

Residents role-play to imagine future of downtown

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Residents walked a mile in someone else's shoes Tuesday night in an effort to imagine the future of downtown Chico.

Stepping into a randomly assigned role, more than 60 people toured downtown Chico trying to figure out what they liked and wanted to change about both the look and use of certain downtown buildings and areas.

Acting in the roles of a developer, a Chico State University student, a decision-maker, or simply a Chico resident, those at a downtown vision workshop looked at six sites ranging from the Second and Wall street parking lot to the Thunderbird Lodge.

Through the use of live polling later Tuesday night, residents also weighed in on how they felt about different types of architecture or stores in downtown and answered questions on parking and downtown concerns.

The intent of the workshop was to form the beginnings of a vision for downtown's future, in what marks the first time the area will be included as part of the city's General Plan.

City Planning Director Steve Peterson said including downtown in the General Plan update will hopefully allow for reinvestment in the area so downtown can stay vibrant in future years.

The city is about six months into the two-year process of updating the General Plan, which will

serve as a blueprint for the future physical development of the city until 2030.

Mark Broder, a downtown planning specialist with PMC — the city's General Plan consultant, said having residents assume a role perhaps differently than their normal one on the one-mile tour results in better, "fresher" information and ideas.

"I thought it was fun and I thought every single one of us (in her walking tour group) mentioned we saw something we never noticed before, that we overlooked," Chico resident Hannah Williamson said after completing the more than an hour-long walking tour.

Tim Moss of TJ Farms Carriage Co. said he's had the sense there was a minority group making decisions on the General Plan and was pleased to see the "openness of making decisions" during the walking tour.

Williamson said while she hasn't attended other General Plan meetings, she chose to make the downtown workshop her first because of the importance she places on downtown.

"I think we have one of the most authentic, still-true-to-its-beginnings downtown," Williamson said. "Some of the other downtowns have morphed into something more modern and we've kept our charm."

Others came because of the potential impact on their own future.

"I'm just interested because I want to stay in this area," said Chico State graduate student MaryJo Lucero, 25, who is also writing a paper on downtown.

"I'm a sixth-generation Chicoan, so I'm

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just interested in Chico period," said Earl Jessee, owner of the downtown business LearningChange.

Moss, who will come to downtown with his business, said he's really interested in how the downtown area is developed and what impact it will have on attracting families and children, the demographic of his business.

Peterson said the downtown focus of the General Plan will seek to improve downtown's identity, the look of the streets, access, historical resources and parking.

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