

# Downtown upgrade needs a real community solution

We have less than 10 weeks to learn about who Ms. Pallin is. We do know that she is under investigation for abuse of power as governor of Alaska.

Since Pallin is unknown, why didn't McCain hint that he was considering her? This is strictly a marketing ploy by an empty candidate who lives in the past and had his emotional development stunted in the late '60s.

McCain has trivialized the campaign with tasteless jokes (bomb, bomb, bomb Iran) and slanderous attacks on Barack Obama questioning his motives and patriotism. This race is about intelligence, temperament and judgement. McCain's judgement is seriously impaired in his first major decision as the GOP standard bearer.

Where are the psychiatrists when we need them? John McCain is unfit for the presidency.

**Bob Menamin**  
City of Verona

**V**ERONA has been inspired to make more of its downtown many times.

The village, the city and the Chamber of Commerce all have been involved at times in plans as small as putting in new signs for \$15,000 and as big as the multimillion-dollar Alexander Co. project on South Main Street — which at one time was even bigger than it ended up to be.

But the whole remains far less than the sum of its parts, a lumbering Frankenstein creation.

The city made a sincere attempt at stitching the pieces together with the 1997 Downtown Redevelopment Plan, which set a tone and established the method for spending money from the second tax-increment financing district there, TIF 4.

TIF money was spent on everything from park benches and streetlights to storefronts and condominiums. The city has buried power lines and spruced up sidewalks for aesthetic appeal, and it's rebuilt roads and rezoned properties for redevelopment, all to create a focal point for visitors other than the simple drive-by from Belleville or Mount Horeb to Madison.

But while the area has gotten prettier and more valuable, it still has too many empty spaces and not enough cohesiveness. It just seems unfinished, and until we can flip that switch, it's not really alive.

Is our downtown a place where you can go party on Friday night? A hangout for families and stay-at-home moms during the weekdays? A busy, bustling cluster of offices? A historic village?

It has elements of all those, but it is none of them. You can't go walk up to a random person in Madison and ask, "What's would you go to downtown Verona for?" and get an easy answer, unless it's "a rush-hour traffic jam."

Even for Veronans, I don't think it's a stretch to say the only thing that really sticks out about downtown is Miller and Sons.

A hometown grocery store could make a fine anchor for a quaint shopper's haven, but we don't even have that going for us. And we don't even know if Miller's will stay there long-term, since it needs to expand and there's not enough room.

The main reason is parking, one of the biggest problems the downtown has.



By  
**Jim  
Ferolie**

### From the editor's desk

There are few public parking spots, so if you stop at Park Bank and then walk across the street to the Sow's Ear, you're really supposed to move your car. Not exactly what I'd call pedestrian-friendly.

The situation is so absurd that one business has been fattling on patrons of a local restaurant who park in its stalls, even when that business is closed. As if anyone parking in any city's downtown at 7 p.m. should worry about getting a ticket.

Great way to encourage visitors to return.

But even though it's a rotten way for customer-oriented businesses to act, it's rooted in the city's lack of foresight many years ago.

When everyone knew everyone and worked things out with a handshake, it maybe was OK to have private parking that ended up being shared. But now at least one prospective business has been turned away from an almost empty building on Main Street and plenty of others have given up trying.

And yet, while parking issues are hurting development, they are merely a symptom of the real problem.

I've lived in cities with ugly downtowns, big ones, spread-out and split-up ones, but never one so fragmented and separate — not physically but in terms of synergy.

Many years ago Verona had an annual "Crazy Days" promotion, where the whole business community brought people here for special sales, but now even the mobs that come for Hometown Days and the Ironman Triathlon don't seem to light a fire downtown.

There's just no identity and no direction.

No wonder nobody knows what to do with the beleaguered "four corners" intersection at Main and Verona. How can you decide

whether to go with more lanes, a roundabout or split one-ways if you don't know what your downtown really is?

Each of these long-term solutions seems like an expensive monstrosity nobody wants, but we need to pick one soon so we can keep it from getting more expensive.

The huge roundabout would probably require buying the gas station and would move cars well but make pedestrian crossings difficult. A five-lane road would squeeze everyone on Main Street back around 50 feet and pretty much ensure that many drivers fly through at 45 mph or faster. Making Main Street one way and splitting into a side road would solve both traffic and pedestrian problems but would basically destroy old neighborhoods on Shuman or Franklin.

What do we want downtown Verona to look like in 20 years? I don't know. Many perspectives will need to be considered, and it will require a definition of the greater good that's impossible to make with complete objectivity.

The issue has been gathering momentum over the past few months, and later this month the Comprehensive Planning Committee will discuss the framework of a strategy devised by planning director Bruce Sylvester as part of its Land Use chapter.

Then, at an open house at the end of September, the committee will be looking for as much public input as possible. Although the mayor has done a good job of gathering a diverse group of perspectives on that committee, it's still only nine people out of 10,000.

They're actively seeking the opinions of "stakeholders," such as downtown neighbors, downtown businesses, the chamber, etc., but anyone who lives or works here is a stakeholder. Whether you've got 40 years of knowledge of the area, a deep understanding of how downtowns work across the country or just a feeling in your gut, every response counts.

The problems in our downtown weren't created instantly, and they won't be resolved in one or two meetings. This would be a great time for the community at large to stand up and help make a plan.

*Jim Ferolie is the editor of the Verona Press and a city resident since 2006.*

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