

HOTEL: Will increase property values in district

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taphouse, but Myers said he is confident that other downtown businesses will benefit as well.

“Hermiston for years was two cities,” he said. “You had the west end on one side of the railroad tracks and the east end on the other and there has always been a big gap, a big void, between the two sides. Now we’re finally bringing the two sides together. I’m excited about the potential.”

As for the money the development will generate for Hermiston’s Urban Renewal District, Myers said he would like to see it go toward developing more parking downtown.

Mary Corp, owner of Kay C’s Art & Collectibles on Main Street, said a hotel in the center of town will almost certainly increase foot traffic.

For a retail store like hers, she said, out of town travelers tend to stop and browse for unique items they can’t find in their hometown. So getting more of that kind of traffic could be a big plus.

“It’s a nice investment in the downtown core,” she said.

As for city-funded efforts, Corp said she would like to see them focus on the low-hanging fruit first, implementing “functional art” like decorative benches, trashcans and lighting to make the area feel more friendly to foot traffic.

“You want to help people recognize this is not a street that’s just for passing through,” she said.

Some downtown business owners aren’t waiting for the city and other outside forces to step up and help Main Street. Simmons Insurance recently held a community

A changing downtown

Holiday Inn Express

A four-story Holiday Inn Express will be built on the northwest corner of Hermiston Avenue and Highway 395. The hotel is expected to open in July 2016. It will have 93 rooms, including 18 suites.

Festival Street

The Urban Renewal Agency budgeted \$15,000 for 2015-2016 to start design work on a “festival street” stretching down Second Street in front of city hall. The project is expected to cost about \$750,000. Early conceptual drawings show decorative wrought-iron gates, trees, benches, brickwork and a street on the same level as the sidewalk. The area would be designed as a community gathering place that could be closed off to traffic during community events.

Downtown gateway

A plan to redesign the intersection of Second Street and Highway 395 near the Hermiston Conference Center for safety reasons has prompted the city’s Community Enhancement Committee to look for an opportunity to turn the intersection into a gateway funneling traffic downtown, complete with decorative arch, signs, landscaping and a water feature. The redesign, complete with gateway, will cost between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

Facade improvements

The Urban Renewal Agency is taking applications for facade grants that offer matching funds to business owners and landlords making improvements to the physical appearance of their buildings. The agency

has awarded two so far, with \$746 to Rob Shaefer of Horace Mann at 662 E. Main St. and \$4,920 to John Ballard for improvements to his law office at 125 S.W. Third St.

Street lighting

Part of the Urban Renewal Agency’s plan for downtown includes looking for ways to implement decorative street lighting, making the area more welcoming during times of the year when it gets dark before the shops and restaurants close.

Signage

The Urban Renewal Agency and Community Enhancement Committee have both included new signage in their wish list for downtown. The decorative signs would direct visitors to the downtown area, parking, cultural attractions and parks.

day in which employees laid down mulch, planted flowers and picked up trash along Main Street and Gladys Avenue.

Hope Barton, who does advertising and finance for the agency, said while they were working several downtown business owners came out and asked if they could pitch in and help next time the agency did a service project downtown.

“We hope next year to do the same thing, but bigger and better,” she said.

The city also has plans to spruce up downtown, using money generated by the 2013 creation of the Urban Renewal District. The district freezes local jurisdictions’ revenue for 20 years, skimming extra revenue generated by property value

increases and funneling it back into downtown improvement projects.

At the district’s inception the city estimated it would make between \$2.5 million to \$4 million over its 20-year lifespan. Now it expects the new Holiday Inn Express will generate at least \$75,000 a year on that property alone, in addition to increasing property values in the rest of the district.

City planner Clint Spencer said the extra revenue doesn’t necessarily change the city’s priorities, but it will probably change the timeline for more expensive investments.

“It will give us the ability to move projects up,” he said.

One of those projects he said would likely happen sooner is the festival street,

which the urban renewal agency budgeted \$15,000 for planning purposes this year. The street would stretch across the block of Second Street in front of city hall, with brickwork, landscaping, trees, and a sidewalk level with the street. Decorative gates would allow the area to be closed to traffic and turned into a community gathering place.

“With more revenue, we may choose to stretch that farther,” Spencer said.

He said the city is pleased with the prospect that a new hotel in town will help drive foot traffic to the area and “keep those storefronts active.”

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ELEVATOR: Price of wheat down 23 percent from last year

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Middleton said.

Right now, members are facing a double-whammy of difficulty. Three straight years of hot, dry weather are expected to cut into most yields, while the price of what is down 23 percent — at \$5.82 per bushel — compared to a year ago.

Activity hummed at McNary Thursday afternoon as truck after truck arrived for delivery. The elevator can easily handle up to 300 trucks per day, Middleton said, each carrying approximately 1,150 bushels.

Tiny kernels whoosh and

rattle their way down the pit and up the conveyor system, while superintendent Adam Bergstrom mans the controls. He is responsible for knowing what type of grain comes in on every truck, and which container it needs to go to avoid accidental mixing.

Middleton works with exporters to sell a certain package of wheat to Asian millers. Once the deal is signed, it’s up to Bergstrom to make sure that specific product makes it onto the barge.

“What he decides to put on paper, I have to put on an actual barge,” Bergstrom said.

Bergstrom is also in charge of worker safety, no small task at such a large elevator. Dust from the grain can potentially be explosive given an ignition source, and working in tight spaces increases the risk of falls.

McNary does have a dust mitigation system, Middleton said, to reduce the danger of an explosion.

“Once that stuff gets airborne, it’s like a bomb,” he said.

The grain industry has come a long way from its history of wooden elevators, Middleton said, to metal and concrete structures used today. The McNary terminal

gives PGG members added strength and durability for storage.

“This is like something you’d see down on the Willamette that an exporter would operate,” Middleton said.

Rick Jacobson, PGG’s general manager, said McNary Elevator was built with money borrowed from the Farm Credit System and is the co-op’s “crown jewel.”

“It’s a great story, when you think about what a co-op system can do,” Jacobson said.

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FIRE: Exterior structure of the building may not be a total loss

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neither illicit drug production nor a natural gas leak were causes.

The blowup and fire caused the roof to collapse on the second floor, and Roberts said those materials insulated and preserved clues, some of which investigators found undamaged.

Roberts also said the investigation found three citizens rushed in and helped get Quezada out of the room. Pendleton paramedics met Quezada and his would-be rescuers at the top of the stairs, he said, strapped the man to a stretcher and carried him to an ambulance.

Black smoke was filling the building at that time, Roberts said. The blaze grew fast and seven fire departments worked to extinguish the fire. Pendleton was the first on the scene. Roberts credited Matt Benedict, assistant fire chief, with swift work to get water on the flames early. Roberts also said it was quite the achievement that crews kept the fire contained to the old building, otherwise the blaze could have consumed an entire block of businesses

and apartments that have adjoining roofs or structures.

While the interior of the building’s tower and second floor look like total losses, the structure of the building may be intact. The second floor is primarily concrete, and the brick-and-mortar exterior appears tight.

Tuesday’s emergency also showed why Pendleton is adding more fire fighting resources. The fire department staffs a minimum of five firefighter paramedics at Station 1, 911 S.W. Court Ave., and two at Station 2, 1200 Southgate. Interim fire chief Roy Palmer said the crew of five from Station No. 1 arrived first, but three took Quezada in an ambulance, leaving just two men at the scene until other staff and neighboring firefighters arrived.

He also said Pendleton had six more calls for ambulances during the fire.

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