

City gears up for downtown rehab funds

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Revitalization committee looks at projects.

Sprucing up the facades of downtown businesses, better lighting and appearance of alleys, sidewalk improvements and renovating “the ugly corner” are near the top of a wish list.

Dawson Area Development director Jen Wolf shared the list last Wednesday with the Gothenburg City Council and downtown revitalization committee members.

Wolf compiled the list from interviews with downtown business owners and brought it to the council retreat.

DAD administrates a downtown revitalization grant and is helping the city develop a downtown assessment plan.

The plan is needed to apply for phase two of a Community Development Block Grant that could bring \$350,000 into the community for downtown revitalization projects.

Despite receiving a similar grant in 2008 that helped downtown property owners make several improvements, Wolf said many owners indicated more work is needed, especially on facades.

Making alleys more appealing through better lighting and cleaning them up was also important as was improving downtown sidewalks.

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The committee talked about installing railings on some of the sidewalks outside heavily trafficked businesses, like the grocery store, for the ease and safety of older citizens.

Rehabilitating property at the corner of Lake Avenue and Highway 30 was also a priority and several committee members talked about spending the money to do it.

Committee members also discussed paving graveled parking lots and and talked about the possibility of installing LED lights downtown.

Grant money can be spent on building rehabilitation, housing, public improvements and to create loan programs.

Wolf also asked business owners about the creation of a business improvement district, similar to one in Cozad, in which property owners are charged a small fee on utility bills that goes into a larger pot.

Additional improvement are then made with the funds and might include park benches, flowers, trees or promotional materials.

Of the 30 business owners interviewed, Wolf said 29 would support such a district.

On Monday, the committee met again to discuss how the grant money would be spent and will have a recommendation at the March 4 council meeting.

A March 18 deadline looms for submission of a downtown revitalization plan.

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