Downtown buildings can get look-over

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Owners of downtown Rapid City buildings can begin to take advantage of some free architectural help.

The help is available through Downtown Development Corp. (DDC), a group of downtown Rapid City business people.

On Wednesday, DDC members met for the first time with a Sioux Falls architectural firm that the state had hired for the South Dakota Main Street project. The firm is working in Rapid City as well as in Belle Fourche, Pierre and various eastern South Dakota cities and towns.

The company, Baldrige & Associates, Architects and Engineers Inc., can do an energy audit and estimate how to lessen utility costs with certain designs, and determine how the building would appear with a face-lift. Architects will also determine how buildings should be used.

The average value of this type of help is between $500 and $600, said Lee Geiger, a Rapid City architect and chairman of the DDC’s design committee.

Bryan Schnell, DDC director, said it was hoped that owners who used this “conceptual design” type of help would become interested in renovating their buildings.

Christopher Schlitz, Baldrige’s director of architecture, toured downtown Rapid City Wednesday and said: “There is some fabulous opportunities of the Downtown Development Corp. to move forward with downtown Rapid City. The city has a very progressive feel to it.”

Building owners may apply for the service at the DDC offices, located in the Buell Building. Applicants are screened by the DDC to assess:

- Type of work needed;
- The ability and commitment of the owner to proceed with work; and
- How the work would stimulate similar work on nearby buildings.

The DDC then forwards its candidates to Pierre for a decision.

The idea is a project supervised by the Governor’s Office of Economic Development. It is financed with money that major oil companies have paid South Dakota as part of those companies’ settlements for over-charging customers during the 1970s. To date the fund, with interest, is $15.2 million, said Ron Reed, commissioner of the Governor’s Office of Energy Policy.

Baldrige & Associates’s contract began Feb. 1, will last for one year and is not to exceed $131,000.

Reed said the idea partly was to improve the energy usage of downtown buildings.

Geiger said Rapid City “in theory” might use Baldrige’s services for 10 buildings. Owners of smaller buildings might find it more useful than owners of large buildings because the latter might employ their own architects.

If downtown established a Business Improvement District, building owners might be able to pay for improvements through low-interest loans.

Interested owners may attend the first quarterly meeting between the DDC and Baldrige & Associates on May 9. Similar meetings will be May 8 in Belle Fourche and May 10 in Pierre.

Baldrige has designed the historic renovation of Rock County Courthouse in Luverne, Minn., and has done similar work in Sibley, Iowa, and Pipestone, Minn., according to the company.