

IDEAS: unveiled to clean up downtown pedestrian corridors; this week, "South End"

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End", "Center Site" and "South End". Sketches for each focus project reflected the input and efforts of city staff, downtown property owners, MP board members and citizens.

In the "South End" (aka "Grease Trap Alley"), sketches include the concepts of retainer walls or privacy screens to camouflage the trash and grease receptacles, shaded pergolas for outdoor dining, potted plants, pedestrian-level lighting and an archway that may bear the name "Merchants Row". The empty lot behind the Amos Agency Insurance (between Community Thrift and the Last Rebel Custom Tattoo Shop) may be ripe for a future use, yet determined.

Design ideas also call for improvements to the sidewalks. Before those can begin, local architect and Design Committee Chairman Ken Pflieger said that underground electrical lines for pedestrian lighting would have to be installed.

The sidewalks are considered city property. Upon city approval of design plans, Pflieger hopes the city will support the lighting and sidewalk efforts with in-house labor, saving money in the process.

Sidewalk improvements call for the resurfacing of walkways and the application of a top coating that would protect the sidewalks, while letting the bricks, currently in place, show through.

Other design aspects, like privacy screens and outdoor dining, will depend on downtown property owners, Pflieger said.

"We're hopeful that the restaurant owners will embrace the idea of improvements because it reflects well on them and also promotes safety," he added. "Most improvement areas are owned by the property owners."

The support and participation of downtown property owners and the city are essential to the follow-through of the Design Summit focus projects. Money raised from the "Turning Point" campaign, a fundraising effort of the Mountaineer Partnership, will help pay for the design focus projects in conjunction with support from the city, private and public donors.

The campaign was launched earlier this year, with letters stuffed in the city's customer utility bills.

As of press time, it was unknown how much the projects in each phase will cost.

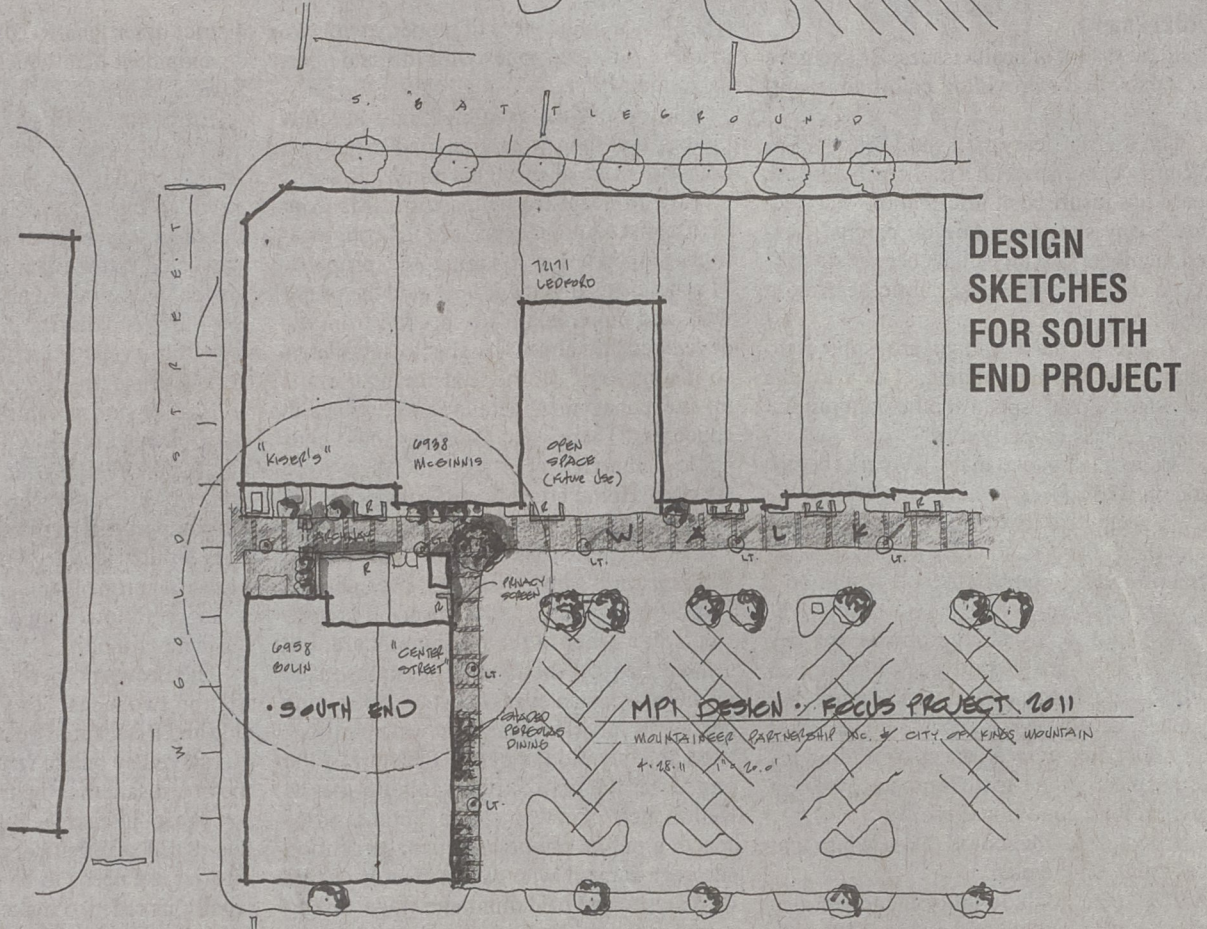
"We're working on estimates, but a lot depends on city input and support," Pflieger said. "We've developed some pricing estimates but at this point in time it's getting the vision out."

He added that its "hard to estimate what the vision could cost", but fundraising events, in addition to the capital fund drive, city, public and private donations will likely be used to pay the bills.

After plans are finalized and approved by the city and property owners, a cost analysis will be completed before work begins.

"The final product is not going to be just MPI's design conceptions but vetted through private-public partners," Pflieger said.

The sketches, he added, are just renderings of ideas. Improvement plans may change with future input from the city and downtown property owners. A focus group will be assembled to look at the actual specifics in each project. The Partnership's work plan for 2012 includes when focus groups are going to meet and who will be on them, Pflieger said.



Why the back before the front?

Although there are plans to renovate or redevelop the streetscapes of Battleground Ave., Railroad Ave., and to a lesser extent Mountain St., the Partnership decided to start with the back alleyways first.

Most of that decision, Pflieger said, had to do with cost, the partners involved, time and manageability of the projects.

"We haven't taken our eye off the front part, but aside from the actual store fronts themselves neither the city nor MPI has any control over the Department of Transportation and railway rights-of-way," he said.

The streetscape projects will likely be a multi-million dollar, multi-year process, he added. Working with DOT and the railway may take a little longer than the three focus projects the Partnership hopes to green-light this year.

"This part is simpler in scale. It can be done in several phases and can be started quickly," Pflieger said. "We're a first year Main Street community and we can't lose sight of that."

He added that when the group penciled in its plans for 2011, the "key focus was to do something that is achievable and manageable" within its first year.

The Mountaineer Partnership may appear before the city council to give updates on the focus projects later this month. The group hopes to move forward with city support and begin renovations by the end of the year.

Pflieger said that design improvements to the city's pedestrian corridors will enhance the visual and safety aspects of

downtown and be a catalyst to spur redevelopment and enhance foot traffic.

Building on recommendations from the state's Main Street Center, which the city joined nearly two years ago, panelists looked at ways to make downtown alleyways and pocket parks more pedestrian-friendly. Both are currently considered to be "underutilized" in downtown.

At a well-attended Design Summit on April 28, Main Street designers said that a pedestrian-oriented environment makes maximum use of smaller spaces. They noted lighting, small parks, additional trees and an outside shopping mall with streets and sidewalks or public spaces acts as a "connective tissue holding together retailers."

Revitalization Ideas at a glance...

■ "North End" - mosaics or murals on the brick monoliths behind Wells Fargo; "North End" may carry its own distinction as "Artist's Row" or "Artist's Way" or "Park of the Arts", capped at two ends with decorative archways yet to be named. Potted plants and pedestrian-friendly lights may also line the corridor. But perhaps one of the most unique features planned for the alleyway is an open space for the arts: painters, potters, art classes, dance, musicians, drama and more.

■ "Center Site" - a facelift for Senior Citizen's Park; ideas to revamp the bland space between Stevo's Bar and Griffin Drug. Design sketches for the "Center Site" include the possibility of adding a water wall, pedestrian-level lighting, potted plants and trees and a loggia (or roofed, open gallery) that would connect the two buildings that sandwich the park. Decorative archways would compliment the space. Shaded pergolas would give support to climbing plants.

■ "South End" - concepts of retainer walls or privacy screens to camouflage trash and grease receptacles, shaded pergolas for outdoor dining, potted plants, pedestrian-level lighting, sidewalk improvements and an archway that may bear the name "Merchants Row". The empty lot behind the Amos Insurance Agency may be ripe for a use, yet determined.

Old Georgetown Apartments new home for Walgreens



KYRA A. TURNER/HERALD

Georgetown Apartments, on W. King Street, was razed last week for the new site of Walgreens Drug Store. The apartment complex was sold June 3rd. Walgreens, the giant drug store chain, has eyed Kings Mountain since 2002 and has submitted building plans to city officials.



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