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VISTA: Committee members want more info on redevelopment projects

By CIGI ROSS - cross@nctimes.com | Posted: Monday, July 19, 2010 9:49 pm

Members of Vista's Project Area Committee want information about the city's redevelopment projects.

The committee members met Monday and told Vista's redevelopment and housing manager, Jeff Zinner, that they would like a list of infrastructure projects the redevelopment agency is working on.

The Project Area Committee was formed in 2008 to advise the city's redevelopment agency on its plans for revitalizing downtown.

Committee member Jerome Hymes said Monday that the city promised to spend redevelopment dollars on infrastructure projects, such as sidewalk and road repairs and lighting, in addition to buying property.

Over the past several months, the city's redevelopment agency has spent millions of dollars on more than a dozen downtown properties. Many of the parcels are located in the Paseo Santa Fe corridor, which runs along South Santa Fe Avenue from Monte Vista Drive in the south to Orange Avenue in the north.

Hymes said he has been submitting infrastructure project ideas to the city for a year without getting any responses about what's being done.

"I want to see a list of current projects, ongoing and planned," Hymes said. "We made a promise. ... We've spent millions of dollars on property and less on infrastructure."

Other committee members agreed that they would like to know what the redevelopment agency is working on.

"People will come and ask us as PAC members what's going on," David Nilson said. "A lot of times we don't know much."

Zinner told the group that small-scale projects are being completed. He said the agency had constructed sidewalks on Massachusetts Avenue and Francis Drive.

"We'd like to see things happen instantly, but sometimes that's not the case," Zinner said. "The fact that we're spending money in other areas (like property acquisitions) doesn't mean it's not being done."

He said some larger infrastructure improvements, such as the construction of a storm water retention basin at South Santa Fe Avenue and Monte Vista Drive, would begin by next year.

Bill Rawlings, Vista's director of redevelopment and housing, said in February that the agency had only bought about 25 percent of the properties it intends to acquire downtown. The acquired properties will be bunched together, then city officials hope to sell them to private developers who will construct mixed-use buildings with ground-floor retail topped by offices and condos.

Zinner said Monday that the agency has had "a lot of interest from developers" for the properties but hasn't signed any deals yet for Paseo Santa Fe.

"We want to position ourselves to make Vista as attractive to private investors" as possible, Zinner said.

In February, the redevelopment agency issued bonds for \$36 million to fund property purchases. It plans to borrow about \$103.5 million total over the next five years to finance property purchases and public improvements in the Paseo Santa Fe corridor.

In the 2010-11 fiscal year, the city could issue an additional \$33.25 million to pay for improvements such as streets and sewers.

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