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Rogers Alleys Could Become A Food Truck Haven Next Spring

by John Gore | Oct. 5, 2014

ROGERS -- New apartment buildings downtown may take time to develop, but some suggestions included in the Gateway Planning report -- such as making the alleys a place to stroll and eat -- could become a reality by spring, officials said.

If the Gateway recommendation is developed, alleys would become home to food trucks -- a concept which has been successful in other cities.

"The alleyways are something we could do without spending a lot of money," said Steve Glass, city director of planning and transportation.

"We could name the alleyways and have signs denoting the name span the entrances to the alleyways. It wouldn't cost much to string lights from building to building to light the area at night. We could probably do that for about \$500 and it would make a world of difference," Glass said.

John Mack, an architect in the process of restoring a century-old building at the corner of Walnut and First streets, said the alleys are the place to start redevelopment of downtown.

"The alleyways could be catalysts to get things going. It could open minds to some of the possibilities downtown," Mack said.

Adding food trucks to the mix is a good idea, Mack said.

"It's a great opportunity for downtown. Fayetteville and Bentonville have food trucks that attract a lot of customers and attention. It would add to the ambience downtown and provide some vitality to the area," Mack said.

"Having food trucks in the alley ways would bring more people into the area. The food trucks could become a destination place for downtown," Mack added.

Paul Hively, chairman of the Main Street Rogers board, also was excited about the concept of using alleys to serve as a walkway between sections of downtown.

"I think it's a great idea, and it's something we could do right away. We can make it happen because the alley ways are already there. We just have to utilize them," Hively said.

"If the food truck idea and lighting the alleyways catches on, I think it could become a beautification project of its own. Business owners might spruce up the back entrance to their buildings, or offer outdoor dining, or just a place to sit and rest," Hively said.

Debra Barbee, owner of Alternique, an art supplies store and studio on First Street, said she's intrigued by the Gateway plans.

"I like the idea of using the alleyways, and the food trucks are certainly a good idea," Barbee said. "There is a lot of potential downtown, and I'm all about potential. These plans really opened my eyes to the new opportunities downtown."

Another project city leaders could begin soon is redevelopment of Frisco Park, also suggested by Gateway planners.

“Frisco Park is kind of cut into pieces,” Glass said.

The north end of Frisco Park is a parking lot, the middle is where Frisco Stage, a playground and pavilion are. There isn’t much on the south end except a few benches.

“If, as Scott Polikov suggested, we had a portable stage, we could move it to one end of Frisco Park and use the whole park for music concerts,” Glass said. Polikov is the president of Gateway Planning.

The playground and Frisco Stage would have to be moved to another location, Glass said.

“The parking lot on the north end could be resurfaced to look green. The Farmers Market could still use the lot, but it would blend in better with the rest of the park,” Glass said.

Glass said he thinks as the redevelopment plan for downtown begins to take shape, moving or removing the Frisco Stage could become possible.

“The stage served its purpose for a long time, but it may be time for something different as we move this plan forward,” Glass said.

Barbee said she favored the portable stage for Frisco Park.

“I think it would be great to move the stage to different areas of the park for different events. You could have a small event or a large event and move the stage to fit the estimated size of the crowd,” Barbee said.

Gary Townzen, owner of Townzen’s Barbershop, across First Street from Frisco Park, said having outdoor concerts in the park is nothing new. Townzen also serves as an alderman on the City Council.

“There used to be a bandstand on the north end of Frisco Park. People would gather in the Frisco Park to hear concerts. In a sense, we would be returning to what once was. Everything old is new again,” Townzen said.