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Rogers Officials Hire Firm For Downtown Plan

by John Gore | Nov. 7, 2013

Gateway Planning, a Texas-based firm, has been selected to create a plan for downtown Rogers.

Contract negotiation is to begin within the next couple of weeks, said Mayor Greg Hines.

“We want Gateway to get started as soon as possible. It will likely be January before the study truly gets under way, but there are a few things Gateway can do this year,” Hines said.

Scott Polikov, Gateway president, said Wednesday he looks forward to working with the city.

“We are thrilled and pleased we were chosen to conduct the study. We have worked with other cities, but each city is unique. The plan we will develop will be tailored to fit Rogers, not some other city,” Polikov said.

Gateway has people on staff familiar with Northwest Arkansas, and, specifically Rogers.

Greg Nabholz, whose family is well-known in Arkansas for construction, and Ed Spivey, a former Rogers resident, are part of the team that will work on the plan, Polikov said.

“Greg and Ed are economic development and real estate experts. They not only know the area, but the cultural drivers in the state and the real estate markets in urban areas,” Polikov said.

Mark Kruger, an alderman and member of the selection committee, said finding the right firm wasn't easy.

“We started with 13 firms and reduced the number to four firms to interview. That in itself was difficult because all of the prospective firms were well qualified,” Kruger said.

Choosing among the four finalists was equally difficult, said Kruger.

“All four firms were capable of doing a good job, but the Gateway firm stood just a bit higher than the other three firms. They presented a unique economic development plan that seemed stronger than the other presentations,” Kruger said.

Gateway's plan outlined an economic plan with a strong catalyst that would get the project going faster and help meet goals more quickly, said Kruger.

The development plan is of paramount importance, Hines and Kruger agreed.

“This will be the first time the downtown has had a comprehensive plan that includes zoning, economic development and other aspects of development,” Hines said.

“If we are going to compete with other urban areas we need a plan with goals that can be measured. This isn't a five-year plan. The downtown development plan is designed as a pathway to strengthening the economic development of downtown for 20 or 30 years,” Kruger said.

“The development plan is a great idea,” said John Mack, an architect with a downtown office.

One of the attractions for Mack is enlarging the footprint of downtown to include surrounding areas.

“This will bring in residential neighborhoods. As I understand it, this will be detailed plan that might include high-density apartments in the downtown area. Along with those apartments, I hope we can develop more entertainment, dining and shopping downtown,” Mack said.

Walkability is an important issue for Mack. He said he wants to see a time where people who live downtown can get most of the things they want a walk away from their home or apartment.

Several bankers have contacted city representatives in connection with the downtown development plan, Hines said.

“They are telling me they are excited about the development plan and anxious to see what’s in the plan when it’s completed,” he said.

“A downtown development plan should have an impact not on just downtown, but the whole city,” said Dennis Ferguson, an executive with Simmons First Bank and a member of the Planning Commission. Simmons First Bank has two locations, on Eighth Street north of Walnut Street, and on West New Hope Road in the Pinnacle Hills Promenade area.

A strong vibrant downtown will be a draw that will stretch all the way to the west side of town, Ferguson said.

“We need an economically sound downtown. It should increase tourism, sales tax revenue and be another place to shop and visit restaurants,” Ferguson said.

“We don’t know much about the actual plan, just what we’ve read,” said Lorrie Madden, executive vice president with Arvest Bank downtown. However, she said bank officials think hiring an outside firm is the right answer for development.

“We’ve had local studies done before, but nothing that will be as detailed and comprehensive as we’ve been told this plan will be. I think this is a real opportunity to develop downtown and build on those opportunities,” she said.