$1.6 million 'facelift' proposed for city block

By JACK GETZ

A $1.6 million facelifting for the 600 block of Main Street was proposed here Tuesday.

Consultant Floyd Tanaka, representing THK Associates Inc. of Denver, Colo., unveiled for city officials a plan to turn the block into an area of small shops, restaurants and offices.

Under a downtown redevelopment proposal drawn by his firm, the city would acquire all properties on the north side of the block from the old fire station west and resell them to a developer who would renovate some and demolish others.

The developer would restore the salvageable buildings on the block to their original appearance, more or less, while upgrading them to meet current Rapid City building and fire codes. He would tear down several deemed irreparable, such as those occupied by the Bronco Bar, Art's Saddlery and Palace Cafe.

Meanwhile, the city would develop the land area around the buildings into a landscaped mall, under the THK proposal. The site now occupied by the Western Auto store on Seventh Street would be cleared for a 58-space parking lot.

THK has projected the cost of such an undertaking at $1,590,000. Of the total, according to economist Duane Pettyjohn, a private developer could invest no more than $300,000 if he were to realize a reasonable return. More than $800,000 in public efforts would be needed.

"It was always an entertainment, bar, saloon, gambling row," he said. "First it served the railroaders, then the miners, then, later on, the stockmen. It retains this type of character to the present day."

Three of the dozen buildings are wood frame structures posing "particular problems" in regard to restoration to meet current codes. Those occupied by Art's Saddlery and the Palace Cafe should be torn down, Tanaka said. The third, occupied by the Stockman's Bar, is historically significant and could be saved — but removed to a different location.

He said the Bronco Bar building is in poor structural condition. A stone building with a stucco finish, it would be impossible to restore. But the old city fire station and the buildings occupied by Mr. Beef Restaurant and Studio One can be renovated, Tanaka said.

The building occupied by Rapid City Clothing and Stephenson Music Co. is "architecturally the most significant in the block." It is not included in the redevelopment project, but it could be renovated by its present owners, he said.

Under Tanaka's proposal, a vacant lot in the block would be left empty and the site occupied by the Stockman's Bar would also be vacant. New buildings would be located in place of those demolished on the west end of the block. Historical preservation guidelines would be sought in the renovation of the others.

Restoring the buildings would mean stripping them of all the "shanty sheds and lean-tos" added since they were originally built and making the rear portions as attractive as the front faces.

At least two restaurants would be located in the block. Most of the rest of the space would be occupied by small shops on the ground floor and offices on the second floor.

Tanaka said the area would be landscaped with trees and shrubs. A landscaped parking lot could be built and sunken planting areas for outdoor dining could add to the mall effect.

It remained for Pettyjohn to explain the economics of the proposal.

He said the major problem was

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$1.6 million ‘facelift’ plan

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Rapid City’s core business district is a fragmented marketplace which sends some shoppers to Northgate, some to Baken Park and fewer and fewer to the downtown area.

Development of a regional shopping center would “decimate” downtown Rapid City, Pettyjohn said. The city is too small to support a regional shopping center even though a growth in population of 20,000 people can be expected by 1990.

Consolidation of businesses and retail shops would rejuvenate the downtown area, he said. The 600 block would not be conducive to large department stores, however.

“The best use of the property,” he said, “would be to make it attractive to the housewife (with small retail shops) as well as to those in little business nodules.”

He said a number of retail merchants already have expressed interest in the THK proposal.

Pettyjohn also offered projected cost figures and documentation for his suggestion that public funds as well as private funds would be needed for the project. He recommended that, should a block renovation project be under-