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Residents voice opinions on **downtown** plans

Terrance Vestal Sun-News reporter

SILVER CITY - Some Silver City residents got a chance to take a glimpse at possible futures of their community and a glimpse at the past under renovation during a workshop Saturday. The workshop, which kicked off Friday night, was facilitated by Charlie Deans, principal of CommunityByDesign, a firm assisting in the effort of creating a "**Downtown** Action Plan" for Silver City.

The Silver City **Downtown** Action Plan is a collaborative planning project between the town of Silver City, Silver City MainStreet, Silver City Arts and Cultural District and New Mexico MainStreet. Using funds from the New Mexico MainStreet program, the town has retained a consulting team, led by CommunityByDesign, which specializes in revitalizing town centers, to work with the community in developing the plan. The consulting team has been meeting regularly with a Citizen Working Group that includes **downtown** stakeholders and business owners since September 2009.

The workshop's mission was to generate and discuss common ground and common goals that could be implemented into the action plan.

A draft of the **Downtown** Vision Statement, which still is being revised and amended at the suggestions of residents, states: "**Downtown** Silver City is the cultural heart and vital economic center of our diverse community. It is the place where the community lives, works and gathers for sustaining creative expression, enterprise, and heritage. Our residents, families, and visitors contribute to the success of its eclectic shops, restaurants, artistic and entertainment venues, and outstanding museums."

Deans said Saturday that the action plan should determine projects that bolster the vision statement that are feasible and can be implemented. It also should identify funding sources to bring projects to fruition.

Residents on Saturday heard presentations from the consulting team on issues including "Principals That Make Great **Downtowns**." Deans said the community should see its **downtown** as its living room.

"It should create an identifiable center and have an identifiable edge," Deans said.

Presentations also were given on the importance of signage, which included examples in Silver City of signage that could be confusing. Special signage, using specific images and colors, could be integral in defining the different areas of a **downtown**, such as its arts and heritage districts as well as commercial areas. There also were presentations on different possible districts, such as arts and cultural districts, parking issues and possible solutions, and historic preservation and adaptive reuse of buildings.

After the presentation, residents broke up into groups for a few hours and generated ideas on how they thought **downtown** Silver City could be improved.

These suggestions included:

- Making **downtown** more pedestrian friendly, including integrating a safer crossing over Hudson to get to the Post Office.
- Cleaning up the Big Ditch area, making it more secure through possible security cameras and having the backs of businesses that face the Big Ditch use outdoor seating areas with more activities in that area. There also were suggestions of more bridges over the ditch and a push for the completion of the "Bridge to Nowhere," which is an unfinished bridge near the public safety center. Increased activity could lead to less drug use and alcohol consumption there.
- Creating a "City Plaza" by moving City Hall into the Bank of America building and have the bank relocate to another site. The city owns the building, which already houses the City Hall annex, and Gough Park could be incorporated as well.
- Turning Bullard Street into a one-way street with a round-about that would direct traffic onto Texas Street.
- Beautification efforts for Pope Street in order to make it more inviting and more identifiable as a gateway to **downtown**.
- A tax or fee for absentee property owners of vacant lots **downtown** so they are motivated to do something with them or turn them over to someone else who would do something with those lots.
- Get the theaters operating again for movies as well as performance arts.
- Find a solution to the homeless problem in the **downtown** area.
- Make connections - the historic and cultural areas leading to the arts district leading to the recreational areas around the Big Ditch and vice versa.
- Public rest rooms.

After the ideas were generated, residents took a tour of the Murray Hotel Ballroom, which was led by Kurt Albershardt.

At 7 p.m., the consulting team presented some graphic renderings of some of the suggestions that had been derived from the workshop.

The ongoing process of Silver City **downtown** revitalization can be followed at downtownsilvercity.com. Residents also can learn how to get involved in the effort at that Web site.

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[Photo:](#)

[Confusing signage in **downtown** Silver City is one of the challenges that was pointed out during the **Downtown** Vision workshop Saturday. Town residents and consultants came together at the workshop to discuss common goals and to develop an action plan to make **downtown** Silver City a better place.](#)

[Photo:](#)