

DDA plan from page A1

ed out of the existing budget. Each subsequent year, over the next four or five, the DDA then would determine whether to proceed on any particular project. The DDA already has a track record with such endeavors; its first 10-year improvement program put a new face on the shopping district.

Pondering sources

But Downey said that, with some potential projects costing \$300,000 or more, the DDA will need to consider several sources for money. She listed Tax Increment Finance Authorities, financial cooperation from the city, private donors and grants.

"Funding will be the No. 1 ticket item," she told the council.

During the meeting, City Manager Frank Lauhoff said there are other Michigan communities the size of Farmington where people united for similar endeavors — and brought their checkbooks. He invited the Farmington area to do the same.

"The DDA is ready to sit down with the corporate citizens in the community, in both Farmington and Farmington Hills," Lauhoff said. "Because this is the downtown for the entire Farmington area. And we want to get the word out to those citizens who may just want to take part in this."

Downey credited landscape architect John Grissim for coming up with "excellent ideas" such as traffic-calming brick pavers for pedestrian crosswalks and traffic roundabouts. She said grants will be persistently pursued.

"I really don't have any idea what's out there" in grants, Downey said. "I'm hopeful that, especially for the Farmer's Market/concert area, that that would be seen by a foundation as such a wonderful benefit to the community that (it) ... would be looked at favorably."

Regardless of any budgetary

concerns, Downey has high hopes for the strategic plan.

"It's a wonderful plan," she said. "I'm excited about it. It does so much to make the downtown area more aesthetically pleasing. It will be pedestrian-friendly in every way."

One particular target area that intrigues Downey is transforming a utilitarian portion of downtown into vibrant, tree-lined traffic roundabouts.

Lots of concrete

"That whole area, down Thomas, Warner and School, there's so much concrete there," Downey said. "What Grissim/Metz has suggested would not only make it more traffic-efficient, but soften that area with greenscape a great deal."

Following are the projects:

- Develop a small park area between City Hall and Grand River, including a fountain, ample seating and landscaping.

- Improve the Grand River gazebo at the downtown's east end.

- Improve the Orchard Street Park, in order to host Farmer's Market and concerts.

- Construct Boston-style traffic roundabouts at the intersections of Thomas-Warner and Thomas-School.

- Redevelop Grove Street.

- Expand and improve Grand River green space and add parking spaces.

- Change the traffic pattern in the Downtown Center Mall from Grove to Farmington Road, from straight line to serpentine in order to slow vehicles.

- Develop, or enhance, DDA district green space.

- Determine and implement an alternative treatment for tree grate areas.

- Add brick pavers to pedestrian crosswalks on both Grand River and Grove Street.

- Construct a pedestrian walkway from the Downtown Center's north entrance down to the largest block of businesses.

- Renovate the Masonic Plaza park area, to provide a shelter from heavy traffic on both Grand River and Farmington Road. Included in the plan is a 30-foot clock tower at the corner, which was a controversial issue several years ago.

Farmington targets parking shortage

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

When it comes to parking congestion in downtown Farmington, city officials agree there's room for improvement.

But added Public Safety Director Gary Goss: "These are not bad problems to have."

On Tuesday, Goss and another Traffic and Safety Board member, Bob DeCorte, met with Downtown Development Authority officials to talk about crowded parking conditions, particularly in the Downtown Farmington Center mall.

New tenants such as the Farmington Postal Store and Big Apple Bagel are generating more traffic at the center. That congestion is likely to increase as Kimco Realty reports that all of its properties in the center have been leased, which includes the anticipated arrival of coffeehouse giant Starbucks.

Yet much of the traffic is high turnover, Goss said. A video — condensed from 12 to two hours — illustrated Goss' point as it showed people scurrying to their cars and moving in and out of parking spaces in front of the post office.

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Some Traffic Safety Board recommendations include painting three crosswalks — in front of the post office, Damman's Hardware and Farmer Jack's — and posting "no standing" signs on the main drive.

"At this point, we don't see a lot of speed on that main drive," Goss said, "but that's because they can't speed because there's a lot of obstacles."

Farmington police officers shoo away vehicles standing in front of shops, Goss said. Delivery trucks park in front between 7:30 a.m. because it's easier to unload there. Such allowances might not be afforded, especially during business hours, Goss said.

"That's what ties everything up ... It just makes a big mess," said Judy Downey, DDA executive director.

Parking tie-ups are also a concern in the lot north of Grand River, which serves the Cook Building, Grace Insurance and the Farmington Bakery. Employee parking is the culprit there, officials said.

The lot has 85 spaces for 20 businesses, which have upwards of eight-nine employees. "Mathematically, you figure it out," said DDA trustee Greg Hohler, who owns the Civic Theater.

The recently-renovated 21st Century Building is expected to add to employee parking needs.

One suggestion is to have the DDA send out letters telling business owners to have employees park further away. A similar effort didn't work 16 years ago, Hohler said.

"You do it and it works for about a month and then people start drifting back," Hohler said.

Another option is posting signs that establish one-hour spots for customer use. Those are difficult to enforce, Goss said: "You're literally out there chalking tires."

Signs do keep employees away from the buildings, said DDA member Michele Jakacki of Focal Point Studio.

Whatever the solution, City Manager Frank Lauhoff said, "It's going to take a cooperative effort."

The Valentine Gift Center



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