



Perris News

Contact: Joe Vargo, Perris Public Information Officer
Phone: 951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Perris Downtown Vision Plan

It's a revolutionary and visionary plan.

Turn downtown Perris into an oasis of cozy restaurants, upscale businesses, luxury apartments and condos and open spaces for concerts and plays.

Create an atmosphere where residents and visitors stroll past community gardens, a Mercado, amphitheatre and children's play area while shopping in trendy boutiques.

All while keeping Perris' historic legacy intact and promoting the recently rededicated Train Depot, the Orange Empire Railway Museum and the Perris Valley Airport, one of the premiere sky-diving facilities in the world.

City officials and urban planners agree the plan will take years to implement and cost millions.

But work has already begun.

"This is the biggest project we've got going," City Manager Richard Belmudez told a recent workshop that included business leaders and residents. "This will be the project that makes us different from any other city. We are committed to this project."

Kimberly Ruddins led the group of about 40 residents through the recent workshop at the City Council chambers.

She congratulated City staffers and residents for overcoming what she said was the hardest obstacle to getting the project going: finding the will to get it done.

"I applaud you for taking on the vision," Ruddins said. "The Downtown needs you."

The plan would remake the area bordered by Interstate 215 on the north, Ellis Avenue to the south, Redlands Avenue to the east and A Street to the west.

The project grew out of Downtown Specific Plan first adopted in 1993 and subsequent blueprints about the best way to develop the Downtown area. The area currently contains the City Hall campus, the Rock House, the historic Train Depot, the Southern Hotel and hundreds of other businesses and residences.

Long-range plans call for an "employment plaza" that would feature commercial or light industrial businesses designed in such a way to give the area the look of a college campus.

The Mercado would feature open spaces for festivals and outdoor markets and shopping and dining areas. It would also contain retail office space, an outdoor amphitheatre, community gardens and a child play area.

The Fourth Street corridor would remain a major transportation link between Perris and Lake Elsinore. But like the rest of the Downtown area, it would undergo breath-taking changes. The thoroughfare would be transformed with more pedestrian walkways. Surrounding the corridor would be an "urban village" of three-to-five story buildings, all within a quarter to a half mile of the Metrolink station on C Street that is set to open next year.

Ruddins encouraged group participants to develop a logo for the Downtown Area and create "signature events" aimed at attracting visitors and shoppers. A small signature event might include something like the annual "Rods and Rails" show. But Ruddins encouraged the community to look further to a defining event likely to be identified with Downtown for years.

"We are all marketing people," she said. "We are all recruiters."

The next step is a City-sponsored program to upgrade the facades on existing buildings along Fourth Street and other arterials in the Downtown Area. The City is developing a Downtown Business Improvement District that beginning in 2009, will provide planning and funding for those business owners who want to redo their exteriors, said Michael McDermott, Redevelopment and Economic Development Manager.

The façades will be in keeping with Perris' historical architecture.

During small group work sessions, City residents brainstormed about other ways to make Downtown safer, more energy efficient and appealing. Suggestions included installing security cameras throughout the area, placing solar panels on top of buildings to reduce energy costs, going high-tech with the installation of Wi-Fi capabilities, showing classic movies and seeking input from churches and schools about how to ultimately developing Downtown.

Perris resident Katie Keyes said the City's history is a natural lure to visitors local and distant, young and old. Perris, which was founded in 1911, is one of the oldest cities in Riverside County and has kept much of its historical flavor, she said.

"This town is almost 100 years old," Keyes said. "The history is so rich here. The history of Perris should welcome people to come here."



City Manager Richard Belmudez addresses the community forum about the Downtown Vision Plan. Perris is committed to revamping its historic Downtown district to draw visitors and tourists to the area.



Residents Bob Warren, Midge Parker and Katie Keyes listen to discussions about the Downtown plan.

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