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Rogers Gateway Economic Development Plan Is Still A Work In Progress

by John Gore | Oct. 13, 2014

ROGERS -- The final downtown economic development plan is months away from completion, but should provide estimated costs, proposed zoning ordinances and recommendations on how to approach infrastructure needs.

The final plan is expected to be presented to City Council in January or February, said Scott Polikov, president of Gateway Planning, the company hired to develop the plan.

The plan also will offer proposals on attracting business, landscaping, renovating Frisco Park, creating more residential space and making the area walkable, Polikov said.

City officials are creating the 2015 budget, although no money has been earmarked for implementation of the plan, said Casey Wilhelm, city finance director.

“There is some \$200,000 in general reserve funds that might be used for implementation of parts of the plan, but there isn’t any designated money earmarked for the plan,” Wilhelm said. The Planning Department could be waiting until the plan is completed before asking for funding, she said.

Another part of the Gateway plan involves working with the city and private investors to create public and private projects in the expanded downtown area. The plan calls for the expansion of downtown boundaries from Olrich to Locust streets and from Eighth Street to Lake Atalanta.

One proposal involves using alleys as walkways and as a possible place to park food trucks.

The alleys would have to be cleaned and a lighting system installed, but it shouldn’t be an expensive project, city officials said.

“I don’t think it would cost much to string lights in the alleyways,” said Steve Glass, city planning and transportation director.

One challenge that hasn’t been worked out is what to do with commercial trash bins in the alleys, Glass said.

“There will have to be some sort of screening or grouping of the trash bins, but I think that’s something that can be worked out without too much trouble,” Glass said.

Another challenge planners have is designing a food truck ordinance, said Derrel Smith, city senior planner.

“We don’t have an ordinance outlining how to deal with food trucks. It was discussed a year or so ago, but nothing was ever submitted as a possible ordinance,” Smith said.

The ordinance would likely detail what kind of trucks would be allowed, where they would park, hours of operation and meeting health standards, city officials said. The ordinance might also stipulate a food truck must not compete with a brick and mortar restaurant.

Representatives of some downtown restaurants said Friday they did not want to comment on the food truck concept because they didn’t have enough information about the plan.

Julie Yell, manager of the Rail Pizza Co., favors the food truck concept.

“I say bring them on. We want to encourage more dining experiences downtown. I wouldn’t care if a pizza truck parks next to us,” she said.

Renovation of Frisco Park is a big part of the Gateway plan. Surveys showed residents strongly supported outdoor concerts in the park.

Gateway officials suggested Frisco Stage may need to be demolished to connect the north and south ends of the park and create a larger venue for concerts on a portable stage. A portable stage could be adjusted in size to fit a large or small performance.

The concrete Frisco stage was built in 2005 with some state general improvement money, said Marge Wolf, alderwoman, who was the Main Street Rogers director when the stage was built. The Rogers Street Department did most of the construction work, and Nabholz donated the steel and cranes to erect the roof pillars and the roof, Smith said.

It isn’t clear if use of state money to build the stage might impact long-term plans for the structure.

“I’m not sure there is any state law that addresses that issue,” said Chris Griffin, city staff attorney. “Nothing lasts forever, and things change. I just don’t think there is any law that deals with the destruction of items built with General Improvement Fund money.”