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Streetscape vision nearing reality

City finalizing plans; work could begin in September

By Jenna Nielsen, Journal Staff Writer



Courtesy

Auburn's arguably complicated High Street and Lincoln Way intersection could soon transform into an inviting "central square" complete with outdoor dining, landscaping and lighting.

City officials are finalizing plans for Auburn's Streetscape project, a corridor design that would connect Old Town and Downtown.

"This will take one of the least attractive parts of Downtown Auburn and, within one year, make it the most attractive and substantially changed," said City Manager Bob Richardson of Downtown's main intersection.

This rendering shows what Downtown Auburn's High Street and Lincoln Way intersection could look like once phase one of the city's Streetscape project is complete.

The intersection is just phase one of nine in the city's \$20 million Streetscape plan, which is an extension of an existing redevelopment project that has grown to more than 480 acres, and includes widened sidewalks, trees, lighting and outdoor dining areas.

Construction on phase one of the project, expected to cost roughly \$800,000, could begin as soon as September Richardson said.

"Before we start, we want to have conversations with all the business owners (near the intersection) to make sure we don't negatively impact their Christmas season," Richardson said.

Most of the 4,832-foot length of the project is located on Highway 49, in California Department of Transportation's right of way.

City staff is in the middle of a year-long process of finalizing an agreement with Caltrans to relinquish that portion of the highway to the city.

But Richardson said residents could start seeing results before the finalization of the relinquishment process because Caltrans has been willing to work with city officials.

The Streetscape project is being spearheaded by the city's Urban Development Authority in conjunction with the Downtown and Old Town business associations.

City staff has been working with the Rocklin-based planning and consulting firm Foothill Associates to come up with a plan that will unite Auburn with a visual corridor.

The idea that there is a big gap and no link between the business districts got the streetscape idea off the ground several years ago.

Richardson said the city is able to finance the projects because of careful planning.

City officials anticipated the current drop in sales and property tax revenues a few years ago, and embarked on a three-part plan to improve the community's image, streamline city administration and shore up the tax base by convincing Nella Oil to move its headquarters from South San Francisco to Auburn.

The \$20 million price tag is the maximum the city would end up paying, Richardson said.

"The number includes a large contingency for unforeseen costs," Richardson said. "The city was built in the 1800s, so who knows what we will uncover when we go underground."

Adele Wise, owner of Wildflower in Downtown, which is located directly at the intersection, said she is excited about the possibility of a more controlled intersection, but that she has a concern as well.

"I think the intersection is very confusing and improving it is a great idea," Wise said. "But I

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am also concerned about people hanging out in (the new outdoor area). Overall, I think it is a great idea and I hope, once it's completed, it is going to be a really beautiful (project) that will unite Auburn."

Auburn resident Thien Dao said she thinks the plans look like a great idea.

"I think having a place for people to congregate will help bring people to the area," Dao said. "I think the intersection also looks more organized and planned out than it is now."

Harvey Roper, president of the Downtown Business Association and owner of Roper's Jewelers in Downtown Auburn, is one of the many business owners who has been working with the city on the Streetscape plans.

"It is a very comprehensive plan," Roper said. "We have looked at this, walked the project, tested it and envisioned it. We have been studying it for months and months and I don't think we've left anything out."

Roper said he is confident the plan is well thought out and he is excited to see some progress.

"Just knowing that the dirt is going to fly pretty soon is exciting," Roper said. "Everything has been adding up to this point. It has just been such a long process and it is nice to see something come to fruition."

Journal Publisher Tony Hazarian contributed to this report. The Journal's Jenna Nielsen can be reached at jennan@goldcountrymedia.com or comment on this story at auburnjournal.com.

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