

Editorial, 4/1: Can-Do Spirit Sprouts in SoDo

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Whenever a locale or neighborhood finds champions -- people that look out for its interests and want it to flourish -- the community as a whole benefits.

So count the Journal Star editorial board among those enthused that a cadre of movers and shakers wants to help South Downtown “survive, revive and thrive,” as business editor Dick Piersol wrote in a story published last week.

We even like the catchy name -- SoDo -- that’s been applied to a part of Lincoln’s urban core, the area bounded by A, M, Ninth and 17th streets.

SoDo includes the Capitol, the County-City Building and Lincoln Mall that stretches between the two seats of government. It includes the Farmers Mutual headquarters, a new NEBCO office building, the F Street Recreation Center and clusters of businesses on 13th and 11st Street.

The work is still in its early stages.

“Now we are trying to get off to the races,” said Tom Smith of Smith Hayes financial services company, who is one of leaders of the initiative.

A public breakfast in May will be the kickoff for events that include a weeklong design charrette to help plan improvements. Other public meetings will be held to stimulate interest and gather information.

A SoDo steering committee has begun meeting. H3 Studio, a St. Louis-based design and planning firm that has done work in Omaha, has partnered with Sinclair Hille Architects of Lincoln. Time Kenney of the Nebraska Investment Finance Authority has voiced interest.

Helping to galvanize interest in SoDo was “Vital Signs,” a report released last year by Barb Bartle of the Lincoln Community Foundation and other local public and private charitable organizations with the hope of spurring collaboration to address some of the community’s challenges.

The report showed that two of the six census tracts in Lincoln that are in “extreme poverty,” with 40 percent or more of residents below the federal poverty guidelines, are located in South Downtown.

Lending optimism to the SoDo initiative is the success that Lincoln has achieved in other efforts to renew and reinvent its inner core. The West Haymarket is humming with activity. The Antelope Valley Project has transformed the blocks east of downtown and the downtown campus of the University of Nebraska.

We hope that the same can-do spirit that lifted those efforts will give momentum to the plans to remake SoDo.