

AREA NEWS

City Council looks to revitalize downtown

BY ERIN WILTGEN Staff Writer

After looking at a budget that reflected a struggling economy, City Council members turned their attention to revitalizing Thomasville's downtown at the City Council Retreat Saturday.

The retreat, which was held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Ball Park Road Community Center, focused in large part on businesses in the Chair City's historic district, touching on the creation of a special tax district, a potential Privilege License and a comprehensive list of downtown businesses.

"I strongly believe that the economic health of your downtown is a contributing factor to the economic health of your city," said council member Scott Styers. "It's our job to help that as a city government."

However, council agreed that the bulk of the work should fall on a special committee dedicated to downtown upkeep, perhaps as a branch of the Chamber of Commerce, rather than on the council itself.

"We don't think it's the City's responsibility to do it," Styers said. "That's not the appropriate use of taxpayers' money."

Council members also acknowledged that city government should take a role in facilitating downtown development, including contributing a certain amount of money to the cause.

One method of government involvement is to create a special tax district. While actually levying a property tax on the businesses in the historical district wouldn't generate enough revenue to justify the measure — raising only \$622.98 per one cent tax — Styers said the declared district would let the council apply different rules to those select businesses.

"What it would allow you to do is treat the downtown historic district a little differently in order for them to create their own environment," he said.

Another use of the special tax district, and the tax system itself, would be to offer tax credits to those businesses that improved their property, said City Attorney Paul Mitchell.

"It might not actu-

ally cause a whole lot of improvement," he said. "But it would certainly be a way for the council to show that their hearts are in the right place."

Besides merely enhancing the appearance of downtown, the council also discussed ways to improve navigation for tourists, such as inserting signs around the Big

Chair pointing to the various businesses.

Part of that project would include formulating a comprehensive listing of current businesses downtown as well as the vacant buildings. This list would not only give the city government an idea of what types of businesses exist but also reveal which build-

ings are available to new companies looking to relocate.

One way to do that is to require businesses to have a Privilege License. Council members discussed implementing both a flat fee and a fee schedule, and council member David Yemm suggested grandfathering the fee in — applying it

only to those companies who relocate to Thomasville now and in the future but not penalizing the ones already here.

But the importance of acquiring such a list transcends the question of fee or no fee, said council member Ron Bratton.

"We just want to know what's in these buildings," Bratton said. "We

don't need a fee."

Council deferred the matter to staff research and hopes to revisit the issue in the next two council meetings to have a proposal drafted by May 2010.

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TUESDAY EVENING TV schedule table with columns for time slots (6:30, 7 PM, 7:30, 8 PM, 8:30, 9 PM, 9:30, 10 PM, 10:30, 11 PM, 11:30, 12 AM, 12:30, 1 AM, 1:30) and rows for various channels like CBS, NBC, FOX, etc.

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