

# Davidson reveals options for Town Hall redevelopment

BY ERIC DINKINS

**DAVIDSON** – More details were unveiled Wednesday at a public meeting for the town’s Catalyst Project, which is aimed at redeveloping its Town Hall property into a mixed-use pedestrian center.

“We want people to be able to kind of move in and out in an organic way throughout the site,” said Christopher Garris, associate principal at Perkins and Will, which is designing the project.

Perkins and Will presented two options for the 3.5-acre site between South Main and Jackson streets in downtown. One of the options suggests keeping the existing Town Hall, and the other suggests tearing it down and replacing it.

The biggest difference between the two plans is that a new road would connect South Main Street and Jackson Street in the plan that would scrap the existing Town Hall.

Davidson Commissioner Brian Jenest said he liked that option more because it created more opportunities for the site. Town Hall is in the middle of the property, and if it stays there the project’s other elements would have to be built around it. He also said the road connection would hopefully lure some traffic off South Main Street and onto Jackson Street, which would be a plus considering that 150 housing units are proposed for the project.

The design of both plans was heavily influenced by residents’ desire for open space on the site, but exactly where that space will be depends on whether or not the existing Town Hall stays. If it does, the pedestrian space would wind through the middle of the site parallel to South Main and Jackson streets.

But with the existing building out of the picture, most of the open space would be in what Garris called a “plaza” on the south end of the site near where Jackson turns east to intersect with South Main. There would also be open space between buildings



**One plan being considered by the town of Davidson would include tearing down Town Hall and building a new one, and adding a road to connect South Main and Jackson streets. Models of two options were presented Wednesday during public meetings. Photo by Eric Dinkins**

that front both streets north of the proposed new road.

“We’re able to get a more generous green space,” Garris said regarding the plan that calls for tearing down Town Hall.

Despite the presentation’s emphasis on open space, resident Shawn Copeland said neither plan looked like it would feel more open because the space would likely be surrounded by road-fronting buildings.

“Yeah, we get more space, but what does it feel like when you’re in it?” he posed.

During the meeting, residents asked about the cost difference between the two options. Rory Dowling, project manager at the UNC School of Government’s Development Finance Initiative, said figuring out the financial feasibility for each project was the next step.

Davidson paid \$50,000 about a year ago for services offered by the Development Finance Initiative, which partners with local governments in the state to assist with development projects. The DFI helps with planning, financing, and economic and commu-

nity development.

As part of its services, the DFI hired Perkins and Will to handle the design work for the project.

One resident at Wednesday’s meeting said demolishing the existing Town Hall sounded expensive. But Dowling, in his response, pointed out that the building needs about \$500,000 in renovations, which could instead go toward demolition costs. The town is outgrowing the existing Town Hall, and if the building is left on the site more space must be added.

Kim Fleming, Davidson’s economic development manager, said after the meeting that financial models for both options would likely be presented at a Board of Commissioners meeting in mid-July.

The goals of the catalyst project are to create more commercial space in the downtown area and close the “commercial gap” on South Main Street from Town Hall to properties east of the Catawba Avenue and Potts Street intersection. The catalyst project also will add more parking in downtown Davidson.

Both proposed plans for the site include parking and a combination of two- and three-story buildings with residential and office space above ground-floor retail. The parking scenarios presented at Wednesday’s meeting were very similar: Both would add 500 spaces in a parking deck that would be partially below ground. All above-ground parking would be concealed by apartments or offices lining the outside of the buildings.

Some residents were worried the project may affect Davidson’s small-town image, depending on the retail and residential demographic it attracted. But Commissioner Rodney Graham said both plans would hopefully “complement” downtown, not make it “different.”

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