

Spiffing up the strip

Group plans Rushmore Road fixup

By Dan Daly
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To millions of tourists, it is Mount Rushmore Road, the gateway to the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore. To local residents, it is Eighth Street, one of the primary north-south thoroughfares and a favorite of teen-agers.

A group of property owners and merchants along the busy street hopes to turn it into a showcase of civic pride, something that sets it apart from the commercial strips that border every other American city.

A meeting to organize a Mount Rushmore Road Business Association this spring brought together a lot of interested property owners, organizers say. Out of that meeting came a planning committee to look at both long-term and short-term ideas for spiffing up the image of Rushmore Road.

And according to committee member Paul Swedlund, the time is right to begin the planning.

The state Department of Transportation plans to remove wooden street light poles along Eighth Street next spring, replacing them with modern aluminum poles on the east side of the street.

And later, the north portion of Rushmore Road is pegged for reconstruction work similar to that going on in downtown Rapid City.

Late this year, the state will begin meeting with city officials to plan that project, which could begin as early as 1994.

"This committee should be involved in those discussions to ensure that the reconstructed portion of Mount Rushmore Road reflects the business association's long-term plans for the entire road," the committee wrote in a memo to association members.

Swedlund said the new lights and the street construction might be a good opportunity to install brackets for flags (see below) and get some of the telephone and electrical lines buried underground and out of sight.

That, the committee members said, would go a long way toward removing some of the clutter along Rushmore Road.

Other long-term plans:

■ **Flags:** Members are talking about creating an Avenue of Flags along Mount Rushmore Road, featuring flags from all 50 states along one side of the street leading to its namesake national memorial. The look would be reminiscent of the walkway leading to Mount Rushmore.

Eventually, the committee members believe, Mount Rushmore Road could have free-standing flag poles along one side with 50 state flags. On the other side, banners could be hung



Journal photo by Don Polow

Mount Rushmore Road is a jumble of utility poles, power lines, billboards and signs. However, it may get a new look.

from the aluminum street lights.

■ **Signs:** This could be the stickiest issue for the business people along Rushmore Road. Swedlund said the committee was looking at voluntary standards for signs along Mount Rushmore Road, rather than a change in the citywide ordinance that governs size, height and other characteristics of outdoor advertising.

Changing signs also could be the most costly of the items the committee is considering. But Swedlund said the changes could be made gradually. "Sign work doesn't come cheap," Swedlund said. "But we're looking

five to seven years down the road. By then, many will need to replace their signs anyway."

■ **Greenery:** Other cities have incorporated landscaping into their main thoroughfares to give them a more suburban feel. The committee is looking at a number of ways to help bring a Black Hills feel to Mount Rushmore Road with shrubbery and landscaping at the businesses that front the street.

In the short term, business owners are being encouraged to plant flowers in cedar barrels along the street — giving the paved street a colorful

border on each side.

When the state begins planning for the reconstruction of the northern portion of Mount Rushmore Road, the committee may look at incorporating such improvements as brick crosswalks and other decorations.

Reconstruction of the southern portion of the street is not under consideration, probably until after the year 2000. The association could lobby to move that schedule up and incorporate improvements already made on the north end of the street into the plans, the committee said.