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Big Picture . Local Focus

Developers gear up for First Street

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Right now, First Street is a relatively barren stretch of downtown St. Charles, devoid of much commerce or activity.

Developers, however, see something quite different in the six-block corridor lining the majestic Fox River.

They speak of a hub where couples sip lattes at sidewalk cafes; where families window shop at quaint storefronts — a thriving area where people live, work, shop, eat and relax.

After nearly three years of planning, those intentions took the spotlight Tuesday as developers outlined their hopes for a \$105 million redevelopment effort to the plan commission.

If approved by the city council, the redevelopment would bring 100,000 square feet of restaurants and retail to 22 acres of downtown, developers say. There also would be up to 103,000 square feet of office space, two parking garages with more than 650 spaces total, 16 apartments and 80 riverfront condominiums.

"We're trying to revitalize downtown St. Charles," local developer Bob Rasmussen told commissioners during a public hearing. "It is rare that we have the opportunity to affect the future of the community in such a significant way."

Under the plan, First Street would be a widened, tree-lined road through block upon block of classic and modern architecture. Buildings would have varying elevations, facades and elaborate window designs.

Awnings would adorn first-floor businesses, while, in many cases, the floors above would house offices, apartments and condos. A few steps east would be a walkway along the river, where folks could have a picnic or read a book.

There would be plazas, park areas, new sidewalks, a bank and grocery store.

"We're building this for the next generation, the next hundred years — not just for today or tomorrow," said Mark Knauer, of Knauer, Inc., part of the development team.

If developers get a go-ahead from the city, they could start work as early as Nov. 1. A targeted completion date is 2012.

Plan commissioners on Tuesday asked questions about parking, traffic and building

locations, among other issues.

Although commissioner Renee Hanlon raised concerns about the relocation of the Blue Goose grocery store and a related parking issue, she praised the plan. "I think it will be great for downtown," she said.

The panel is expected to decide at a later date whether to recommend approval of the project to the city council.

In the meantime, nearly \$3 million in infrastructure work to make way for a redevelopment is set to begin in October, with road closures no earlier than Oct. 9, officials announced Tuesday.

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