

Envisioning Out Downtown Community Meeting
November 2005

In November over 80 residents and businesses attended our community meeting, Envisioning Our Downtown. We were thrilled with the turnout and level of interest in the community. Hundreds of ideas were shared ranging from enhancements to existing businesses all the way to radical transformations of our streetscape. While some of these ideas may be controversial they certainly engaged the group and look to be great stepping stones for future development.

During the 2-hour meeting, participants broke into small groups and brainstormed ideas about what changes they would like to see in JP along Centre and South Street over the next three years. Groups focused on either 'Inside', 'Outside' or 'Up'. 'Inside' groups discussed what businesses they would like to see in JP that aren't here now, which days and times they would prefer to see shops open for business, and what types of entertainment are missing from the district. 'Outside' groups thought about existing gathering spaces and whether or not they are adequate, improvements to the street, sidewalks and lighting, and what kinds of events they would like to see in the commercial district. And finally, 'Up' groups considered the growth of the commercial district, the idea of restoring some of the commercial buildings to two and three stories, and the possibility of a multilevel parking structure to support growth.

The 'Inside' wish list included everything from a family restaurant to a produce market, from an arcade to movies at the Footlight Club, and from new stores for clothing to household goods to art supplies. When it came to the 'Outside' conversations, there was a strong level of interest in seeing storefront improvements, more trees and potted flowers, outdoor cafes, public art displays and cleaner sidewalks. And the 'Up' groups discussed the need for more parking, increased housing above first floor retail and a desire for roof top gardens.

After the brainstorming, each small group shared their top ideas with the larger group and then everyone voted on their favorites. The top vote getter which was eloquently described at the meeting was a vision of the street becoming a pedestrian walkway with wider sidewalks, outdoor cafes, new street lights, and public art. And the next most popular idea was a transformation of the district's way finding signage and signage designating historic locations.

JPCSMS' Visioning Committee has begun work to flesh out ideas and make so of them a reality. In particular, we are focusing on implementing new signage in the district, updating our market research to determine current uses and needs of the commercial district and recruiting new businesses to JP. If you are interested in joining us please contact Jodi Lief Wolk at jodi@jpcntresouth.org.