

*From The City Wire*

## The Redevelopment 'Buzz has Started' in Downtown Rogers

by Rose Ann Pearce | May 6, 2015

Gary and Jan Oftedahl have owned a photography studio in downtown Rogers for more than 30 years. A dozen years ago, they moved to an apartment above their business.

"We like it because we just have to walk downstairs to go to work," Gary Oftedahl said. "Walking up the stairs is good exercise, but you give up a few things like a garage to park the car."

There are clear indications in this city of more than 60,000 residents that a renewed interest in redevelopment of the downtown area is growing. The city is spending nearly \$450,000 for an economic development plan for downtown. And it is spending \$5 million on redevelopment and expansion of green space at Lake Atalanta, on the eastern edge of downtown.

Downtown living is also catching on, including Mayor Greg Hines, who at 39, wants his two daughters to experience what Rogers was like when he was growing up there. Hines is building a new home in the area defined as downtown, running from the lake on the east to Eighth Street or 13th Street, on the west and from Olrich or New Hope Roads on the south to Arkansas 102 on the north.

"It's not really defined," Hines said of the downtown boundaries. "The footprint can be as big or small, initially. You don't want the scope to be so large that a monumental project looks small."

### WORKING ON A PLAN

Gateway Planning Group of Dallas is developing the downtown plan. The plan will probably be rolled late this summer, Hines said.

"What I wanted was a real economic development plan to show a potential develop what they can do for a return on their investment."

"The buzz has started," Hines said, over coffee at Iron Horse Coffee Company, an early investor in downtown growth. "A number of real estate transactions have occurred or are pending. There are at least four different transactions in the contracts in the last two months. Developers are getting ahead of the curve and tied to a specific location in anticipation of what might happen."

Discussions about one particular building are ongoing. That is the city's interest in the former Morning News building on



*Customers order an evening meal from Trickdilly, a food truck parked on Walnut in downtown Rogers just outside of Brick Street Brews. Troy Walker owns the food truck and hits the spot on Friday and Saturday evenings.*

West Second Street. Hines said the city's interest stems from the need for expansion of the Rogers Historical Museum, directly across the building from the Morning News building. The building was constructed in 1947 as the home for the Newt Hailey Motor Co., a Ford dealership.

The city has been in talks with representatives of Northwest Arkansas Media, which owns the building, but an agreement has not been reached.

"It could be restored to look as it did as a car dealership and we would be repurposing a structure downtown," Hines said.

Other projects are in various stages of discussion or planning but are not ready to be discussed. Later this year, a new Walmart Neighborhood Market will open on the southwest corner of Eighth and Walnut streets.

Still there are plenty of amenities in the downtown area, said Jan Oftedahl.

"I recently counted a half dozen grocery stores within walking distance," she said, not to mention bars and restaurants.

#### DOWNTOWN LIVING

The city also is conducting a zoning review of downtown residential areas to drive more downtown residential living. Some are starting to look at the downtown area as a residential area, including Hines' parents who recently moved from a home in Pinnacle to a downtown home one block south and one block west from Hines' new home.

Hines said he wants to be able to walk or ride his bicycle to downtown events like the Rogers Farmers Market.

"It's important to have friends of all ages and you're not as likely to have that in a subdivision. Downtown, there are folks of all age groups from the 70s to the millennials," he said.

He expects a working draft of Gateway's proposals in the next month or so, at which time the city council and others will hold work sessions with builders and others who have expressed interest, he said.

The idea of living downtown was appealing to the Oftedahls, who claim not to be too interested in yard work. Today, they can't imagine living anywhere else, said Jan Oftedahl. Their apartment boasts 2,500 square feet and 16 8-foot tall windows. She is not sure the couple could return to a neighborhood after living downtown all these years. Like others, she is excited to hear what the Gateway study and plans will reveal.

#### 'ECLECTIC OPPORTUNITIES'

Another strong advocate for downtown growth and development is architect John Mack. He has worked and lived within four to five blocks of his downtown office since establishing his practice in Rogers in 1972. He too looks forward to the new plan, noting zoning issues will need to be addressed to attract more businesses and people to the area. Walkability will be an important issue as well as the connection between Lake Atalanta and downtown.

Another area Mack hopes will be addressed is the northern entryway into the downtown from U.S. 62 on the north side along Second Street.

"There are eclectic opportunities with contemporary elements with historical elements," Mack said. "There are a lot of different opportunities. The diversity of what downtown can be is exciting to create a sense of place."

Troy Walker is trying to tap into the eclectic opportunity. He is the operator of Trickdilly, a food truck he parks on Walnut in downtown Rogers just outside of Brick Street Brews. He hits the spot on Friday and Saturday evenings.

"Rogers has been really good to us. We do more business typically on Fridays as folks are getting off work than most Saturdays. But being here in front of the tap tasting bar we stay pretty busy from their customers," Walker said. "We park in downtown Bentonville for the lunch traffic each day, but there are far more trucks per capita. ... The city of Rogers has been so easy to work with. They gave us a six-month permit and we are about the only truck parked here downtown in the evenings."

Walker said having the local tap bars open in the evenings helps bring more nightlife to downtown Rogers, but he's looking forward to the day when there are more residential options in the brick street area.

Brick Street Brews opened in April 2014 and features locally brewed craft beers and wines. Owners Rick and Naomi

McLeod, Jim and Dana Mather, Lynn Atkins and Mike Rooney, said they sought out a location in downtown Rogers for the brew tasting room and beer garden to give local residents the opportunity to enjoy many of the region's craft beers without leaving home. They see Rogers as a progressive town that have never forsaken its roots.