

Round Rock plan for downtown gains ground

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ROUND ROCK — Downtown is one step closer to becoming a hub of shops, restaurants, entertainment and living space.

On Thursday, Los Angeles-based consultant Torti Gallas and Partners presented to the City Council a draft of the downtown master plan that would transform the two-block historic area into what is expected to be a thriving — and walkable — town center.

The council is considering earmarking \$13.8 million from the city's capital improvement fund for two projects intended to jump-start the plan: the Main Street Bridge and the Town Square. The council did not vote on the money.

The Main Street Bridge would be a new entrance to the heart of the city. Plans include extending Main Street, where the two-block historic district is perched, to Interstate 35 and creating a new city entrance there, with a hotel and theater. Currently, access to downtown comes from I-35 to Round Rock Avenue (RM 620), which runs just north of Main Street. The Town Square would be a new town green by the water tower.

The plans call for the realignment of Round Rock Avenue to create a square grid and for improvements to Main Street and the intersection of Liberty Avenue and Burnet Street .

Torti Gallas began working on the master plan last summer, and the city held a series of brainstorming sessions in January at which the public gave input into the plan.

The downtown plan, for an area roughly bounded by I-35, the railroad and Brushy Creek, is intended to preserve the city's historic architecture while incorporating urban design concepts and creating walkable streets and neighborhoods through street-scaping.

"The downtown plan is about places and spaces that people want to be that enhance the quality of life in Round Rock," said Will Hampton, downtown plan project manager and city spokesman.

For the redevelopment to occur, the city may need to rezone areas, create a public improvement district (where a special tax would be charged to pay for infrastructure improvements) and

possibly consider tax incentives for mixed-use or green development and the relocation of "creative industries" to downtown.

There are no total project estimate costs yet, but the seven initial projects — including the Main Street Bridge and the Town Square — are estimated at \$52 million. A bulk of the five other primary projects include street-scaping to enhance sidewalks, plant trees and put in pedestrian lights.

The project also includes changes around Brushy Creek: building an amphitheater, moving Memorial Park, enhancing Veterans Park and creating a park with a multipurpose sports field.

"This can be our Lady Bird Lake," Hampton said.

Members of the council and the planning commission will provide their input and recommend changes in the next few months, and the council is expected to adopt a final draft by summer's end, Hampton said.



Courtesy of JB Goodwin