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Memo: 'We invite residents and merchants to play an active role. There are a lot of opportunities to partake in, ask questions or add input.'

Lisa Piana

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP

Design work begins on downtown facelift

Consultants invite public input to help direct plans for Franklin center

Ashley Studley, Staff Writer

FRANKLIN - With funding secure and surveys complete, Franklin will now begin preliminary designs to improve downtown.

Eugene Bolinger, vice president of the Weston & Sampson consulting firm overseeing reconstruction, proposed specific improvements to Town Council last week and wants the public's opinion.

"We want to continue to get public input and allow that input to direct the design," he said.

A major proposed improvement is to create two-way traffic on Emmons, Main and West Central streets.

Bolinger said it would allow people driving along Rte. 140 to pass straight through downtown and would create a comfortable environment for pedestrians.

It will also help emergency response, he said.

"By establishing two-way traffic on West Central, we allow the Fire Department to make a left hand turn out of the Fire Station," he said.

Other proposed safety and aesthetic improvements include widening sidewalks and crossings, adding period lighting and signs, and planting more trees.

"We want to establish downtown Franklin once again as a destination," he said. "To be the focal point of the town."

Franklin began talking about revamping its downtown in 2002, and was granted \$5 million from the Federal Highway Administration in 2005 for improvements from Moore to East Central streets. Last year, the town secured another \$1 million from the Executive Office of Transportation for work on Depot, Emmons and Ray streets.

Bolinger said these improvements will make the area more pedestrian-friendly and conducive to business.

"These investments will lead to bigger investments," he said.

Department of Public Works Director Robert Cantoreggi said the town will now begin preliminary plans that will likely take nine months to complete.

Once finished, the plans will be presented to the state Department of Transportation for feedback.

Cantoreggi said this stage of the project is when the town will get the most feedback to steer the rest of its planning.

Bolinger wants the public's opinion on all aspects of the design.

"(As) part of getting to the 25-percent stage, we'll be participating in additional meetings and workshops," he said. "We'll have a series of meetings where we present those preliminary designs, and people's reactions to those designs will allow us to fine-tune those plans."

Lisa Piana, executive director for the Downtown Partnership, hopes people take the opportunity to get involved.

"We invite residents and merchants to play an active role. There are a lot of opportunities to partake in, ask questions or add input," she said.

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