

April 1, 2010

Downtown projects planned for Northville

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Editor

With a little help from one of its friends, the City of Northville may soon have another new amenity that would increase foot traffic in the downtown area.

The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) board recommended a two-story concept for the proposed walk-through from the city lot behind the Marquis Theater to Main Street Tuesday morning. The two-story concept is the more expensive of the two final concepts under consideration, but a donation from the Northville Area Development Corporation (NADC) will help bridge the gap.

The NADC, fronted by long-time resident and businessman Chuck Lapham, will provide \$125,000 to the project, but only for the two-story project, not the one-story plan that had also been proposed.

"I just felt like it was longer-lasting," said Lapham. "We'll give the next generation something that can best serve the future of the town."

The walk-through had been discussed by the board for years and incorporated into the downtown strategic plan. It will involve a sort of glitzed up hallway that will be cut into the west side of the Comerica Bank building off Main Street. Both floors will be cut away, allowing for a large space with a 57-foot skylight cut into the middle of the 67-foot roof. The DDA had budgeted about \$800,000 for the project. Early estimates came in at between \$400,000 and \$721,000, depending on which concept was selected. With the donation, there was only a \$95,000 difference between the estimates for the one-story plan and the two-story plan.

That was one recent development that made the project more economically feasible, said Gary Cooper of Cooper Designs, the architect for the project. The other was that representatives from the bank said they would be open to a lease agreement with the city, rather than requiring the city to purchase the space. A lease would be economically beneficial because city code would require a new firewall be constructed if the property changed hands.

"A lease agreement would eliminate a lot of code issues and give us more flexibility," said Cooper.

The taller space would allow the DDA to hang banners promoting special events. Display cases in the walls could highlight city businesses or become home to historical exhibits, too.

Still the project did not receive universal approval. Resident and Landlord Bob Buckhave said he was concerned about the expense in a down economy.

"I like the concept, but I'm adamantly opposed to the cost," he said. "We have a track record in the DDA of going over budget-it's just a fact of life.

"It's always been my contention that we should back these costs to make it more palatable," he added. "Does it have to be an experience to Main Street from the parking lot? I think not."

The issue should go to the city council for approval at its next meeting, which starts at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, said City Manager Pat Sullivan.

The DDA has construction work planned on the streetscape this year, too. He said there's no specific timetable to get the cut through project under way.

"We were hoping for this construction season, but we're already getting into this construction season," he said. "We still have some design work to do."

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John McCallum:

Why is this being put forward? Is there something I am missing in this article?

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John McCallum:

Bob Buckhave seems to have the only common sense position on this off the wall idea. If this is the best the city can do with \$900000

I will be appalled