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## Goal: Making 16th Street less a boundary, more a destination

**J**ONATHAN CHUMLEY GREW up in the Old Northside and remembers the days when no one went north of 16th Street.

Now president of the Herron-Morton Place Foundation, he asked a question: “How does 16th Street become someplace you want to go – or even want to walk down it. It is not a pleasant experience.”

Speaking as part of a panel discussion at the Feb. 7 annual meeting of the Herron-Morton Place Foundation, Chumley continued:

“How does 16th Street become a destination, not a boundary?”

The panel discussion, moderated by Bill Bisson, a member of the foundation’s Board of Directors, also featured Chris Barnett of the Near North Development Corp., Janine Betsey of the King Park Area Development Corp., and Mike Higbee, president of Development Concepts, Inc., and former head of the city’s Department of Metropolitan Development.

Their topic: The 16th Street commercial corridor revitalization program, a three-year-old effort that is part of FOCUS, an acronym for “Fostering Commercial Urban Strategies.” That initiative is a partnership between the Local Initiatives Support Corp., the Central Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the Indianapolis Coalition for Neighborhood Development and the City of Indianapolis.

The FOCUS initiative is working to revitalize the

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☐ To view the 16th Street plans as developed through the FOCUS program, check the website at [www.focusindy.com](http://www.focusindy.com) and click on “commercial corridor program.”

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stretch of 16th Street between Interstate 65 and the Monon Trail – a heavily traveled thoroughfare with about 25,000 vehicles a day, just shy of the traffic along North

Meridian Street.

“Could we create a 16th Street that is something other than a 35-mile-per-hour superhighway,” Barnett asked. Later in the discussion, he added, “Many times I have taken my life in my hands and walked 16th Street.”

Beyond the idea that 16th Street must become more user-friendly to both pedestrians and motorists, the hour-long panel discussion zeroed in on one other major hurdle:

The Kroger store between Central Avenue and Park Avenue.

Higbee urged the several groups involved in the 16th Street initiative to become more pro-active with the grocery firm. He said his sense of the landscape was that the stakeholders have done a good job of protecting their neighborhoods from unwanted development, but that obstruction is not enough.

“The neighborhood could be laying a significant role in helping Kroger determine what that corner could become,” he said, adding that the store “has as good a chance to go away as staying.”

That is a concept which does not bother some neighbors in both Herron-Morton Place and the Old



The heavy traffic along 16th Street is a problem for planners who want to see the thoroughfare become much more than a neighborhood dividing line.

Northside, who believe that if Kroger goes away another company would be more sensitive to local issues.

The debate centers around land-use and density: Many neighbors believe Kroger should use an urban model, instead of spreading out with a suburban model that would dedicate most of the block to surface parking.

Lynn Molzan, president of the Old Northside Foundation, spoke from the audience, noting that Kroger had indeed been provided with a positive plan for the site, but had turned a deaf ear.

It was suggested, however, that Kroger might have backed off because there were too many local organizations speaking with different voices.

Betsey noted that one goal of the 16th Street initiative was to pull together the stakeholders so that the corridor's problems were not addressed in pockets. "Rather than addressing different segments," she said, "we can do a bigger and better job."

In fact, part of the problem is that no one is certain what Kroger will do. An Indianapolis Star report published the day before the meeting indicated Kroger is "looking at improvements" in the 16th Street store and that the Cincinnati-based company believes the store features "a good location and has a good future."

Several panelists agreed that the Kroger site has

great potential. "That corner wants to be a lot more than it is today," Higbee said, adding that sitting back and waiting to see what Kroger does might be the wrong strategy.

Barnett said he planned to organize a meeting of the 16th Street initiative's steering committee to prioritize the remaining items on the workplan and gauge neighborhood support for the options.

Beyond the uncertain future of the Kroger site, the panelists agreed that the 16th Street corridor has a strong potential. Higbee, whose Martindale on the Monon housing project sits just east of the FOCUS area, was particularly bullish.

"It's one of the most understated streets in the city," he said, noting that 16th Street can be the link between residential neighborhoods and the burgeoning commercial area to the west.

"It has the opportunity to be the major east-west transit corridor between the neighborhoods and the dynamic life sciences initiative with thousands and thousands of jobs to be created," he said.

If that vision is accurate, the problem will be to create a 16th Street which serves as both a thoroughfare and a neighborhood street. Chumley suggested that replacing empty storefronts with vibrant activity will encourage motorists to slow down.

Barnett suggested that there are a handful of bleak

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spots along the corridor which must be addressed. “If they were a whole lot better,” he said, “the whole atmosphere would change.”

Betsey said that stakeholders need better demographic tools to lure developers to the area. She said her organization is now working on better data to reflect the population growth.

Convincing developers that the area has a much-improved buying power is key to the equation, she indicated. “That way, we can market the area to its true potential.”

**– Bill Brooks**