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Downtown Northville: Walkthrough options outlined

Several parties must evaluate suggested plans

By Pam Fleming
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Gary Cooper from Cooper Design in Ann Arbor presented four options last week on what could become a new part of downtown Northville in the future - a walkthrough or cut-through from the Marquis Parking Lot south of Dunlap Street to Main Street.

Greg Presley, chair of the Northville Downtown Development Authority, mentioned a few months ago that this idea has been batted about since the 1990s among city planners. But it looks like it may actually become a reality in the near future if all parties involved can come to a consensus.

DDA Board members must first discuss plans with Comerica Bank, which has agreed to donate the property to construct the project next to the bank's location on East Main Street.

The cut-through would be made where the former Girly Daze store is located, just west of the downtown branch office.

Board members also need to review the proposal with Northville Historic District Commissioners and members of city council before any construction plans are drawn.

THE FOUR CONCEPTS

The four concepts are a one-story tunnel, which would be the least expensive; a full two-story option, which would be the most expensive; a partial two-story design; and an open alley. All concepts assume the same front and rear facade improvements.

In the one-story, "tunnel" option, the walkthrough is proposed as a one-story space with the existing second floor lease space remaining above.

In the full, two-story option, the second floor would be removed.

In the hybrid or partial two-story option, the walkthrough is proposed as a one-story space at the front and the rear and as a two-story space in the center, where there would be a two-story central light well.

The open alley option proposes that the second floor and roof are removed at the walkthrough space and that the walkthrough be treated as an open alley. The front and rear facades, however, would remain and be reconstructed.

Cooper said some changes would have to be made to the Comerica Bank space and that the front of the branch office would also have to be rebuilt.

A bathroom would have to be moved so that it could stay in the bank's space, and a new vestibule in

the rear of the branch office would be needed.

Presley said DDA board members also decided against adding public rest rooms as part of the project.

DISPLAY PANELS

Another concept discussed as part of the project are some display panels that could be added on the walls of the first floor of the walkthrough. The displays could represent aspects of the history of Northville or highlight local artists' work.

Cooper also talked about having a skylight if a second-floor plan was adopted.

One advantage to having an open-space concept is that it would give more options as far as adding windows on the walls. Cooper said Comerica bank officials, however, aren't terribly interested in having windows on the bank's side of the walkthrough.

Cooper said he can stay within the estimated budget of \$800,000 no matter which design is selected.

Lori Ward, executive director of the DDA, said there was a lot of discussion amongst Design Committee members as to whether the space should be open at both ends or with doors.

Cooper said he could include a sign or a design on the sidewalk to mark the entrance to the walkthrough, which would have a 12.5-foot-wide entrance. An open-air walkthrough would require more maintenance.

Jim Gallogly, public works director, said he thinks the walkthrough is a good idea.

BOARD MEMBERS' OPINIONS

Board members weighed in on their choice of the four options during the Jan. 5 special meeting.

John Casey from Poole's Tavern likes the open alley concept. Carolann Ayers likes the one-story "tunnel" option. Linda Heaton likes the partial two-story concept with skylights.

Pat Sullivan, city manager, was interested in either the full two-story option or the partial two-story option.

Jim Long and Margene Buckhave like the one-story option because that would cost less.

David Larsen likes either the full two-story option or the partial two-story option. Lou LaChance likes either the one-story option or the full two-story option. Mary Starring likes the one-story option, again, because of the lower cost.

Ken Roth likes the full two-story option or the partial two-story option.

Presley likes the fourth option, the open ally concept. Johnson said he is not "married" to any option, but is leaning to the full two-story option. "It's an investment in the future of downtown," Johnson said. "I think it's penny-wise and pound foolish to not do the one we prefer and try to go back and recreate it later."

Cooper said he needs some direction soon because the DDA would like to start the design in the next construction season. He will submit the concepts for discussion to the Historic District Commission and city council, with a future discussion to be set up with Comerica Bank officials.

Johnson said it would be best to receive bank officials' input before going to commissioners or council members as they are the ones who are donating the property.

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