

DDA board likes two-story option on E. Main cut-through project

Corporation to donate \$125,000

By Pam Fleming • STAFF WRITER • April 8, 2010

On March 30, members of the Northville Downtown Development Authority Board selected the option in which the second floor is eliminated but having the walkway covered in the proposed East Main Street cut-through.

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 options 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 which provided offices in the front and the rear with a large two-story light well in the center space; and a totally open walk-through in which the building would be removed, leaving the space as an open alley. PROJECT COST UNDER \$800,000

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

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 of the other two concepts — either the one-story project or the two-

story project with a covering over the walk-through.

The bank is agreeable to a lease arrangement 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 front and rear facades will be redone in the project. Comerica Bank officials have also agreed to have the blue awnings on the front of the Comerica Bank replaced with more traditional sloped awnings.

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

Comerica Bank has expressed no interest in leasing or improving the second floor space over the former Girly Daze store.

INTERPRETIVE PANELS PLANNED

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

Members of the project steering committee liked the two-story design best.

“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 will mean that artificial lighting will only have to be used in the evenings.

Lapham said he also liked the two-story concept.

"I feel that it will be longer lasting and give our generations a better perspective of what many of us saw as the future of the downtown," Lapham said. "I do like the idea of just one door on the north end of the walk-through."

Lapham said the Northville Area Development Corporation was formed in 1962. The corporation was privately funded by six or seven people in the community to aid the downtown area.

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 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."

DDA board member John Casey said he 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, likes the two-story concept as well. "The benefit of day lighting means passive solar gain," he said.

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