

Ideas exchanged at Revitalization Workshop

The Scottdale Town Center Revitalization Committee's steering committee held the first of three workshops Thursday evening at Geyer Theater giving residents and local merchants an opportunity to discuss their likes, dislikes and needs for downtown.

Joan Miles, project manager with Pashek Associates, began the meeting with a power point presentation concerning the planning process and work done to date. During this presentation, Miles noted that Scottdale has many "properties worthy of celebrating" and it was the purpose of the revitalization plan to "focus on strategies for the Borough's Town Center capitalizing on (these) existing assets."

Miles gave an overview of the multi-layered approach used thus far consisting of three steps: gathering background demographics, refining the Town Center District boundaries, and mapping the Town Center area.

The background demographic study yielded both good and bad data. As for the bad, it was shown that Scottdale continues to lose population at a significant pace. In 1990 Scottdale had 5,200 residents and by the year 2000 there were 4,800. It was also predicted that the population would decline until the year 2010 when it is expected to level off with nearly 4,000 residents.

Another negative conclusion Miles told those present was the study determined that Scottdale has an increasingly aging population. In 1930, 50 percent

of Scottdale's residents were under the age of 28. In 2000, that number dropped to 30 percent. In 1930, only 6 percent were 65 or older and in 2007 that number jumped to 21 percent in that age range.

However, Miles did point out that positive data was also collected. Scottdale's population is very well educated. The data indicated that Scottdale has the highest percent of high school graduates in the area. Overall, 27 percent of residents have either a college or post-graduate level of education. She also remarked that housing values in the area are up at least 28 percent and residents' income has also risen 16 percent between 1990 and 2000.

The second phase completed was redefining the Town Center District boundaries. These boundaries are now Mulberry Street to Grant Street to Market Street to Orchard Street to Broadway. Miles said the associates deliberately captured the old high school within the boundaries. The area encapsulated is considered Scottdale's Town Center.

The third phase consisted of physically mapping the Town Center and its land use. "We walked every block to get a feel for land use (determining) what is over represented and what is under represented," explained Miles. The study wanted to define "what areas are good for suggested redevelopment."

It was shown that one-quarter of land is used as residential and one-third is



Joan Miles and Jim Pashek of Pashek Associates led the discussion during the Revitalization workshop on the needs of Scottdale.

used for businesses. It was also determined that 17 percent of the area is vacancies, 11 percent is parking lots and off street parking, and 15 percent is that which would include parks, churches and social clubs.

With the given information in mind, Jim Pashek, led the discussion concerning what it is that the merchants and people of Scottdale would like to see happen to make the business center better.

Pointing out the graffiti and garbage around town along with the overgrown

properties throughout, Pastor Dennis Henley of the Christ United Church offered his thoughts that Scottdale has "let things deteriorate too much." He also added that the downtown area does not "have any consistency, theme or general appearance."

In related discussion of the appearance of Scottdale, resident Mary Kaufman spoke out saying "I am ashamed of the litter."

Ninety-one year old resident Ken Kromer stated that it is his belief that "one of the biggest things that is miss-

ing in Scottdale is pride." Referencing last week's editorial in the Independent Observer, Kromer said that old yard sale signs on telephone poles and garbage in alleys shows the lack of pride in the community.

Discussion was also held concerning other issues such as the lack of parking and places for people to go and "hang out."

Mike McVey, the new pastor at the Scottdale Church of the Nazarene

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admitted he was a "newbee" in town but that he has recognized that there is "no place for people under thirty. Kids and teens are literally wondering because there's no place that feels welcome to them. It is not only the kids," McVey continued, "there is not even a coffee shop for people to go to. Scottdale needs a place to hang out whether you're under thirty or over sixty-five."

Susan Ansell, a teacher for the Southmoreland School District agreed saying that there are only "a handful of kids at the high school who say they'd (plan) to

stay around here" following graduation.

Resident Rob Rabenstein stated, "Scottdale has the potential to attract the calmer quieter life. Real estate is fantastic and we have tremendous possibility for this community."

Other suggestions offered included the ideas that businesses be open at the same time and attracting businesses not directly in competition with the chain stores such as Wal-mart. In reference to the absence of a local grocery store, Pashek stated that it is "unfortunate but Scottdale has no economic support for a

traditional grocery store." He suggested that merchants focus on "niche businesses" such as antique shops and specialty food stores.

Bringing in tourism was also discussed. Working in conjunction with West Overton's restoration should be considered.

Pashek concluded that the exchange of ideas seemed to echo the need to upgrade the image of downtown, attract private interest, and address a parking plan whether it is a real problem or a perceived problem.

According to Pashek, the next

step in the process would include topics of streetscapes enhancements, identifying potential funding, and preparing marketing materials. Approaches for changing ordinances to make Scottdale a more business friendly environment will also be explored.

The Revitalization steering committee is planning the second workshop to be held sometime in August and its topic will deal with embracing the historical aspects of Scottdale and using them as economical development opportunities.