Planners seek change in downtown zoning

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Rapid City's central business district is too large for the size of the city, Planning Director Knute Knudson said Tuesday, and zoning changes are needed to ensure orderly development.

He told about 15 people who attended a hearing on proposed zoning changes that the city planning department wants to consolidate the growth of business in the downtown area and to make the area esthetically compatible with the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center and Central High School.

The area in which zoning changes are proposed roughly covers Soo San Drive to East Boulevard and West Chicago to Canyon Lake Drive in the western part of town and from North Street to South Street in eastern Rapid City. The most significant changes will take place downtown between Omaha Street and Main Street and from West Boulevard to Fourth Street, Knudson said.

The development of that area in the next 15 years is "vitally" important to downtown, he said.

The proposed zoning changes would provide for orderly development and help reduce parking problems downtown by changing much of the area south of Kansas City Street from central business district zoning to general commercial zoning. General commercial zoning requires businesses to provide off-street parking. As development occurs, adequate parking would be provided, Knudson said.

Outside the downtown area, the planners are recommending a restriction on high density residential zoning.

Much of the area west of West Boulevard between South Street and Kansas City Street would change from medium density residential, which allows construction of single family homes and duplexes, to low density residential, which allows only single family home construction.

In addition, much of Kansas City Street from East Boulevard to Fourth Street would be changed from high density residential, which allows apartment house construction, to medium density residential.

Those changes are proposed as a result of complaints by area residents about the number of apartment houses, Knudson said.

If the changes are approved, Sioux San and Camp Rapid would also be regulated by city zoning ordinances. Previously the lots were classified as government lots and not zoned. Under the proposal, they would be zoned "public, quasi-public," which would force the agencies to have their construction plans approved by the city.

Currently, Knudson said, non-taxable public buildings such as government offices, churches and schools are zoned with a "hodge-podge" of classifications. The proposed change would place all such buildings in the same class.

Buildings currently in place would be allowed to remain, but if the buildings are destroyed, the land owners would be forced to follow the zoning changes for new construction.

Knudson said he hopes the ordinance will go into effect by early next year.

No opposition to the proposed zoning changes was expressed at Tuesday's meeting.