

*From Odessa American Online*

# Details Released in Downtown Revitalization

Jon Vanderlaan | March 23, 2016

Officials laid out during a Wednesday night meeting an initial plan for a revitalized downtown Odessa, including city purchases of land and incentives for new retail, restaurants and residential construction.

Downtown Odessa Director Gloria Hernandez and Gateway Planning Group, which was commissioned to help the city with its downtown revitalization, presented maps and a broad plan to residents and business owners.

Scott Polikov, president of Gateway, said during the meeting that the city's downtown has potential, but needs the tools to fulfill that potential.

He presented several maps during the meeting with a number of corners and city blocks patterned with new businesses.

One of the anchors of the theoretical revitalized downtown is the yet-to-be-built hotel and convention center, but more broadly Polikov spoke about residential building.

Estimating that the current downtown could host about 150 new residences and there's demand today for 1,000 units downtown, Polikov said he feels downtown is safer than people think. In his experience downtown, he said it's more worrisome being alone.

"If you have even a few hundred people living down here in the next few years, that would be a game changer," Polikov said. "... When more people live downtown, you won't feel like you're alone."

Hernandez said the numbers of people were gathered from market analysis based on the number of jobs downtown and the people who would like to live near where they work.

One of the Gateway team members, Kelsey Berry, said downtown currently shuts down around 3 p.m., leaving people with nothing to do after work and meaning downtown is deserted after 6 p.m.

But all of them avoided saying which should come first: residential building or retail and restaurants, noting that it would be ideal to have it all at the same time.

Polikov and Hernandez also said a new Ector County Courthouse, which was soundly defeated in a bond election by voters in November 2012, would be a key ingredient to helping downtown work.

Long-term, Polikov said that project was important to the success of the overall project, and how long the project takes to be fully successful could in part depend on that.

"I think the driver is going to be the discussion about the courthouse," he said.

Hernandez said they can accomplish everything they need to without the courthouse, but when people see how



*Gateway Planning Principal Brad Lonberger, right, talks with Dale Jenkins, center, and Joe Williamson following a town hall meeting with the Odessa community to show their plans for a downtown revitalization plan. (Edyta Błaszczuk | Odessa American)*

successful downtown is, they will want a new courthouse to be part of it.

They also laid out plans on how they would reach these goals, including the purchase of businesses downtown and using those to attract developers.

Hernandez said she's not sure how many lots the city will purchase, but she said the lots would either be sold or given to developers who want to bring businesses downtown.

The city also will have a number of incentives to offer developers who want to come in, from relaxed regulations to free or reduced land to build on. Typically, she said, the city will purchase and demolish the lots.

Hernandez said she doesn't know how the city would pay for buying the properties, noting it would be more of a question for City Manager Richard Morton.

However, she said incentives given to businesses would be paid for by proceeds from the Odessa Development Corporation sales tax money, which is collaborating with Downtown Odessa on the project.

All of this work will be done to bring in businesses that range from local, such as Norma's Café that is already downtown, to more regional businesses, such as Twisted Root, a burger joint founded in the Dallas area, Hernandez said.

"We're tired of boarded up buildings downtown," Hernandez said. "We're tired of it looking dilapidated and ugly."

Some business owners had questions, including those who would have residential areas near their businesses where they could live and a resident's question about uniform facades downtown.

Polikov said they want everything to look like it belongs instead of a mashup of different styles.

Gateway officials will be meeting with city officials in April, leading to a May conceptual rendering of the block level of downtown, showing the most descriptive possibility of what a revitalized downtown could be to date.