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Grants boost downtown Gallatin development

By KATRINA CORNWELL/Staff



A two-phase streetscape project is expected to give the 200-year-old business district a facelift. (By MABLE MCREYNOLDS/Staff)

Wide sidewalks adorned with Victorian-era decorative lights, landscaping, decorative benches and receptacles are part of a \$1.8 million streetscape project that will forever change the look of Gallatin's downtown square.

The two-phase project coming in just over \$1 million is expected to give the 200-year-old business district a jolt, helping existing businesses thrive and making the square more inviting for new specialty shops, enhancing its overall economic strength.

"This award will allow Gallatin to continue improving the aesthetic appearance, pedestrian safety and functionality of the downtown area, which we feel will lead to greater investment, viability and economic growth in the Gallatin community," Mayor Jo Ann Graves said.

The state is expected to formally sign off on the project by the end of October, and once that's done, the streetscape improvements can begin.

Gallatin already had \$1 million to pay for the project's first phase, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation awarded the city an enhancement grant worth \$810,509 to spruce up the historic square.

"I am very pleased that Gallatin has been selected to receive an award of this magnitude," Mayor Jo Ann Graves said. "This grant will allow us to continue our work on the Downtown Revitalization project." Gallatin was the only city in Sumner County selected in this year's round of awards, and it the recipient of one of 35 statewide grants topping \$12.1 million.

Recommended Business Mix
Entertainment 10,000
Specialty Merchandise Store
10,000 Home Furnishings
12,000 Specialty Restaurant
(s) 12,000 Hobby, Toys, &
Games 11,000 Bakery /
Specialty Food 7,500 Specialty
Health Store 2,500 Apparel /
Accessories 8,000 Sporting
Goods 5,000 Tourist Attraction
20,000 Offices -Professional /
Corporate 100,000 Offices -
F.I.R.E. 20,000 Offices -
Medical 20,000
TOTAL: 238,000 square feet
of retail demand business
recruitment downtown

Sumner County has agreed to commit \$200,000 in court fees toward the upkeep of the grounds around the old courthouse on the square. The funding source comes from increases in litigation taxes and will be paid by July 1, 2009.

The windfalls will help make ideas conceived in the city's downtown master plan a reality. "Gallatin is a city on the move. We have started the Greenway, which will connect to our downtown area as well as to other parts of downtown.

"The second phase of the streetscape grant, which we just received, will allow us to complete the entire streetscape project. The new library is underway, projected to be completed in spring 2009. There are businesses that are looking to locating on the square once these new improvements are made."

Improved street surfaces, landscape islands and brick crosswalks on North Water Avenue, Smith, East and West Main streets are part of the first phase of the square makeover. Outdoor tables and chairs, street planters and street trees, directional signs and a pedestrian-friendly design will make the square more aesthetically pleasing and safer.

"When you make things a lot more attractive, more people want to come there, it's going to bring more and better retail," said Reggie Mudd, an owner of several downtown buildings and board member of Greater Gallatin, an organization dedicated to the preservation and revitalization of the historic downtown.

"It's a cumulative effect you think. We have a real asset that needs to be protected and nourished."

"Gallatin recognizes that a major component of its overall viability and long-term sustainability is directly related to a vibrant and prosperous downtown neighborhood," City Planner Jim Svoboda said.

Deborah McNeeley, owner of Upscale Boutique, can't wait for the work to begin.

"I'm very excited about it," McNeely said. "I don't only run my business down here, but I also own the building."

This first phase of the streetscape work will also coincide with the construction of the public library in downtown and the development of a greenway trail system along Town Creek that will link downtown to various community facilities, neighborhoods, schools and parks. A renewed interest in downtown Gallatin was spurred by several factors. Greater Gallatin renovated the Historic Palace Theater, the oldest movie theater in Tennessee, for \$600,000 to \$700,000.

Sumner County considered relocating the county courts and jail out of downtown Gallatin, and former mayor Don Wright wanted to put a fountain he purchased on the square.

In 2002, the city hosted a "walkable communities" workshop, funded by the Nashville-Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, featuring Dan Burden, a nationally recognized pedestrian advocate, according to the grant application. The workshop helped educate and inspire city leaders, business owners and citizens on ways to improve the walkability, livability and vitality of downtown Gallatin.

It was also the driving force behind the preparation of the city's master plan, completed in 2005 with the help of officials and hundreds of citizens. City Councilman At-Large Ed Mayberry had championed its creation as a guide in determining how the downtown should look in the future.

City Planner Jim Svoboda was honored as the planner of the year in Tennessee for his work in developing the downtown plan, a plan for a Town Creek Greenway and with growth-and-development issues the following year.

The city planner was featured as the guest speaker at the Tennessee Chapter of the American Planning Association's annual conference, "Building Great Communities" held in Memphis, Sept. 7.

Of those who responded to the household survey, 37 percent felt that downtown Gallatin's single greatest weakness is its need for more and better businesses, according to the Downtown Master Plan.