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## New neighborhood concept has look, feel of an earlier era

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During a five-day planning session that ended Saturday in Omaha, from 10 to 50 people daily joined the experts brought in by developer Herb Freeman to design a new traditional neighborhood at 168th and State Streets.

From 500 to 1,800 hits a day were recorded on the project's Web site - [whatsnewonstatestreet.com](#). Some people online took time to ask questions, submit ideas or share heartfelt remembrances about growing up in neighborhoods where people easily gathered, children were within walking distance of each other and ice cream cones and other treats were simple.

The design for the 160 acres resulting from the five-day session now will be submitted to engineers and go through a city approval process that could take a year.

Here are reactions from some of the people who participated or stopped by:

• **Connie Spellman, director of Omaha By Design, a private effort to raise local building design standards.**

"This is a perfect example of what we're calling walkable residential neighborhoods. To see the concept brought to Omaha is so great. It's exciting to see someone with the vision and courage to try something new.

"I love that they don't have the garage sticking out front, that they're taking advantage of the natural resources - not turning their back to it or leveling the land - to create a wonderful environment.

"It's exciting to have another option for our citizenry."

• **Bob Peters, private planning consultant and former city planning director who is working with Freeman.**

"The cross-fertilization of ideas that comes from the planning process achieves unexpected results.

"Foremost in this concept are the many pathways and destinations within the development. They'll enrich the feeling of community and the lives of the families who will be lucky enough to live there.

"As development costs - construction costs, the related land costs, the financing costs - all continue to increase, there will be a need to increase the density of subdivisions. The lesson that will be learned here is the level of quality and the grand visions created while fitting 1,000 living units on a property that typically would have 300 to 350.

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"And as developers research New Urbanism and new traditional neighborhoods, they will quickly discover that it's not the size of the lot that drives the higher price points but the uniqueness of the development and the amenity package."

• **Denny Van Moorleghem, vice president of Regency Homes.**

"I've traveled and looked at several neo-traditional neighborhoods in Kansas City, Denver and Chicago, and this seems to be far more like a neighborhood.

"Other new traditional neighborhoods didn't have the warmth or the character, I think because they didn't have the focal points of this design.

"They're doing it right, bringing in the right people."

Although building in such a neighborhood would submit a builder to more architectural and other controls, Van Moorleghem said he could see Regency building there.

"A lot of buyers want something different," he said.

• **Christian Christensen, president of Bluestone Development, the developer of downtown's Rows at SoMa.**

"This is great, very exciting. I've seen this in other markets, and I think it will be 10 times better than they're able to present.

"This is a true neighborhood. I think once people see what it's like to live there, we'll see more pop up."

• **Rod Benson, whose family recently bought 10 acres north of the site for a nursery business.**

"It's a destination place that I envision our family being part of. It's so different than the sprawl going on in Omaha right now."

Benson said it reminded him of the time he spent as he was growing up in grandparents' homes built in the 1930s and 1940s. He said he enjoyed not only the quarters he earned for helping out but also the evenings spent on a front porch swing, sharing tall lemonades or short sodas with neighbors.

"If there's a way I could recreate the way my childhood was, this is it," Benson said. "This has places to walk to, things to do that don't cost a family a fortune."

Benson said he also liked the aspects of the plan that encouraged multi-generational living. He said, for example, that he could see his 16-year-old daughter living in a secondary living unit above the garage during college and then having the space used by one of the grandparents.

• **Marion Brewer, a Denver attorney who owns 80 acres south of Freeman and whose family has farmed in the area for about 100 years.**

"I'm watching with great interest. Obviously this land has been important to my family. My cousin still farms to the west of there.

"When the time comes, I want to make sure that what happens to the bit of the family farm that's come to me is handled tastefully.

"I'm really excited about (the plan for) a vibrant community that carries on the same beautiful tradition the residents of Omaha have had of doing right by the city. . . .

"We hate to see urban sprawl, but to see it done well is fabulous. I wish Herb all the luck in the world."

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