

Packers opt for more than income in Tiletown District

Richard Ryman | August 24, 2015

Packers officials hope their new Tiletown District development can reverse an outflow of young professionals from the region.



(Photo: Courtesy of Rossetti Design Workshop)

ASHWAUBENON – The Green Bay Packers were expected to derive nonfootball income from their Tiletown District project, but in designing it the team was asking different questions. Lodge Kohler hotel and spa, Hinterland brewery and restaurant, and a Bellin Health sports medicine clinic will join Cabela's as anchors of the Tiletown District west of Lambeau Field, the Packers announced last week. Businesses will line Lombardi Avenue on the north side of the district, and townhouses will line the south side along Brookwood Drive.

But nearly one-third of the 34-acre development will be public plaza, a large green space running the length of the South Ridge Road-to-Marlee Lane property. It will include an ice

skating pond in winter, an event area and a football field-sized green space. The Packers hope to see it active throughout the year, not just on 10 game days.



By making one-third of their new development public park, the Packers are forgoing income potential for longer-term goals, both cultural and financial.

“I don’t see it as being primarily a revenue driver,” said Ed Policy, Packers vice president and general counsel. “We are looking to bring something to the marketplace that we don’t have here now. We asked, ‘What can we do to be competitive 15 years from now?’”

“We do have a shopping mall just down the street and we do have an exciting downtown. We are not trying to be either of those.”



An artist's rendering shows a summer scene in the Titledown District with the public plaza and Hinterland brewery. Courtesy of Rossetti Design Workshop

The Packers commissioned a market study that sought answers to three questions: Would development be feasible, what are the long-term economic prospects for Brown County, and what can the team do to have an impact?

Answers to the second question were worrisome and dovetailed with other reports the Packers heard about the loss of young talent in the region. The study indicated real concerns about young people leaving the area and not coming back.

“That is becoming a problem and will be a greater problem as the future goes on,” Policy said. “If we don’t turn that around, it causes concerns about developing something long term.” The Packers decided they were in a position to do something about improving quality of life in Brown County, and their plaza is the result.

“A lot were focused at the start on retail,” Policy said. “We said rather than do that, let’s figure out quality of life. The answer came back, ‘You really need an active, exciting, engaging public space.’”

That coincided with the answer to the question about what the Packers could do to have an impact.

“If anybody can, the Packers are in a very unique position to do something about that (brain drain),” Policy said. “Sports stadiums create very valuable locations.”



Brown County Executive Troy Streckenbach said communities that figure how to attract the next generation are going to be the ones that are successful.

“Part of that is looking at your community and revitalizing it,” Streckenbach said.

The Packers see the public plaza being used year-round. The event space just off South Ridge Road could be used for events or festivals, like a farmers’ market or art show. Bellin Health plans to use it for some of its programming.

The ice skating pond will be dry in summer and serve as additional green space. About Thanksgiving it will become a full-sized rink designed to look like a country pond. It will include large sculpted rocks that skaters can glide between or around.

And at the western end will be 100 yards of grass adorned with football field markings and a large “G.” It is park and not an athletic field, not that people can’t gather for a little pick-up football.

Packers President and CEO Mark Murphy compared it to Canalside Buffalo, designed by Biederman Redevelopment Ventures, which also is working with the Packers on the Titledown District.

“The things they’ve done with the Canalside park have really revitalized Buffalo,” Murphy said. The Packers want the plaza used throughout the year. The townhouses, for example, are meant to be occupied year-round. The Packers do not intend them to be used as party houses.

Murphy said the 30 to 50 townhouses should be attractive to young professionals and retirees. “It’s a place people not only would visit but want to live. They would be able to walk to many amenities. It would be very attractive,” he said.



Policy said few developers could afford to, or would choose to, set aside that much acreage in lieu of revenue. The balancing act for the Packers is to make enough money on the remaining acres they lease to cover their costs and, though they are downplaying it, generate revenue. “We want to create something that will attract and retain young people,” Policy said. “And we had to do it in a manner that ensured financial stability. We need successful businesses around the public plaza.”

A key to financial stability is long-term leases with tenants, especially its three anchors announced Thursday. The Packers won’t reveal terms of its financial agreements, but operating in proximity to Lambeau Field, in a development created and promoted by the Packers, probably comes at a premium.

Policy said their study determined there is room for economic and commercial growth in Brown County. He said their study showed retail spending here was greater than would be expected with the county’s level of disposable income, which means the county was attracting nonlocal shoppers.

“There is money to be spent here,” he said.

Lambeau Field is a bucket list destination for many travelers from around the country, if not the world, and the Packers talked throughout this process about doing things that will draw more people to Brown County during the 355 days when football is not being played. To their benefit,

that would mean more Pro Shop sales, more 1919 Kitchen & Tap sales and more stadium tours, in addition to more spending at the county's other attractions.

Nonfootball revenue is important to the Packers because they are the smallest market in the NFL and don't have a deep-pockets owner who will sink money into operations. The current NFL collective bargaining agreement kept in place elements that the Packers rely on to remain competitive, including revenue sharing, but the future could be different.

The Packers could have gone the easy route and made a 34-acre retail mall, but Policy said they chose to think longer term. He pointed to Kohler's development of golf courses near Sheboygan to become a major PGA player.

"They didn't build what fit there, otherwise you wouldn't see Whistling Straits where it is," he said. "It's about demand generation."