

Downtown booster sees n

Pat Dobbs

Assistant City Editor

By midsummer, downtown Rapid City property owners will receive a plan promoters hope will help determine the business district's future.

Bryan Schnell, redevelopment director of the Downtown Development Corp., predicts the outcome will make or break his 1-year-old organization. And, he says, the projects may influence residents for "the rest of our lifetime."

The list will cover perennial problems, from parking to pigeons, as well as long-range considerations of rebuilding streets and routes to Mount Rushmore, and extending landscaping. The plan will be presented to business and building owners and eventually figure in the city's master plan, says Schnell.

Calling downtown the heart of the city's cultural and economic activity, Schnell says the development plan, among other things, will suggest a financial commitment from the private sector as leverage in negotiating with city hall.

Public-private funding cooperation will be needed because government subsidies for such things as street improvements, public restrooms or landscaping "ain't gonna happen," says Schnell.

And the involvement of the Downtown Development Corp. is needed because managing the area as a business "is a job that needs to be attended to," says Schnell.

What business and building owners decide will "determine if the Downtown Development Corp. is going to be the organization that helps downtown become the strongest economic area between Denver and St. Paul, or if we're just a flash in the plan," said Schnell.

The decision would come in the second year of the three-year commitment to the Rapid City Main Street Program. The redevelopment authority is funded by city, state and private money, and is charged with developing a strategy to improve downtown.

Downtown is a 40-square-block area bounded by Omaha and Kan-

sas City streets, West and East boulevards.

Planning for the long-range needs of downtown began in 1985 when Mayor Art LaCroix appointed the Heart of the City Task Force. The Main Street Program evolved from that, starting under the new name in 1988 as part of an economic development project aided by the state and associated with the non-profit National Main Street Center in Washington, D.C.

Filling empty buildings downtown and preserving the historic district that dates to Rapid City's beginnings are among the primary goals.

Schnell points out results can be seen in the renewed interest in preservation projects. Several false fronts have been removed to reveal unique architecture, a process Schnell hopes will prove the domino theory.

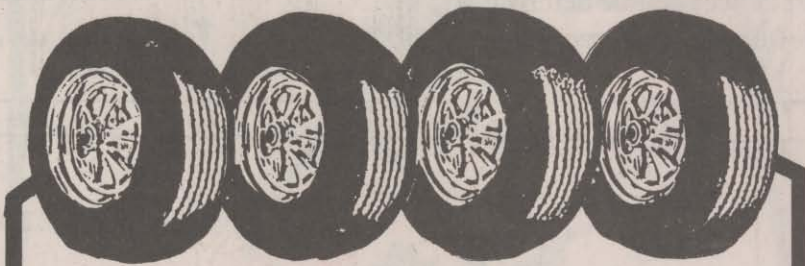
And the changes, he says, will benefit the community in the long run as well as revitalize downtown.

Studies show restoring buildings increases sales and helps stabilize property values.

The campaign to clean up and fix up is at the core of one of Schnell's objectives: to make downtown well-lit, well-groomed and safe. That image, along with a "bustling and fun" atmosphere created by scheduled promotions (such as bringing the Seated Lincoln to the corner of St. Joe and 6th streets and this year's St. Patrick's Day festivities) will attract shoppers, he said.

"We know that 2 million people turn the corner of Omaha and Mount Rushmore Road every year... What we have to do is get them to...alter their travel plans by giving them something they never expected," said Schnell.

The relatively compact shopping district is loaded with vintage brick buildings, Schnell said. "We should tear off the facades and let (the original exteriors) shine through... People are hungry for (historical)



We Have Better Tire Buys
TIRES, TIRES, TIRES is NOW in 2 Locations
Largest selection of Guaranteed used tires

Prices begin at \$5.00 and up

No Waiting - No Appointments Needed

10-15 Minute Servicing

**WE BUY AND SELL GOOD USED TIRES
AND GOOD USED CUSTOM RIMS**

Compare and Save With Us

342-2483
327 E. Omaha

342-4552
Across from Family Thrift West

need for private funds

stuff. If they want it — give it to them."

The redevelopment is not just geared to tourism. Schnell says his organization also is addressing year-round shopping, and notes there are more stores and services downtown than at the Rushmore Mall.

Business recruitment is a more subtle campaign, not as visual as restoring a building's front or advertising for shoppers. So Schnell and college interns have stepped off measurements of buildings downtown and compiled on computer an inventory of available spaces. Schnell claims his "computer jazz" is more current and extensive than the county assessor's.

"You know how you get that? Here's how," he says, revealing a quarter-size hole in the sole of a worn loafer.

His leg work also includes meetings to forge partnerships between city hall and downtown, and between the various organizations active in the community. Establishing communication, he says, will strengthen downtown, link it to the civic center and the new hotel, as well as "bringing into the fold" businesses complaining of being left out.

"We want to let them be what they are, but tie them in and make it all stronger," said Schnell.

A related but separate committee is assisting in that effort. Appointed

by Mayor Keith Carlyle, the City Center Resource Council represents various entities and is working to establish itself as a clearinghouse for various community improvement proposals.

Schnell, a member of the council, says the panel's contributions are assisting in developing consistent signs at entrances to downtown. Other assistance is expected, says chairman Sharon Lee.

"There are a lot of good ideas, a lot of things happening within the community," said Lee. "We want to make sure the (proposed world-class museum) doesn't die. We want to make certain we've explored every avenue."