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# Markham Designs Presented to Public

by Rachel Parker Dickerson | July 29, 2014

Consultants from Gateway Planning presented preliminary designs of their vision of the revitalization of Markham Street at an open house Monday night at the Conway Area Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber's conference room was packed at 5 p.m. with community members viewing the designs, asking questions and writing down their suggestions.

The project received a \$180,000 grant last year from MetroPlan's Jump Start program which, combined with \$50,000 from the city, has gone to fund a private and public partnership to create plans and conduct research studies. Design consultants from Gateway Planning have solicited public input at several turns before presenting designs.



The plans for Markham Street call for a more pedestrian-friendly area with bike lanes, on-street parking, sidewalks and street trees to make it more vibrant and bustling with people. The consultants looked at the city's plan to turn the 1.5 acres purchased from Conway Scrap Metal into an amphitheater and suggested including other outdoor spaces for additional uses when the amphitheater is not in use.

Brad Lonberger of Gateway Planning, said of the amphitheater/park, "By making it into an amenity and improving the streets around it, it makes an attractive place to locate your business."

He said to the north, planners would like to see more residential development with small units, large lot multi-units and some town homes.

"If you're able to mix different housing units and types, you can create a variety of income levels and generations," he said.

Wes Craiglow the city's deputy director of development said of the presentation, "I think it's fantastic. As far as a vision for the area and an illustrative feedback from the previous visioning sessions, I think they brought our community's vision to life quite well. In general I think everyone's supportive of the way the neighborhood's going. I think everyone is in agreement that the area is under served and under utilized. They did a remarkable job. They listened well, and what they presented is an excellent manifestation of community input."

He said the next step will be to encourage developers to consider a project on Markham Street.

"Fifteen years ago downtown was quiet and less productive. We're going to be pushing that same sort of energy into that area," he said.

Lori Melton was among those who attended the open house Monday night. She said, "I told them we need a convention center to bring people downtown. People love to come to Conway for events, but you're limited to how many people you can get in a room. A downtown hotel/conference center would be great."

Sandra Leyva, who owns The Locals coffee shop on Van Ronkle, just off Markham, said of the plans, “I really like it. I did the walkabout when they had the consultant come. The first thing he pointed out was there were no people walking around. I’m really impressed with the plans. I’m happy that walking and biking are going to be not just accepted but encouraged.”

Mayor Tab Townsell said the revitalization of Markham Street will “take the power and energy that’s happening in downtown and in The Village at Hendrix and tie them together.”

He said it will add value to the neighborhood, “just like the redevelopment of downtown has added value to those properties in downtown that haven’t yet been touched.”

He also predicted it will be an attractive place to live, with plenty of community amenities within walking distance and further from the railroad than current downtown housing.