

Downtown concept unveiled

Final draft focuses on 'building upon what has been occurring'

Brian Sharp
Staff writer

(Democrat and Chronicle, September 29, 2007) — Redevelopment of downtown should start from either side of Main Street, the head of a local design center says, focusing on street-level improvements in areas where private development already is planned. The final draft of design concepts from a three-day January workshop was unveiled Friday evening during an open house at the Rochester Regional Community Design Center, 1115 E. Main St.

"This is a next chapter, building upon what has been occurring," Joni Monroe, the center's executive director, said earlier in the day.

Monroe points to the area around Fitzhugh and West Main streets, where Florida developer George Traikos has promised a \$8.1 million overhaul of the Academy Building to begin next spring.

On the east side of downtown, the focal point is near the Eastman Theatre, which is planning a \$35million renovation next summer. Plans also are moving forward to build housing or a hotel on a parking lot across the street.

The January design workshop drew an estimated 120 architects and other professionals to Midtown Plaza, where they brainstormed ideas for renovating downtown, focusing on areas generally within the Inner Loop as well as High Falls. The best of those ideas are in the final draft unveiled Friday.

Ideas for Midtown Plaza include knocking down two or three buildings, Monroe said, removing the front portion and building new, crisscrossing the area with streets named for the old department stores, and retaining the atrium of the mall while making it more open to the outside.

Looking across downtown, other proposals are to build a parking garage on the back of City Hall and to convert the parking lot at State and Church streets to a park, Monroe said. There should be more direct pedestrian access to the Genesee River from State Street and, in High Falls, access to the river gorge and green space at the base of the falls.

A section of the Inner Loop should be filled in but, rather than replace it with a street-level boulevard, North Union and Pitkin streets should be improved and the Inner Loop space developed.

On-street parking should be installed on Main Street, once buses can be routed through the proposed \$230 million, county-led Renaissance Square project off East Main Street between North Clinton Avenue and St. Paul Street. In addition to a bus terminal, the project includes performance theaters and a Monroe Community College campus.

Monroe said that, while thinking big, there also are smaller ideas, such as projecting images off the fortresslike Eastman Commons buildings, the student housing near the Eastman School of Music.

"We're really looking at some things that could be done in the next 12 to 18 months," she said.

BDSHARP@DemocratandChronicle.com