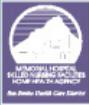


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Just the beginning

Rendering courtesy of RBF RBF Consultants suggested a plaza be built on the corner of San Benito and Fourth streets that would incorporate a mix of retail, offices and residential spaces as well as an open area for civic events.



Posted: Friday, September 5, 2008 12:00 am

Melissa Flores | 0 comments

RBF presents final downtown plan and challenges city to keep working

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After more than a year of working on a plan for downtown Hollister, and a \$190,000 price tag, RBF staff has left the city of Hollister with a few catalyst projects and a slew of economic development strategies. But the work is hardly over.

"There is not a silver bullet and every community wants a silver bullet," said Jason Jones, an urban designer and planner with RBF consulting, the company hired by the Hollister Downtown Association a year ago. "You have to look at it as a multi-faceted approach."

RBF consultants have worked on plans in many communities in California and other states that have been successfully implemented, such as Sedona and Scottsdale Ariz., San Bernardino and Encinitas.

"The one common thing that separates communities where things happen from those where they don't is that you need to have champions," Jones said at a morning breakfast sponsored by the HDA Aug. 29. "You need people who are going to take ownership."

Jones said he has seen in many communities that residents sit back and wait for the city to put in the plan into action.

"They wait to see what the city does and put it all on them," he said. "But the cities don't always have money to do it. "It requires public-private partnerships, and even nonprofit partnership. It needs champions in each sector."

The demographics (see box) of the community influenced the projects and economic development strategies Jones and his staff came up with. One concern they cited is the number of residents who commute out of town, and who spend money outside the county. Another concern was the lack of entertainment for people with children and residents under 18, because they make up a large portion of the population. In addition, they noted that the county has a higher than average unemployment rate, and some of the main industries in the county were not expected to expand until 2014.

Of the catalyst projects RBF staff identified, there are two projects they suggested would do the most good economically. One of the projects is a renovation of the Granada Theater, which would be eligible for historic preservation tax credits.

"You could come in to watch a show or movie," said Jonathan Schuppert, an urban designer and planner. "They could do live or music events. Expand the restrooms and dressing rooms. Add an orchestra pit."

The other project Jones suggested be tackled early on in the process is transforming the empty lot at Fourth and San Benito streets into a

mixed-use plaza with open space.

Schuppert said Redwood City staff and residents undertook a renovation of an historical theater recently while they created a plaza nearby.

"It's one of those things where those projects go hand in hand," Schuppert said. "There was a close collaboration between the property owners and managers, and city staff."

Margaret Bulat, a lead community planner and associate with RBF, presented five economic development strategies in depth. (See below.)

Jerry Muenzer, who is a member of the HDA's economic restructuring committee, emphasized that the plan is not the end of the road.

"We will continue to work on it," Muenzer said. "[RBF] may not be coming back, but we have a documents and our group is not a closed group. We are asking people to get involved."

Bulat threw out a challenge to the people in attendance at the breakfast, mostly business, property owners, politicians and city staff.

"I challenge each and every one of you to pick it up and read it," Bulat said. "It's your downtown."

The \$190,000 report was commissioned by the HDA with support from the business community, city of Hollister and San Benito County.

Target, recruit, retain and expand downtown businesses

Issues – Many downtown businesses cater to a daytime employment base and weekday consumers. They are also in industries that are not expected to grow in the next few years.

Objective – Provide diverse goods and services to the community while increasing local job employment opportunities and sales tax revenues.

Actions:

- Target and recruit industries that are absent from downtown that will attract families, youth and tourists i.e. dining, entertainment and specialty shops
- Target and recruit growing industries such as agri-tourism, health and social sciences and information technology
- Streamline the permit and business licensing process
- Support small business incubators i.e.: locations where multiple businesses share office space and support services
- Develop a business retention program
- Encourage businesses to extend their hours of operation to include evenings and weekends, so commuter and tourist dollars can be captured

Market downtown to residents and regional users

Issues – Though HDA is already advertising in local papers and has a Web site, it is important to keep information up to date and to expand.

Objectives – Enhance the image of downtown as a destination for local residents and regional users.

Actions:

- Develop a marketing slogan that is unique to downtown and incorporate it into the existing logo. It should appear on advertising material, signs and gateways
- Consider guerilla marketing techniques such as YouTube videos of downtown events, pages on social networking sites or pod casts on iTunes
- Develop a downtown Welcome Kit to go out to new residents that includes information about events, coupons to businesses and other information

Expand the types of community, cultural and civic activities

Issues – There are a limited number of events downtown on evenings and weekends, especially those geared toward the large Hispanic population.

Objectives – Create a vibrant downtown with a wide spectrum of activities that will attract people downtown

Actions:

- Allow live street performers to use the area
- Put on school plays in downtown venues, indoors or outdoors
- Plan an art and wine or agricultural street festivals
- Plan ice cream socials or downtown picnics

Educational partnership opportunities between youth and businesses

Issues – 33 percent of the population is under 18, but there are limited programs for youth, and the percentage of students that go on to hire

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21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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education is low.

Objectives – Create educational opportunities between business owners and youth to develop a sense of pride, ownership and accountability.

Actions:

- Establish volunteer crews to clean up downtown or to help with events
- Involve students in advertising by having them create fliers, videos or other promotional items for events
- Consider a school downtown that would focus on real-life projects that could involve students in local businesses
- See that community college offers coursework related to industries that will be downtown
- Provide internships for students at the businesses downtown

Identify, pursue and manage funding sources

Issues – A strong funding base will be needed to implement the catalyst projects and other strategies.

Objectives – Identify a secure source of funding that will allow projects to be completed.

Actions:

- Research and apply for grant programs
- Implement a property-based business improvement district to increase revenue
- Institute a paid parking system in downtown

By the numbers:

- 83 percent – households with families
- 60 percent – residents who commute out of town for work
- 58 percent – residents who are Hispanic/Latino
- 33 percent – residents under 18
- 24 percent – residents who commute more than one hour
- 11 percent – County unemployment rate

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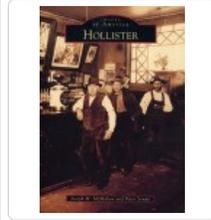
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Sincerely,
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