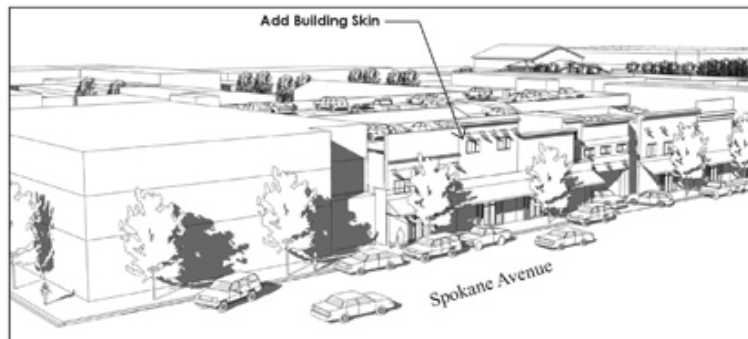


Posted Thursday, February 1, 2007

Whitefish on Brink of Downtown Overhaul

By Lynnette Hintze, The Daily Inter Lake

The city of Whitefish last week razed the Big Mountain Tire building at the high-profile corner of Spokane Avenue and Second Street, setting the stage for redevelopment that will include parking space.



The council opted to tackle the parking project before embarking on another “catalyst” project in downtown — a streetscape of Central Avenue that would include new crosswalks and curb

City Manager Gary Marks will outline three options for the city property at Monday’s City Council meeting.

Four years ago, the city paid nearly \$1 million for the property occupied by Big Mountain Tire and the adjoining parking lot. Whitefish’s new downtown master plan recommended a multilevel mixed-use structure to accommodate both parking and commercial space, but when the council learned last fall it would cost about \$12 million to develop, they asked Marks to develop more modest proposals. His recommended alternatives include:

- Construct a surface parking lot with greenery and landscaping.
- Sell 90 feet of property fronting Second Street for commercial development and develop the back two-thirds of the property as a parking lot. Proceeds of the sale would fund both the parking lot and other downtown improvements.
- Sell the front 90 feet and use all the proceeds to build the first level of a future multilevel parking structure. Installing the footings would drive the cost up considerably, Marks said, but would enable the city to add more parking levels as needed in the future.

Marks said he will unveil cost estimates to the council Monday. He also will ask the council whether it wants to sell the 90 feet now or save it to capitalize on its ever-increasing value.

The city is soliciting qualified firms as it moves into the design phase of the project.

extensions at each intersection, with a special raised crosswalk on U.S. 93 at the intersection of Central Avenue and Second Street to slow traffic. The reconstruction also calls for new native trees and landscaping at corner and midblock curb extensions, widened sidewalks and ornamental lighting scaled to pedestrians.

“We want parking in place before we dig into Central Avenue,” Marks said.

A new City Hall also is a high priority in the downtown plan, but the city will need to sell its existing facility to accommodate the construction.

Whitefish adopted a downtown plan in March, 18 years after downtown businessowner Don Nelson broached the subject with the council. The Heart of Whitefish, a nonprofit group of downtown business and civic leaders, rejuvenated the effort about five years ago, soliciting pledges from local businesses to help pay for the consultants.

Portland consulting firm Crandall Arambula worked with Whitefish community leaders for nearly two years to develop a plan with broad-based support.

With the potential for roughly \$85 million in private and public investment, the plan provides a framework for priority projects and potential amenities that could be built in downtown Whitefish during the next two or three decades.

Features editor Lynnette Hintze may be reached at 758-4421 or by e-mail at lhintze@dailyinterlake.com