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Abandoning First Street?

• 'River walk'
eyed at master
plan meeting

By Pat Blair

Senior staff reporter

Whether First Street should be abandoned to accommodate a "river walk" along Little Goose Creek at the boundaries of Sheridan's Historic Downtown District was among ideas presented at a meeting Thursday night to discuss the proposed update of the Historic Downtown Master Plan.

The meeting, attended by about 20 people at Best Western Sheridan Center, was hosted by the Downtown Sheridan Association, Steady Stream Hydrology Inc. of Sheridan, and Western Water Consultants of Sheridan.

Steady Stream Hydrology and WWC are consultants for the update of the plan, which was first approved in 1993 at the request of what was then the Uptown Sheridan Association to guide planning and enhancements for downtown Sheridan.

Cheryl Harrelson, of Steady Stream Hydrology, said abandoning First Street from the bridge on Broadway to its intersection with Val Vista Street would restore a portion of the flood plain lost when the creek was restrained by concrete walls in the flood-control project of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

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She said the project would be "hydrologically doable" and could result in creation of seasonal "pocket parks" that could add to the aesthetics of a walking path along the creek.

She added that work, as well as possible improvements in Big Goose Creek where it goes through Kendrick Park, could be done without decreasing the flood-control capacity of the creeks.

Restoration of the creek to its pre-1960s flow would meet the DSA's wishes to incorporate the Big and Little Goose creeks into downtown enhancements, would contribute to improved water quality in both creeks, and would decrease the city's annual costs to remove sediment deposited in the creek, Harrelson said.

Removal of sediment is part of the city's agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers to keep the current creek channel free of obstructions.

Chad Reed, from WWC, noted the "river walk" proposals are still only conceptual — and, like other proposals presented Thursday — are for discussion. The final master plan, he and WWC's Shawn Higley emphasized, will be guided by public input.

Reed said the master plan update will also include such issues as downtown parking, extension of the Sheridan Pathways project through the downtown area, enhancement of entryways, art displays, and incorporation of private developments such as Whitney Benefits' east side development.

The new plan also will include discussion of public rest rooms, he said.

"Parking is one thing we really want to evaluate," Reed said. "It's pretty hard to find parking downtown."

He told the audience that one potential solution is a parking garage. But, he noted, it isn't the only solution.

On the issue of entryways, the master

plan update will include a proposal for the Coffeen Avenue/Main Street intersection as well as "Malfunction Junction" — the intersection of Scott-Broadway, Wyoming Avenue and Burkitt Street.

One possible way of dealing with that, Reed said, is to revisit a Scott-Broadway extension, a proposal that has been suggested, and abandoned, in the past.

Other considerations for the master plan will be the North Main Street reconstruction scheduled for 2009 and an analysis of open spaces — including properties around the Sheridan Inn, the Best Western, Mills Park and Whitney Commons — and how to incorporate them into downtown plans.

And, Reed said, the updated master plan will identify unused second-story space downtown "and look at how to use (it)."

Among those who attended Thursday's meeting was former Sheridan Mayor Jim Wilson, who said of what he heard, "I think it's got potential. It's building on what the community already has in place."

Current Mayor Dave Kinskey was not at the meeting.

Higley told attendees that Sheridan is already well ahead of many communities.

"A lot of communities are just getting started on upgrading their downtowns to bolster economic development," he said, adding that Sheridan's downtown master plan has been in place since 1993.

The last update to the master plan was in 2001, but DSA felt it was time to revisit the plan, according to DSA Executive Director Roger Bent, because so much has happened in the past five years, including developments by Whitney Benefits and completion of projects — Grinnell Plaza, Gould Street and Scott-Broadway reconstruction — identified in the earlier plans.