

Urban designers stress pedestrians to revive Roseburg

Chris Gray, cgray@newsreview.info

May 17, 2007

Convert Southeast Pine and Stephens streets back to two-way traffic. And get a grocery store back in the old Safeway or Rite Aid site.

Those two items topped a list of suggestions brought up Tuesday evening by a pair of Portland urban planners who led a presentation on restoring downtown Roseburg, opening up the waterfront and integrating the Mill-Pine Historic District back into the rest of the southeast part of town.

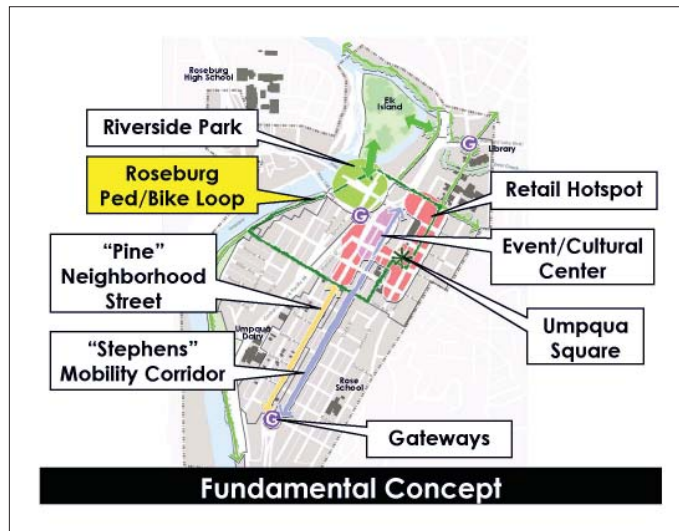
"We think it is a prime objective to get a grocery store back in downtown," said Don Arambula, a principal urban designer for the top planning firm Crandall Arambula, headquartered in Portland's Pioneer Square. "Losses of a downtown grocery store should be a canary in a coal mine."

He said Roseburg's downtown has some assets that could be built upon — existing retail stores, tree-lined Jackson Street, the South Umpqua River, the historic Grand Hotel apartments, railroad depot and Mill-Pine District.

"If you can fix some of the transportation problems, you'll see the economic vitality of the Mill-Pine go up," Arambula said.

Many of Crandall Arambula's ideas reflected taking the town back 75 years to how it was originally intended to be laid out, with Cass and Jackson the commercial lifelines and Pine and Stephens with two-way traffic.

The planners — on retainer with the state — came to Roseburg after approval of the transportation system plan in December to address perceived deficits in the plan raised by local residents.



Instead of stressing automobiles first, as most transportation plans do, the two urban planners who spoke said the city should think pedestrians first, cars second, and bicycles third to revive Roseburg's urban core.

Arambula and his colleague, Jason Graf, advised the city to focus on Jackson Street, with a grocery store at the north end, then attempt to channel downtown

development on Cass Avenue, making an 'L' to the train station.

The city should give incentives to aid retail downtown and discourage non-conforming uses.

A second anchor store could someday go in across Cass from Yogee's and the Roseburg Beauty College, providing a free flow of pedestrians across downtown.

The lynchpin to center the commercial and cultural development would be a new town square where Cass and Jackson came together.

"I know there's a Wells Fargo there," Graf said, admitting his idea was just a concept. "We see a lot of potential in that area. We would love to see all the edges surrounded by active uses. This is a great spot."

Graf said banks could be relocated, but placing a town square has to be just right. This corner could be surrounded by commercial development in the middle of downtown, a block from where the Hebe fountain once stood, with pedestrian-friendly streets on all sides.

The planner said the old Rite Aid site would not work well as a town square because it is on the edge of downtown, and is not surrounded by retail development.

Graf said the focus of Pine Street, south of Mosher Avenue, should be residential, while Stephens should be seen as the mobility corridor for car traffic to get through.

But it was unclear when or if any of their ideas could be implemented. Community Development Director Fred Alley said these were just concepts, not policy.

A separate plan for Southeast Stephens already presented to the City Council by Public Works calls for improvements that would potentially conflict with Crandall Arambula's concept of a mobility corridor on Stephens, with three travel lanes — two northbound, one southbound, as well as parking on one side.

Arambula said this "contralane" concept was being used in Whitefish, Mont., per his firm's plans.

"I was a little concerned that the plans for South Stephens were so far along," said John Renz, of the Department of Land Conservation and Development, which helped fund the study presented Tuesday. "I hope that the plans aren't so far along that (Pine and Stephens) can't be two-way again."

Alley said the Southeast Stephens plans were already in the works and arise from the city's Downtown Master Plan, which was adopted in 2000. Crandall Arambula's ideas, he said, could be appraised for the transportation plan when it is reviewed this fall.

"We still have unsafe streets. We need to address that now," Alley said. "It's going to be a number of years before we have a significant change."

Public Works has proposed \$1.9 million in upgrades for Southeast Stephens, including a new streetlight system, new pavement, new sidewalks

in many places, landscaping and bumpouts that would help protect pedestrians at crosswalks.

In order to make two-way traffic work on Pine Street, Arambula advised taking one of the lanes of parking away from Stephens for a travel lane. Bumpouts on both sides of the street would prevent this format.

"It is so important to slow the traffic down ... and make Pine Street two ways again," said Mary Blevins, a longtime advocate for the Mill-Pine Historic District. She said this was the first time she'd heard an official call for the two-way streets. "It was so gratifying to hear you speak."

The Portland planners were well received by the gathering of about 40 city residents at the Douglas County Library, with some disagreement over the specifics, but a general appreciation for their ideas.

"We need to talk to the City Council and stop the approval of the South Stephens project so these two great plans can be integrated," said community activist Gayle Rosellini after the meeting. "We need to slow down."

Putting a grocery store in at the old Safeway site is impeded by a no-compete clause that prohibits a new grocery on the site till 2010.

"Maybe it's worth waiting four years. You really need a grocery," Arambula said, suggesting that the wrong development would damage the rest of downtown.

Albertson's had a similar non-compete agreement when they moved out of their old site on Northeast Stephens Street, where Dell is now located.

Arambula said the Dell call center could have gone anywhere in town. Where it sits it has depressed the surrounding retail development.

- You can reach reporter Chris Gray at 957-4218 or by e-mail at cgray@newsreview.info.