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Covington creating neighborhood

By Patrick Crowley

COVINGTON - Andy Clepper was thrilled to hear the city's vision of creating a new neighborhood on the downtown development site known as Riverfront West. He could use the business. Clepper, 41, is a Fort Mitchell father of two young girls, a former human resources manager who was tired of being downsized and bought out. And he is a budding entrepreneur who is betting on Covington. A few weeks ago, he plunged into the business world by buying the Roly Poly sandwich shop, a tidy and inviting place on the bottom floor of the Wessels Corp. office building and directly across from the Kenton County Justice Center.

"I got tired of the corporate world," Clepper said as he stuffed turkey, lettuce, cheese and other fresh ingredients into the rounded bread Roly Poly is known for. "I've always wanted to own my own business. This opportunity came up, and I jumped on it." Already, the hours are long and the concerns are many. Finding employees is difficult. Clepper's wife is often at his side, helping out. He's bought a new sign, offered specials, pumped up the catering business and spent some money on advertising. "I've got to get the word out, I've got to get some more business," he said. "We have a great product. I just need to get some more people in the door."

Clepper is one of dozens of Covington business owners and investors anxious for the city to get moving on the \$800 million Riverfront West project, a grand vision for the 15 or so acres between the Clay Wade Bailey Bridge and the Madison Place office tower and directly across the river from Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium.

Part of the plan - which is still in the very early conceptual stages - calls for hundreds of new residents living in what would be a new downtown neighborhood featuring office buildings and retail space. Next month, Covington officials will travel to two cities known for successful riverfront development plans, Louisville and Memphis. Three developers are also putting together proposals for the site: Towne Properties of Cincinnati, Covington-based Corporex and Flaherty & Collins Properties of Indianapolis. "Those are cities that have success in developing their riverfronts with what we would like to do here in Covington," said Covington Assistant Manager Andy Riffe, who specializes in economic development. "We can do something very bold and innovative that can tie in with MainStrasse, with downtown, with the other parts of the city through a new mixed-use development," Riffe said.

The city is also studying work by other developers, particularly Steiner + Associates, the developer and operator of Newport on the Levee, and The Ackermann Group of Anderson Township, which is developing the \$40 million Harbour Greene residential and office project on Bellevue's riverfront. Riffe and other Covington officials are taken with how both developers fuse tested ideas and methods into brand new projects. "Think about what we have in downtown Covington and what every downtown used to have," Riffe said. "Streets where residential, retail and office all mixed together. And it worked. People walked, they had a sense of neighborhood and community. Steiner and Ackermann do that in their projects. They get it. That's what we're after with Riverfront West. That's what will work."

Back behind the counter at Roly Poly, Clepper prepares for what he hopes is a big lunch rush. "You know, I looked at downtown Cincinnati for buying a business," he said. "But I like it over here. The people in the city are great to work with, I like the atmosphere, and I like being part of this community. "Just like the other businesses, I'll work hard to make it," Clepper said. "But some new people moving in to live and work downtown, now that would really help all of us."

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