Boston opinion reverses on nodules

Bob Imrie
Staff Writer

With the trees and shrubbery in place and the whirl of construction activity over, those eight corner nodules in downtown Rapid City apparently aren’t so nasty and displeasing after all.

Just one of 30 people contacted by the Rapid City Journal in an on-the-street poll Friday, felt strongly that the $467,000 beautification project isn’t making downtown Rapid City more attractive.

That finding comes just days before the Downtown Association plans to recommend that the city construct eight more, nearly identical.

Randy Fisher, landscape architect for TSP West, said the Downtown Association studied three concepts for the last phase of the project last week and selected the full node. Earlier it had requested scaled-down versions for the final eight.

One concept considerably reduced the size of the eight and the other was a compromise, Fisher said. Estimated costs for the eight complete nodes is $400,000.

The Common Council’s Public Works Committee will learn about the Downtown Association’s decision at Tuesday meeting.

Friday’s findings contrast significantly with a similar, random poll in May when a wide variety of opinions were offered. At that time, sidewalks were torn up, downtown was in general disarray and residents apparently were confused over exactly what the results would be.

Friday’s poll found at least three people who had changed from opponents to supporters but also revealed that some local people are skeptical about building more.

Eight visitors to the city cropped up in the sampling and said they liked the nodes and their “modern” look. One California man, who had just arrived, said he commented to his wife as they drove through about the way the corners were designed.

Earlier this spring, the nodes were the center of controversy. Critics said the project was a waste of money, took too many parking spaces and disrupted traffic. The project had been scaled down from 16.

All but $43,000 of the $467,000 came from federal urban renewal funds earmarked for downtown beautification. The $43,000 represents special assessments some merchants will pay for improvements on their buildings to accommodate the nodes.

Esther Petersen, 4802 West Main, is one person who’s changed her mind about project.

“I think they are benefiting downtown. I am much more in favor now than when they were being constructed, because of the flow of traffic. I still think they obstruct traffic but I will put up with them because of the beauty.”

But asked if eight more should be built, she said no. “The money should be used in some other way.”

Helen Wyss, 3801 Canyon Drive, said, “I think they are just beautiful. I thought at first it was the biggest waste of money but I’ve changed my mind now that I’ve seen them. It’s added a lot of beauty downtown.”

Judy Nash, 2708 Maple, said the final product wasn’t what she envisioned. “I didn’t think it would beautify downtown but I think it does now. It just makes downtown more attractive.” However she thinks eight are enough.

Mrs. Earl Berman, 226 E. St. Andrew, said she’s slowly getting used to the improvement. “I suppose it’s beautifying downtown, but it was an awful lot of money to spend.”

An advocate of the improvement from the start, Diane Meisenholder, 912 St. James, said the nodes “add more” to downtown but “this is enough. We need the parking.”

People will appreciate the work much more after the trees get larger, said Sue Klassi, 414 Belmont. “Maybe it will make downtown a little cooler, too.”

Wesley Peterson of Sunnyvale, Calif., was impressed. “I think they add to the aesthetic beauty. It breaks up the oneness of Main Street.”

And Karen Storsteen of Sioux Falls said, “I like these a lot better than the downtown mall in Sioux Falls. Being able to drive through downtown is so nice.”

Phil Nichols, Rapid City, says the project was “a great idea,” but criticized what’s been done since the work ended. “The city puts something in and then doesn’t maintain it. There’s no clean-up. I think things could be picked up which would make them look a little neater.”

One city resident, who didn’t want to be identified, said he’s reserving his final opinion until after this winter. “Then we can see if the shrubbery survived the salt-laden slush splashed on it.”

Harshest criticism came from Jim Melvin, 611 St. Cloud. “No, I don’t think they beautify. I think they stink. They are a traffic hazard for one thing, and I think the money should have been spent on something that the public could benefit more from.”
The corner nodes in Rapid City feature trees, brick and even benches for people to relax (Staff photo by Bob Imrie)