Corner node project draws new objections

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Staff Writer

If eight more corner nodes are built in downtown Rapid City, they will look nearly identical to the eight that caused a rash of controversy earlier this spring. The second phase also is creating controversy.

The Common Council's Public Works Committee Tuesday voted 8 to 1, with Alderwoman Norma Thomsen dissenting, to accept the Downtown Association's recommendation that another eight "full scale" nodes be constructed.

But the committee stopped short of giving the full go-ahead for construction after hearing more complaints about expanding the project. Instead, it instructed architects to come back with specific figures on how much it will cost merchants who need special work done to accommodate the improvements. That work is paid for through special assessments on the property.

Glenn Plummer, who owns Plummer Plaza and Plaza Grocery at the corner of Seventh and St. Joseph, and has been an outspoken critic of the project, spoke through Attorney Archie Bangs that he will "fight" to keep the node off his corner.

Plummer objects because he spent considerable money earlier to make improvements in his building that the city requested. If the node is built, Bangs said Tuesday, Plummer estimates it could cost him between $75,000 to $80,000 to re-do some of the work.

"He did some of the work at the insistence of the city and now has to undo it at the insistence of the city and he doesn't think that is right," Bangs said. "He will fight it.

Dick Robinson, an architect with TSP West which designed the nodes, said that they are designed to cost about $80,000. But he said maybe that node can be designed with special features so utilities Plummer installed won't have to be moved.

Alderman Lisle Owens said Plummer hasn't been involved in the pre-planning and urged him to attend some meetings so he "doesn't panic. He's after the fact a lot of times."

But owners of the Security Building, diagonally across from Plummer's, also voiced objections. "I don't think our overall attitude is to kill the project but we have some special problems in our corner that we hope we can resolve," said attorney Al Scovel, one of 10 owners. "We are not here to stop what's going on. We are here to assess what's going on.

Vern Podlasek, spokesman for the Downtown Association, urged the city to avoid spending too much time on the controversial corners. "Let's do it in the other corners so we can beautify the city in hurry," he said.

The Downtown Association has done a complete reversal since the first phase of the project was completed. At that time, it wanted the work completed but with "scaled down" nodes that wouldn't abut onto the street or remove more parking spaces.

TSP West designed three concepts after that recommendation, but at a recent meeting the Downtown Association endorsed going with the original node.

"They have been sold on the positive attributes of the full node," Robinson said. He said the scaled down concept cost nearly as much plus there were concerns that the lack of intersection uniformity might create some traffic illusions.

The major difference in the next eight might be that emphasis will be on city directories and facilities for posting public notices instead of seating.

Estimated cost of the next eight is $400,000. The first phase cost $407,000. Most of the funding is coming from urban renewal funds earmarked for downtown beautification.

There was a lot of anger and frustration... over the first eight, but it's whole new ball game now," said businessman LeRoy VanDeStouwe. "Downtown wants them. There's unity and desire to have the project extended.

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