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## Brain trust sees bike paths, solar energy, gateway improvements in Rifle

Downtown Rifle redevelopment team charts changes

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RIFLE, CO COLORADO, ,

Downtown Rifle got a face-lift. At least on paper.

On Friday, Oct. 12, in a conference room at the Rifle Branch Library, planner J.J. Folsom hunched over a large piece of drafting paper with a marker in hand, sketching out new sidewalks, curbs and landscaping improvements around the intersection of Centennial Parkway and Railroad Ave.

Architect Tim Van Meter drew solar photovoltaic panels onto the roof of the Garfield County administration building at the corner of Third Street and East Ave.

And transportation planner Jim Charlier showed a visitor a graphic of a proposed new bike path on the east side of Rifle Creek,

between Third and Fourth streets. The path, he said, would create greater “porosity” and connectivity between downtown Rifle and Centennial Park to the west.

All three men are members of a consulting team working with city staff to draft a redevelopment strategy for downtown Rifle. The team, headed by Charlier, is funded by an \$806,000 federal transportation planning grant awarded to the city in 2011.

At their day-long design session, the team worked to identify projects that could be completed in the near future, and could generate public interest in the larger goals of the revitalization effort.

Those goals may include a citywide trail network, new residential and retail development along West Second Street near the Brenden Multiplex Theatre, a new restaurant near the theatre, and perhaps the extension of Rifle’s downtown one block to the south.

Charlier’s team has sketched out all of these possibilities. Yet getting them built, he said, will require grants, interested developers, or both.

“We are really preparing this city to compete for grants,” he said. “Rifle will have a competitive advantage when this is done.”

Detailed planning provides clear direction to developers and grant makers alike, Charlier said.

On Nov. 6, a steering committee that oversees the city’s federal grant will meet to discuss which of these larger projects they’d like to see move forward next year.

In the meantime, Charlier and his team hope to break ground on some smaller improvements that will beautify the downtown and set the stage for further development.

“We could have the county building be a prototype of the energy savings possible in the rest of downtown,” said Charlier, referring to the county annex at Third Street and East Avenue. “We could easily reduce that building’s energy use by half. The county could be our star pupil on this.”

Architect Tim Van Meter’s proposed overhaul of that building’s façade calls for re-installing old windows along the front that could flood the interior with natural light, along with increasing solar exposure in the winter months, when the sun is low in the sky.

His plan would also add two stories of office space in the back of the building, and the installation of several kilowatts of solar panels, to reduce the building’s use of fossil fuels. The design team is in discussion with the county about these proposed changes.

Other short-term efforts the team is pushing include so-called “gateway improvements” near the southern entrance to

Rifle's downtown.

“The entrance to town is important for attracting investment,” said Charlier, “and right now it’s a bit rough and raw.” He said the team was looking at replacing Jersey barriers that now line the intersection of Centennial Parkway and Railroad Avenue with earthen hills, as well as installing a more permanent bus structure on the south side of Centennial Parkway.

Another possibility, he said, is to construct a display that draws attention to the natural gas pump at the Shell station on the corner of Railroad and Centennial.

The Colorado Department of Transportation or the city might consider funding those efforts, he said, while the trail improvements and street beautification could be eligible for grants from state groups, such as Great Outdoors Colorado.

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