

2012:

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business leaders got together to talk about their vision for Rapid City's next 20 years.

That group put a new museum, visitor information center, Canyon Lake restoration, a third high school and other new schools at the top of its priorities.

But schools, as well as county projects, have been dropped from subsequent discussions because the planning is being done on how to spend city tax dollars.

After the first meeting, the public was invited to similar meetings in all five wards. Meetings in North Rapid City and in the south and east part of town were reasonably well attended. But a meeting for west Rapid City drew only about 10 people, and more recent meetings have attracted even fewer.

Rapid City resident Toni Martin said she attended three meetings as part of Vision 2012 because she wanted more information about the proposed projects. She got her questions answered, and took part in an enthusiastic discussion, she said.

"I sensed as I looked around the room that there were people there who had special interests or who were there to say, 'I don't want that to happen because it may increase my taxes,'" she said. "But the thing is, when you go to these meetings, you find out that is not always the case. The projects would not necessarily increase taxes."

Alderman Delores Coffing said residents from her part of town, among other things, wanted money to improve Robbinsdale Park and to fix Robbinsdale Pool, which could close by the end of next year because it needs many costly repairs.

The city uses money from various sources to pay for its projects, but if Rapid City is serious about making big improvements, it probably will need the additional revenue that would come from the sales tax extension, Coffing said.

But she added: "I would hope people would not be tunnel visioned and listen to only a few who say, 'You are trying to con us into the sales tax.' That will be the people's decision."

The mayor and aldermen have said they want the public to vote on whether to extend the sales tax.

Alderman Larry Blote said so far many of the people at Vision 2012 meetings had tried to pitch a special interest.

"The ones we have heard from so far are the ones who want to see us spend some money, not the ones who want (the sales tax) ... reduced," Blote said.

Still, most people are not taking part in Vision 2012 at all. Perhaps they don't realize how seriously the mayor and council take the opinions offered at the

City sales tax extension will go to a vote

■ Half-cent sales tax could raise \$60 million for city improvements over next 20 years.

By Paulette Tobin
Journal Staff Writer

Sometime next year, Rapid City voters likely will decide whether to extend a half-cent sales tax that could raise \$60 million for civic improvements over the next 20 years.

The sales tax was passed in 1984 to pay off the debt on Rushmore Plaza Civic Center. It is due to expire in 1995.

You currently pay the half-cent tax on most retail purchases in Rapid City. Groceries, prescription drugs, and farm equipment and supplies are exempt from the tax.

All it would take to extend the sales tax is six votes on the common council. But Mayor Ed McLaughlin and the 10 city aldermen have said they want the question put to a public vote.

The tax currently is bringing in more than \$3 million a year. Even if the city's

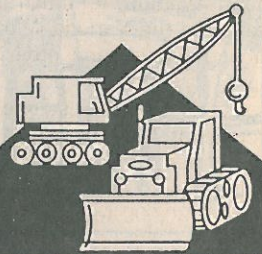
take didn't increase in the next 20 years, it would still mean \$60 million in additional revenues by the year 2012.

Through a process called Vision 2012, some people already have

begun talking about how the money might be spent and whether it is really needed.

The mayor says he would like the sales tax vote to come up in the summer or fall of 1993. There are a couple of ways that could happen — as an initiated measure or a

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sure on the ballot, said acting City Attorney Bob Jackson.

For an initiative — which the mayor says he would prefer over a referendum — someone would have to draw up an ordinance calling for the extension of the sales tax and then collect enough signatures to bring the initiative to a vote.

For a referendum, the common council would have to pass an ordinance extending the sales tax. Then petitions would have to be circulated referring the ordinance to a vote.

How would the money from the tax be spent?

At this point, says McLaughlin, "Nothing is sacred." All the proposed city im-

provements that could be funded by the sales tax are on equal footing.

But by the time the sales tax extension is put to a vote, McLaughlin said, he wants the city to be able to tell

voters just what they are buying. By then, specific projects should be on the line.

The projects selected for funding would be chosen largely on the basis of what the public says it wants during the ongoing Vision 2012 meetings, he said.

Bringing Vision 2012 to your organization

If you have an organization, service club or group of people who would like to hear a Vision 2012 presentation, call the mayor's office at 394-4110.