

Toward Downtown Development

by Barbara Sayer

Calling it an "Update on Downtown" the Asheville Forum held a meeting on March 29 at Pack Memorial Library. Around 35 people gathered to hear architect John Reid describe the proposed renovation of the old J.C. Penney building and to hear Asheville Art Museum director Ed Ritz outline the museum's proposal to move from the Civic Center to the old library building on Pack Square.

Hendersonville developer Robert Miller is developing plans to renovate the Penney's building (corner of Haywood and Walnut Street) into condominiums. Reid said the plans now call for 30 units to be located on the upper floors with shops and service oriented businesses to be housed at street level. By offering a variety of floor plans ranging from studio apartments to larger two bedroom penthouses, the developer hopes to attract a broad segment of the urban residential market.

The Asheville Art Museum is now housed on the bottom floor

of the Civic Center; a location which Ritz described as difficult for newcomers to find, difficult for some handicapped persons to maneuver and lacking in the kind of exposure and accessibility important to a public museum. Ritz said a move to the old library building would give the museum this accessibility and would, in turn, add to the rehabilitation of a significant locale in the downtown core, Pack Square, by the adaptive reuse of a historically important building. The plan which the museum presented to city council and the county commission would involve the renovation of the building by a South Carolina firm. The museum would lease the building with an option to buy it in five years.

Ritz said he was asking for an annual budget of \$92,500, some \$25-30,000 more than the museum now receives. City and county officials have since rejected the proposed financial package, but have endorsed the idea of the museum's relocation and have pledged to seek finan-

cial arrangements acceptable to everyone.

The Asheville Forum was formed in response to several public meetings held last year after the November referendum on the proposed downtown mall; formed "to help formulate and advocate new goals and activities for downtown development". Steering the March 29 meeting, Doug Swaim stressed the importance of creating a broad base of support for downtown projects and rejecting the polarity that developed around the mall issue. One frequently mentioned direction for downtown development, Swaim said, is the creation of more and higher quality urban residential space. In an effort to explore this idea and to broaden its appeal, the Forum will sponsor a talk by Phillip Morris, executive editor of SOUTHERN LIVING magazine. Scheduled for May 18th, the topic for Morris' presentation is "Liveable Downtowns - A Southern Perspective." The exact time and place is to be announced.

ATHENS RESTAURANT

"Home Cooking Always Pleases"

**BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER
DAILY SPECIAL, SUNDAY DINNERS
GREEK SALAD**

**TRUE ITALIAN SPAGHETTI
ORDER BY PHONE, TAKE'M HOME
OPEN 7 A.M. TILL 9:30 P.M.**

CLOSED ON MONDAYS

10% discount for UNC-A students

641 Merrimon Ave. Phone 254-5200

Sip 'N Dip

**Open
7 Days
a Week**

**Best Selection - Fine Wines
Imported and Domestic Beers**

**642 Merrimon Ave.
252-2164**