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# Gateway Planners Give Rogers Resident A Glimpse Of Downtown Possibilities

by John Gore | Oct. 1, 2014

**ROGERS** -- Outdoor cafe dining, an entertainment district and more people living and working in downtown are priorities the community wants to see develop, according to surveys, focus groups and attendees at the Gateway Planning meeting Tuesday at City Hall.

There wasn't a plan laid out for the audience; that will come Thursday when more of the plan is brought forward. The Tuesday meeting was to give information and a glimpse of some of the ideas taking shape. The plan won't be finished until late this year or early next year, Gateway officials said.

Benjamin Blansit, who works for an architectural firm, said he found the meeting interesting.

"I was curious to see how this was developing. I look forward to seeing the finished plan," Blansit said.

"What impressed me was how open the Gateway people are to new ideas. I thought it was a great meeting," said Buffy Scherer.

Her husband, James Scherer, agreed the city needs to develop some entertainment venues.

"People work and live here but then play somewhere else. We need to bring people here to play," James said.

Scott Polikov and his Gateway team are trying to create that atmosphere and other amenities downtown.

"Rogers has many opportunities to repurpose many of the buildings downtown," said Polikov, president of Gateway Planning.

"Lots of things are happening in downtown, but they don't seem connected. That will be our job -- to connect areas of downtown where one area leads to another," he added.

Daniel Hintz, formerly with Downtown Bentonville, explained the "Theater of Cool" and how to achieve it downtown.

The Theater of Cool translates into energy. Downtown has some energy now, Hintz said.

"We don't want to lose that energy, we want to build on it."



*Staff Photo Michael Woods • @NWAMICHAELW Scott Polikov of Gateway Planning speaks Tuesday during a public meeting at Rogers City Hall as he and other city officials talk to residents about the details of the proposed downtown economic development plan for Rogers. Gateway won a \$450,000 contract to prepare a plan for the downtown area. More than a hundred merchants and residents attended the meeting to get information and give feedback on the concept.*

The core of downtown is basically a rectangle from Walnut Street, south on First Street to Cherry then west to Third Street back to Walnut, according to Hintz.

“You have a lot of blank walls on buildings that could be used for public art projects. There are great places for other type public art works in the parks and open areas downtown,” Hintz said.

Food trucks are another aspect that could be added downtown, he continued.

“Placement is important. Where the trucks will be allowed to operate has to be worked out. Trucks stopping anywhere isn’t the right way. If you strategically place trucks, that’s planning,” Hintz said.

Alleys should be repurposed downtown. The alleys are a significant resource for people to walk from one area of town to another.

Keypads were passed out to those attending the meeting. People were ask to respond to about 18 questions flashed on a screen. Of the 117 people at the event, 82 people accepted key pads to vote. The responses were converted to percentages.

Questions were designed to allow attendees to express their ideas about some of the information they heard at the meeting.

One of the questions involved what people would like to see downtown. Of those voting, 48 percent said they wanted more entertainment downtown. When it came to creating residential space, the voters said they would like to see townhouses or lofts downtown.

Residents also said they wanted more art and culture downtown. The kind of restaurant or cafe they wanted to see was locally sourced places or ethnic food, not fast food, and 70 percent stated they wanted outdoor cafe seating and more public art. They would also like to see outdoor concerts and a beer garden.

Paul Hively, chairman of Main Street Rogers board, Mayor Greg Hines and Raymond Burns, president of the Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce, each said they were thrilled with what’s getting ready to take place downtown.

Hively compared the changes to waiting for Christmas. He said he’s excited and can’t wait for them to happen, but like Christmas, you must be patient.

“This isn’t going to happen overnight. It will take some time, but it will happen” Hively said.

Hines said there’s been several developers wanting to see downtown.

“In the past six months, we have had more inquiries than ever before about businesses wanting to locate downtown. I can’t tell you who right now because things are in the works, but it’s very encouraging that we are on the right track,” Hines said.

Burns said the Market Street Plan and the Gateway plan will be merged into the Vision 2030 plan.

“This is the first time we have had a community plan. People outside of downtown are concerned about downtown. We will be able to move forward in more than one direction, and we will have a plan that can help us get where we want to go,” Burns said.