

Report outlines strategies for a River District makeover



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January 25, 2018

If you head north on 16th Street out of midtown Sacramento, you enter an area with a bit of both grit and desolation. On either side, before 16th turns into Highway 160 and crosses the American River, are stout brick buildings, an empty industrial lot or two and a handful of businesses.

It's not much to look at, but a new report for the city suggests the eastern part of what's known as the River District should be seen as something else: An area with potential as a new business hub.

The report, released in December, outlines potential strategies for converting North 16th Street into an affordable landing spot for artisanal manufacturers, design and marketing firms and "hardware" and ag tech companies.

Report author Business Street, which appears to be a consulting firm, states that other local, potential destinations for such firms have their own challenges: R Street is too expensive, West Sacramento lacks amenities and Power Inn Road is too far away.

Making North 16th the new go-to site for development, according to the report, would require

SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL

some work, including addressing city fees and putting a stop to random groups giving out food to the homeless in the area. The report also suggested adding food carts, providing more pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, and being smart with public investments.

Implementing Volkswagen's "Green Cities" program — building electric car charging infrastructure and making zero-emission vehicles available — would be an example of the latter, the report states.

Patty Kleinknecht, executive director of the River District, said the report also supports the idea that businesses can thrive if they're near areas where workers can live and find entertainment. Though separated by a railroad trestle, North 16th is just blocks from both midtown and downtown.

"I'm pretty excited that there seems to be interest," she said. The next step is to review the report with city staff and economic development officials and come up with actual policies the city council could review this year, she said.

To get results, the report suggested focusing on two or three specific goals to hit over the next year. If successful, the North 16th Street area could one day garner the kind of reputation associated with former industrial areas reinvigorated as hip neighborhoods, such as Dogpatch in San Francisco and the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York City.

"The most important result may be showing the world that Sacramento is not just about government, but that government and industry work together here to make and sell things to the world," the report concludes.