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Roseville seeks downtown renewal

City lays plans to attract new businesses and homes to area.

By Jennifer K. Morita -- Bee Staff Writer

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Community leaders want to turn downtown Roseville into a vibrant gathering spot with public plazas, creekside walkways and a bustling mix of shops, restaurants and homes.

So last week, the Roseville City Council agreed to put together a downtown specific plan that will serve as a blueprint for development in the 160-acre area encompassing Vernon Street and the historic district.

City staff members also will pursue a formal program to manage the downtown area, as well as an in-lieu parking fee to ease parking requirements and encourage more businesses to open.

Later this month, Roseville Redevelopment Manager Jan Shellito will ask the council to approve a budget and plan to implement the downtown revitalization strategy.

Last summer, the city initiated the \$97,929 Downtown Roseville Visioning Project, inviting anyone interested to work with consultants to develop a plan for the city's core.

The group's recommendations were unveiled last week during a council workshop.

Much of Roseville developed using the specific plan process, which outlines exactly where homes, commercial space, offices and industrial buildings are placed.

"Unlike our typical specific plan process, we're not reacting to a group of developers and landowners," Shellito said after the workshop. "We're driving it."

Having a specific plan in place will allow the city to control and shape development in the downtown.

For instance, one of the area's key assets is a creek that meanders through Royer Park close to retail shops and the Civic Center along Vernon Street.

Currently, the city owns a large chunk of property along Dry Creek where there are city offices, a fire station and a parking lot.

Downtown Visioning participants say they'd rather see shops, restaurants and homes as well as public walkways and possibly an outdoor amphitheater overlooking the creek.

Making the vision into a reality, however, requires a push from the city.

Consultant Marie Jones told the council that while the city as a whole has a "fantastic economy," conditions in the downtown area aren't as rosy.

Downtown only captures 1.5 percent of all retail sales in Roseville, according to Jones.

There are more vacant storefronts downtown than in the rest of Roseville, and rental rates for office and retail space are lower.

Jones said an important element of revitalizing downtown would be adding residential units. New homes would serve a niche market and provide more people to frequent businesses there.

Only 35 percent of the 11,500 households projected to move to Roseville by 2015 will be able to buy homes, she said.

"That's a big change in Roseville, and it has to do with the rapidly rising price of homes," Jones said. "That translates into a demand for new condominiums."

Building relatively less-expensive condominiums downtown would attract young families, "urban singles" and seniors looking to downsize, she said.

Downtown Visioning participants also urged the city to pursue an in-lieu parking fee program.

Existing parking requirements have discouraged prospective business owners from opening up shop in the downtown area, Jones said.

If developers are allowed to pay a parking fee instead of providing on-site spaces, the city can use the money to build a parking structure that could be shared by businesses throughout the downtown area.

"It allows the city to use parking more efficiently," Jones said.

In addition to pursuing a specific plan and in-lieu parking fee, city staff also will look into putting into place some type of what they called a "Main Street program."

Shellito said the program could be a public/ private partnership between the Redevelopment Agency and Downtown Merchants Association or a private organization.

Shellito said the city's Redevelopment Agency already does some economic development, as well as promotes downtown events.

The Downtown Merchants Association participates in similar efforts, Shellito said.

"We need to formalize what is taking place right now," she said. "We should evaluate all of our efforts and see if there's a better way to maximize our resources."

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