

Square expected to bolster downtown

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MAIN STREET SQUARE:

Work is expected to start this fall on the \$6.5 million project.

By Shell Jeffery-Tornjack
Journal correspondent

Three years of planning and public input will culminate in the creation of a new community plaza in downtown Rapid City. The proposed Main Street Square took one step closer to reality when the Rapid City Council voted to include \$3.5 million in the next go-round of 2012 projects.

"This will be a downtown events center. There will be something for the whole community to enjoy," said Dan Senftner, president of Destination Rapid City.

The existing parking lot at the corner of Main Street and Sixth Street will be the site of the new Main Street Square. The one-acre lot will feature a stage, an interactive fountain, a sitting garden, an oval lawn that will be transformed into an ice rink in the winter months, a waterfall, free wifi and public restrooms.

"We believe it will bring considerably more people downtown. It will increase shopping and eating. People will bring their kids downtown to skate, and they may stop and get a coffee or to check out the clothing stores," Senftner said.

Nina Hollenbeck has owned the Main Street Market for about 14 years. During that time she believes pedestrian traffic has remained pretty consistent. The addition of the Main Street Square downtown is a great way to increase that traffic, she said. "I think anytime you get people downtown and around the area, it's a good thing."

The project began in 2009 when the Rapid City Convention and Visitors Bureau hired consultant Roger Brooks to do a branding, development and action plan for Rapid City and the downtown area.

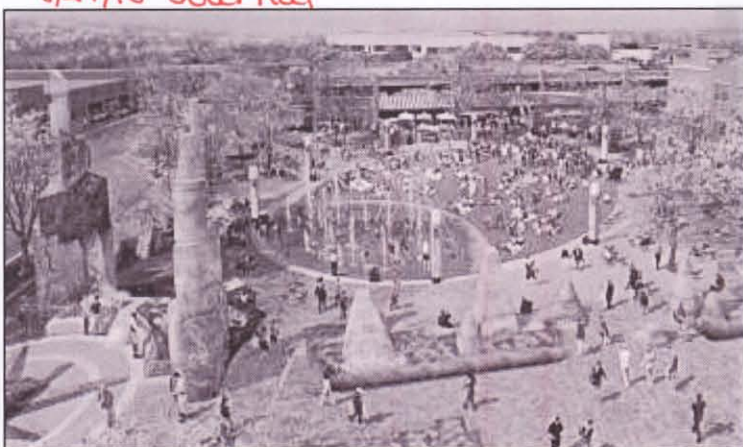
From Brooks' research and public meetings came the recommendation to construct a community plaza downtown.

"That's what is working around the country — a town square. Something for the entire public," he said "It is more for locals than for tourists."

Organizers envision the square becoming a hub of activity for the community, with concerts, lectures/series, festivals, garden shows, community events, chess clubs, and youth groups all taking advantage of the new downtown space.

"We want to bring energy, people and traffic downtown," Senftner said.

For the larger events or



Courtesy illustration

An architect's rendering of proposed Main Street Square at Main and Sixth streets.

2012 funds

Sixth in a series of stories featuring the projects that have received approval for 2012 funding.

Today: Main Street Square
Monday: Rapid City Economic Development Partnership's Jobs Program

festivals, organizers will close Sixth Street.

One of the focal points of the square will be the water fountains. The water feature will be interactive with music. Senftner said children will even be able to run and play in them.

During the winter, the 8,000-foot oval lawn will be transformed into a groomed ice skating rink where images can be projected onto the stage's screen while holiday music plays.

One activity Senftner is looking forward to is a weekly movie night. The stage will have a canvas screen, with the projector above the stage. The sound will emanate throughout the park via speakers in the poles.

"I think that a lot of us are looking for entertainment that is not a bar or a club; a place to meet friends that is in a comfortable

environment. The Main Street Square gives us that type of meeting place," Senftner said.

The town square can be used for a variety of events, he added.

"We've already had a phone call from someone who wants to have their wedding there."

Senftner said part of the purpose for the square is recreation, but it should spur economic development as well.

"Perhaps an ice cream shop, maybe some year-round farmers market vendors, or food vendors could occupy the space and be a great complement to the square," he said.

There were some concerns when organizers first started discussing adding a new park to downtown Rapid City.

Some people were concerned about vandalism or people sleeping in the park. Senftner said, however, the park will be equipped with cameras mounted on the poles that will monitor the area 24 hours a day.

The police and the community will be able to monitor the park by logging onto a website.

The square also will be designed so that the traffic noise is reflected back to the

automobiles, so when people are in the plaza they can visit comfortably, Senftner said.

The total project cost is \$6.5 million. In addition to the \$3.5 million from the city's 2012 fund, \$3 million is being raised privately. Expenses for upkeep and maintenance will come from revenue from the new voter-approved Business Improvement District.

Since garnering the financial support of the Rapid City Council, plans have been moving along really fast, Senftner said. Architectural drawings are about 90 percent completed. He anticipates groundbreaking in October or November this year. Construction should begin in 2011. The completion date will depend largely upon the weather.

The management of the square will be determined by the Business Improvement District Board. They are taking requests for proposals for the management of the square.

"We would believe the board would look for an educated organization who is familiar with the plans to run it," Senftner said. "We believe Destination Rapid City could be that organization."