

City trying a 'holistic approach' to downtown



The administration is working to try and make the downtown core more inviting and pedestrian-friendly. *Ô ðó cì gB Etgf kú@tkp@BgemgA@B gpvqP@ gr qtvgt*

by [BRIAN BECKLEY](#), Renton Reporter Editor
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City officials this summer touted what the mayor described as a “holistic approach” to downtown revitalization during a presentation to the City Council that focused on what various city departments are doing to help the core live up to the city’s vision of a “vibrant, pedestrian-friendly” section of Renton.

The push has brought together multiple city departments in what Mayor Denis Law described as a “full-court press” to make downtown a place people want to live, shop and invest in.

“This has been a priority for me for the past eight years in office,” Law said of the project. “I wanted everyone engaged, every department.”

Involving the Police, Fire, Public Works, Community Services and the Community and economic Development departments, the city has placed an emphasis on public safety (both “perception and reality,” according to City Administrator Jay Covington), code enforcement, business recruiting and new development, beautification, special events and engaging property owners and business as partners, among other topics.

Police Chief Kevin Milosevich opened the presentation last month, talking about how the department has placed an emphasis on the parking garage at the transit center and increased police presence downtown.

Though the department is dealing with some staffing issues this summer, he said police have increased their presence this summer and patrol officers are told to be seen downtown when not on a call. By next summer, with a full staff, additional officers are expected to be assigned to the core.

In addition, Milosevich said officers have been out talking with business owners to hear their concerns and working with the Liquor Control Board to possibly designate the area an “alcohol impact area” that could outlaw certain types of fortified wines and other alcoholic beverages in the area.

Though city officials insist downtown is safe and numbers show the reported crimes in the area are not out of line with previous years, Law said the most important thing is how resident feel and that means a more visible police presence.

“However you look at it, people need to feel safe,” he said. “We need the police present today.”

Fire officials and code enforcement have also been working downtown in an effort to reach out to property owners to protect the buildings and instill pride in appearance of the area.

Fire Chief Mark Peterson told the council that his department inspected 50 buildings downtown and found 11 with deficiencies; but after owners were contacted by the department, all but one of the deficiencies had been corrected by August.

Planning Department Administrator Chip Vincent said his department also instituted an “unprecedented” effort to inventory all of the code issues downtown, sending letters to all property owners to take a “pro-active approach” regarding any problems.

Vincent said following the outreach by the city, six structures voluntarily came into compliance and of the 40 warnings that were issued, 18 had been dealt with and the city is continuing to work on the remaining violations.

Vincent said common violations downtown involved property maintenance, broken windows, litter and non-conforming signs.

The city has also engaged with property owners about programs like the facade improvement grants available and trying to serve as a “matchmaker” between open storefronts and potential businesses.

Another way the city is looking to revitalize the core is through increased events, which bring people to the area.

“The more events we have ... the fewer problems we have,” said Community Services Department Administrator Terry Higashiyama.

Among the new events started by the city are the Pop-Up Piazza and the Eruption of Art events.

In addition, beautification efforts, like new banners, flower baskets and temporary art in some of the empty buildings have helped spruce up the area. Additional changes like providing more sidewalk space for outdoor tables may also be on the way.

The city has also been actively recruiting businesses, investment and the “right kind of development,” according to Vincent. Vincent cited the new Lofts at Second and Main project and this month’s opening of the Cheers sports bar in the former A Terrible Beauty space as examples.

Finally, the city is making a public investment in the area, through grants and effort to convert downtown streets from one- to two-way roads.

The mayor said all elements were “critical” to the success of the project, but he was encouraged by what has happened so far.

“I’m really excited about the direction we’re going,” he said.

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