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Downtown makeover begins

The first steps of a comprehensive makeover of Elko's central downtown business district are in place after a summer-long project.

Plans to give the downtown core a facelift include beautifying Idaho Street with trees and other natural landscaping, as well as adding benches, drinking fountains and other public amenities and improved parking. Some of that groundwork was laid over the past few months in the extensive reconstruction of Idaho Street, says City Manager Curtis Calder.

The Idaho Street project totaled roughly \$11 million and included infrastructure improvements in the downtown area, which are necessary for future phases of the renovation plan.

Q&D Construction of Sparks this summer revamped approximately three miles of Idaho Street. New curbing, gutters and sidewalks were installed from 12th Street East to the city limits. The project also upgraded traffic signals and traffic striping to help improve traffic flows around the intersection of 12th and Idaho streets.

In the downtown core starting at Fifth Street, terracotta-red concrete curbing was installed — as well as nearly \$500,000 in water and sewer line improvements that were necessary not only to upgrade current capacity to existing buildings, but also to facilitate future renovation in the district, Calder says.

Much of the work was necessary to prepare for a planned mill and overlay project by the Nevada Department of Transportation next summer, he adds.

“We tried to get all the infrastructure in so we didn't have to tear up the road again. We put in conduit for irrigation and other areas that would require landscaping and really laid the groundwork for a lot of good things that are going to happen because of the redevelopment plan.”

Work on the next phases of the redevelopment plan hinge on filling Elko's vacant city planner position, Calder notes. However, advancing the long-discussed downtown redevelopment project is a high priority for city officials, he says.

“Until we get the planner position filled, we won't see lot of implementation. But we are now starting to see a tax increment coming back to that district, which will eventually fund some much-needed improvements. It is an older part of town, and a lot of the infrastructure needs to be replaced and upgraded.”

A key component of the redevelopment plan involves a complicated and difficult acquisition of 78 acres of Union Pacific-owned land on the East and West boundaries of the redevelopment district.



“That will have a huge impact on the tax increment in that area and will be a major funding source to make lot of these improvements happen,” Calder says.

The majority of businesses in the downtown core are located on the first floors of mixed-use, multi-story buildings. Shops that help define the character of Elko’s downtown include Cedar Creek Clothing Company, Mishmash and Muddle, Cowboy Joe’s, Blohm’s What 2 Wear and Cucina Fresca.

Gwen Uhlig, owner of Cucina Fresca, purchased the 4,800-square-foot building that houses her upscale kitchenware and gourmet food store in 2005. She subleases 3,200 square feet to Mishmash and Muddle.

Uhlig says completing the city’s makeover plans for the downtown district would be a big step in bringing shoppers back to the central core. Much of the retail shopping in Elko has migrated to new developments along the Mountain City Highway corridor.

“I don’t think that in terms of comparing our downtown situation with other communities that it’s not as big or daunting a task as other communities that have let their downtowns completely die,” Uhlig says. “Downtowns can be the heart of a city where you showcase your history and pride in your culture. You usually can’t remanufacture that in new spaces.

“We have such a history in our downtown, from the California Trail to the railroad and of course all of other history: the ranching and Basque culture and mining. This is the perfect area to showcase and celebrate that.”

Delmo Andreozzi, assistant city manager, says future downtown revitalization should include a mix of public and private investment. “It is important to have both so that the area doesn’t wither,” Andreozzi says. “It is important to keep those small business, which are the backbone of our community. They hire a lot of employees, they generate sales tax, and they have a lot of atmosphere. It is important to keep it from deteriorating so people don’t want to move out of there.”

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