Square expected to bolster downtown

8/29/10 Journal

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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," said Dan Sentfner, 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 become a stage, interactive fountain, a sitting garden, an oval lawn that will be transformed into an ice rink in the winter months, a waterfall, free will 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 shops," Sentfner said.

Nina Hollenbeck has owned the Main Street Market for about 14 years. During that time she believes pedestrian traffic has remained pretty consistent.

"This addition to the Main Street Square downtown is a great way to increase that traffic, she said. "I think it will get people downtown and around the area, it's a good thing.""

The project began in 2011 when the Rapid City Convention and Visitors Bureau hired consultant Roger Brooks to do a brand-development and construction 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's more for locals than for tourists."

Organizers envision the square becoming a high-activity location for the community, with concerts, lectures, festivals, garden shows, community events, club nights, club nights, club nights, and youth groups all taking advantage of the new downtown space.

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

For the larger events or automobiles, so when people are in the plaza they can visit comfortably, Sentfner 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 very fast, Sentfner said. Architectural drawings are about 90 percent completed. He anticipates groundbreaking in October or November this year. Construction should begin in 2013. The completion date will depend largely upon the weather.

The management of the square will be determined by the Business Improvement District Board. "We are taking requests for proposals for the management of the square, " Sentfner said. "We would like the board would look for an educated organizer who is familiar with the plans to run it," Sentfner said. "We believe Destination Rapid City could be that organization."