I were considering development options, we concluded that a significant

increase of customer base was needed to support the downtown area, providing daily shoppers to support the various shops, and most importantly, within walking distance. It's what we wished we had when in the retail business ourselves. Additionally, we found a need for 'empty nesters', retirees, snow birds, and professionals who wanted a Village location and apartment, but did not want to be saddled with a brick and mortar condo, the associated fees, the financial commitment in a topsy-turvy real estate market, and upkeep. These prospective residents will want to keep things clean and simple, with flexibility should their personal situation change.

We wanted to see the "Grove" as we once remembered it in our youth to be once again a vibrant and prosperous spot in the Village. We knew if we could kick-start this process in a significant way, surrounding commercial property owners would follow.

After spending several years interviewing many developers, we kept coming back to Wangard Partners as the best choice to lead this project. Their reputation and track record in the development community is exemplary and they have taken a personal approach to looking at our site, our goals, objectives, and requirements, then putting a plan in place to accomplish them. In my opinion, anything less than what is being proposed falls flat since it won't accomplish what we intended it to. This property does not need to be redeveloped, and shouldn't be with a 'watered down' plan. Because we are on the twilight side of our lives, this is our attempt to leave a lasting legacy in revitalizing the Village business district despite the fact it would be much easier for us to leave things "as is".

I hope you agree with what we came to know from our many decades of involvement, living, and business experience in this community by embracing the redevelopment plans as presented.

Sincerely,

Richard G. Reinders

Partner

R&R Investments of WI, LLC

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