



Busy Kidd gets guidance on urban design

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

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The Hillsboro Argus

The Argus

FOREST GROVE - It's been an exhausting month for Forest Grove Mayor Richard Kidd.

With his city already in the midst of the periodic review of its master plan, Kidd has also been hosting a delegation from Forest Grove's sister city of Nyuzen, Japan. That group visited just after the Metro Council held a meeting in Forest Grove last week.

May started with Kidd attending a conference on urban planning, the three-day Mayors' Institute on City Design, held this year in Portland.

It was the equivalent of standing puzzled at a crossroads when Ferdinand Magellan or John C. Fremont magically appear as a guide.

Planning gurus ranging from an urban designer from Vancouver, B.C., to the design director for the National Endowment for the Arts, to the director of the downtown redevelopment district in Boulder, Colo., brought insight and experience to the conference, which examined 10 cities from around the west.

Forest Grove's case study involved its downtown core. On a posterboard at a reception at the University of Oregon's downtown Portland building, panelists were asked this question:

How can Forest Grove attract new investment and infill development in the downtown core while maintaining the center's historic character?

It's a question that's been plaguing Forest Grove for years, as it looks to expand its tax base without significantly adjusting its urban growth boundary. And it's a question that was resoundingly answered by the panelists.

First off, the panel said, the city's definition of the urban core was skewed.

The downtown area shouldn't just include the 16 blocks in the immediate vicinity of the intersection of Main Street and Pacific Avenue.

Instead, the definition of downtown should extend to properties on the west side of B Street and the south side of 19th Avenue.

"We're not doing anything to damage the character of Old Town," Kidd said. "That's sacred ground."

But along the main transportation corridor through the Highway 6 couplet, and in the area around the business district, Kidd wants to see a few changes to help spur development.

First, the city needs to create a central plaza for community events and concerts. That plaza could replace the parking lot between City Hall and the fire station, off Council and Ash streets, respectively.

Second, he'd like to create new zoning restrictions for the business district. While it may seem counterintuitive to create restrictions in an effort to foster development, there's a method to the plan.

By establishing a floor-to-area ratio greater than 1 - meaning any new building must have more floor space than footprint on the ground - developers can be sure the project next to them will also be up to par.

"Quality developers will not do the project if the project next to them" doesn't meet those standards, Kidd said.

Lastly, the mayor said, planners presented ideas on how to foster pedestrian movement through downtown Forest Grove - particularly getting commuting college students to walk through downtown rather than directly to campus from their cars.

Part of that idea, he said, is to convert parking adjacent to the campus to 1-hour parking, except on Sundays, so church attendees can use those spaces.

College students can walk more than 3,000 feet to class, Kidd said, so pushing parking farther away from Pacific University won't hurt them. But, he said, they might spend their money at downtown businesses.

Along those same lines, planners said, a row of planned dormitories along Main Street should have main entrances facing Main, so that parents and visitors see the downtown area. Students can still exit along College Way, but visitors should be encouraged to see the town rather than just the gown.

The ideas will be brought before the council at a work session this summer, Kidd said, with ordinances to follow if the council agrees.

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