



## Plans for downtown aim to preserve character, revitalize area

Written by Amy Stansbury Friday, 03 April 2009

The City of Round Rock has a vision and long-term plan to turn downtown into a revitalized, walkable and vibrant region with shops, restaurants, offices and residential properties.

Some of the most notable changes planned include realigning West Main Street to connect it to East Main Street and extending the road to the IH 35 frontage to create a gateway to the historic district.

A town green about the size of the Square in Georgetown is planned for the tract of land just west of LifeForce Fitness at the intersection of Mays and Main streets. To ensure the land is available, in March the city bought the \$325,000 piece of property at 210 Round Rock Ave. where Snapdragon Florist was once located.

“I think the Snapdragon deal is symbolic,” said Jim Nuse, city manager. “It just shows the council is committed to making this happen.”



While no timeline has been set, it is expected to take decades to complete the vision. A draft plan and proposed regulations for the look and design of new buildings are expected to be presented to the city council and the planning and zoning commission in May.

“This is a phased process over time, and there will be things in portions of the plan that we’ll kind of create the synergy for at different points in time,” Nuse said.

## **Public input**

In January, the city held a charette led by a group of consultants, Los Angeles-based design firm Torti Gallas and Partners, that were hired to develop the downtown master plan. A charette is a series of meetings in which designers engage the community to identify the project's goals, issues and possible solutions. Draft renderings are created during the process and presented at the end. Approximately 200 residents, business owners, property owners and community leaders attended portions of the charette to develop the basis for the downtown Round Rock master plan.

Some of the themes that came out of the week-long series of meetings were that the community would like to preserve the character of downtown, have more locally owned restaurants there and turn it into a more vital, thriving region.

Concerns were voiced by members of the Heart of Round Rock Neighborhood Association about the Greater Round Rock Community Foundation's plans to turn the 6-acre ballfield on the east end of Main Street into a dense social services center. Downtown resident and neighborhood association member Sarah Cox said she hopes the community foundation will allow 4 acres, currently zoned residential, to be parkland.

"I feel that the community foundation, City of Round Rock and our Historical Round Rock Neighborhood Association have been working together to help fit everyone's needs and wants for the Sam Bass Ball Field location," Cox said. "As a homeowner in downtown Round Rock, we worry about our property values and the increase of traffic on Main Street. We feel that this family-oriented neighborhood would benefit from having a park or something more environmentally friendly go on the beautiful piece of land more than parking lots and cement buildings."

The community foundation has said it will submit more specific program details, and Torti Gallas will draft a plan taking into consideration all interested parties' concerns and desires.

## **Roundabouts**

Though some were also concerned about the proposed roundabouts, or traffic circles, particularly for the intersection of Mays Street and Hwy. 79, there may not be any need to worry because they may not happen.

Communication Director Will Hampton said the Texas Department of Transportation maintains Hwy. 79, so TxDOT would have to approve the roundabouts.

"[TxDOT] may come in and say, 'No,'" he said. "We need to have a plan for what we'll do if there's not going to be any roundabouts on 79."

Torti Gallas is developing a plan for the highway with and without them.

Though roundabouts are not as prevalent in the United States, they are common in Europe. Many studies show they improve safety and reduce traffic congestion.

## Property owners

Don Quick, owner of Don Quick and Associates, a nearly 40-year-old commercial leasing and sales company in Round Rock, has had one of the buildings downtown in his family for many decades. In 1940, Don Quick's father bought the building at 204 E. Main St. and operated Quick Pharmacy there for many years. Quick still owns the building, but it has held many businesses since then. Most recently, he leased it to Deborah Stevensen, who opened Friar Tuck's Pantry there in late January.

Quick said the plan and the vision the city has put together will help assist in the growth of the broader downtown area.

"This is a long-term study, but we think it's vital to the heritage and the vitality of Round Rock overall," he said.

Nelson Nagle owns several properties on the west side of downtown near the Allen R. Baca Center, including the historic house where his family counseling practice resides, the new Simmer on the Corner that opened in November, the renovated house where Round Rock Flowers & Gifts opened in February and the building where Sen. Steve Ogden's office is located at 309 W. Main St.

Nagle said he bought his first property downtown in 1998. The rest, he said, have been purchases that he has made opportunistically to help preserve and foster the feel of downtown. All of Nagle's buildings feature characteristics of older homes, though they are completely remodeled. Wooden flooring and crown molding are featured in nearly every building, and the doors to each building and each office are ornate.

Nagle has also built new buildings as well as renovated established houses. He built one last year at 100 Harris St. with multiple offices and a two-story patio and deck overlooking one of the oldest oak trees in Round Rock and the childhood home of Louis Henna.



This large roundabout in Malta, New York, is an example consultants presented that the city is considering for the intersection of Hwy. 79 and Mays Street.

“It’s about the nostalgia and the sense of place,” Nagle said. “The environment downtown is different. I can hear the busy interstate, but it just feels different downtown.”

Nagle said the property owners should do their parts to preserve the character and culture of downtown, and he hopes the city will continue to do its part to help make the district pedestrian friendly.

### **Business needs today**

There have been some recent changes downtown. Businesses such as The Thinking Cap toy store and The Party Image recently closed, and the Silk Cocoon is expected to close soon. But other businesses have recently opened, including Friar Tuck’s Pantry, Round Rock Flowers & Gifts and Quinns Bar. Star Co. coffee shop is expected to open in early April on East Main Street.

These and other popular businesses, such as Louisiana Longhorn, Main Street Grill and Junior’s Icehouse recently formed a Downtown Business Alliance to work together in a common mission to attract people to downtown Round Rock.

“Everything we do must support that mission,” said Shawn Faulk, Star Co. general manager. “There are several things we have identified that we feel we need to happen, like more lighting and landscaping, and better signage off the highway.”

Faulk said he would like to create some events, such as a ball drop at midnight on New Year’s Eve to keep people in Round Rock rather than leaving the city to go out in Austin.

Friar Tuck’s Pantry owner Deborah Stevensen agrees that events downtown would help bring foot traffic and awareness to downtown. She also wishes the property owners were more selective about the businesses to which they lease space.

“Lawyers and real estate companies will not generate retail,” Stevensen said. “We need to have something for people in the downtown area to come and do. We need shops, like in Fredricksburg and Salado, where you can walk up and down the street, in and out of the stores, and stop for tea and cake.”

## Historic Downtown Round Rock



### 1 A vision for tomorrow

A major component of the new downtown master plan calls for an extension of Main Street to the IH 35 frontage road to create a new gateway to downtown and offer better access to the area. In March, the road project received \$392,000 in federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



2

Round Rock Flowers & Gifts, 212 W. Main St.



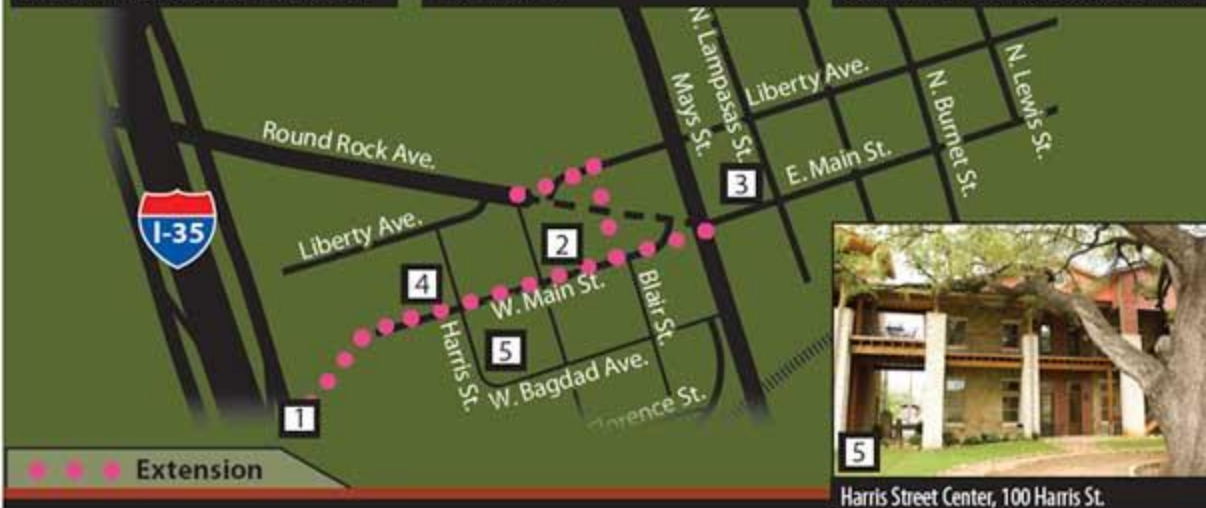
3

East Main Street



4

First building Nelson Nagle bought downtown



Extension

Harris Street Center, 100 Harris St.

## Downtown Development Council

The Round Rock Chamber of Commerce holds monthly Downtown Development Council meetings open to anyone interested in downtown. Approximately 17 people attend each month, including city staff, business owners and downtown residents.

The next meeting will be held at 2 p.m. April 15 at the chamber office, 212 E. Main St. It will include a seminar on reinventing space and driving retail downtown.

Contact Tracy Terry at the Round Rock Chamber of Commerce at 255-5805 or [tterry@roundrocktex.com](mailto:tterry@roundrocktex.com) or visit [www.roundrocktex.com](http://www.roundrocktex.com).

### **Did you know?**

Main Street is actually not Main Street at all — it is Main Avenue. However, most residents and business owners refer to the road as Main Street.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**