

DDA Board likes two-story option on cut-through project ; corporation to donate \$125,000

By Pam Fleming • Staff Writer • April 2, 2010

Members of the Northville Downtown Development Authority Board selected the option where the second floor is eliminated but the area is covered in the proposed E. Main Street cut-through.

The selection was discussed at a special meeting Tuesday morning at city hall. Chuck Lapham, principal of the Northville Area Development Corporation, has also agreed to donate \$125,000 to the project.

The two-story option is one of four originally presented by Cooper Design of Ann Arbor.

The other three options were a one-story walk-through leaving the second floor intact; a hybrid option that provided offices in the front and the rear with a two-story light well in the center; and a totally open walk-through where the building would be removed, leaving the space as an open alley.

Preliminary budget estimations are around \$600,000-\$720,000 for the two-story option discussed at the meeting.

After several meetings, two of the concepts were knocked out – the open-alley concept and the hybrid concept. Comerica Bank officials said they would be willing to work with either the one-story project or the two-story project with a covered walk-through.

Bank officials have agreed to a basically token-cost long-term lease arrangement (\$1 for about 100 years) rather than a building sale arrangement for the walk-through space.

Cooper said this is important from a building code perspective, because if the walk-through was owned separately from the bank, there would be firewall issues between the adjoining bank and the cut-through.

“This (a lease arrangement) will make construction simpler and less costly as well as provide greater design flexibility,” Cooper said.

The cut-through will be built through the former Girly Daze space just west of the bank.

Interpretive panels planned

Interpretive panels outlining the history of Northville or artwork are planned for the walk-through walls.

Members of the project steering committee also liked the two-story design. “They liked the idea of natural light to illuminate the space,” said Lori Ward, executive director of the DDA.

Savings can be gained from the full two-story concept because natural sunlight means artificial lighting will only have to be used at night. Lapham said he likes the two-story concept.

“I feel that it will be longer lasting and is what many of us saw as the future of the downtown,” he said.

Lapham said the Northville Area Development Corporation was formed in 1962, and it was privately funded by six or seven individuals in the community to aid the downtown.

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Cost concerns expressed

Bob Buckhave said the DDA has a track record of going over budget.

“Does it have to be an experience to get from the Marquis Parking Lot to Main Street?” he asked. “I think not. I’m afraid this is going to send a very bad message, especially in these economic times. I’m more in favor of a concept that holds the cost down. It needs to be carefully thought out how my money’s being spent, and I speak for every taxpayer who contributes to the DDA.”

Jim Long and Lou Mascola of Gardenviews also questioned the cost of the project. “Bob (Buckhave) raises some real good points about the cost overruns,” Long said. “I hate the cost, but I like the overall advantages of the two-story option.” “I love the concept, but I think it’s ridiculously expensive for the amount of square footage that we’re gaining,” said Margene Buckhave, who voted no on the project.

John Casey likes the two-story option.

“Initially, I was leaning toward the one-story option because of the cost factor, but with Chuck’s gift from his corporation we’re looking at a difference of only \$90,000,” Casey said. “I like the fact that we could put banners up, and the operating expenses are lower.”

Carolann Ayers also favors the two-story concept. “This is a one-time chance to do it right,” she said.

Greg Presley, DDA chair, OKed the two-story concept as well. “The benefit of day lighting means passive solar gain,” he said. “And, I do think having the private donation makes all the difference.”

“I think we get a much higher quality project for not much more money with the two-story option,” said Chris Johnson.

City council will have another opportunity to discuss the project next Monday night.

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