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## Plans afoot for Auburn's downtown include plaza, theater, retail

by Robert Whale

Two developers last week answered the City of Auburn's call for downtown development proposals.

Now it's up to city officials to choose between the mixed-use, urban village plan offered by Alpert International and the apartment-retail mix the Stratford Company hopes to build on the Marvel Grocery and Crites-Huff blocks it owns directly south of City Hall.

Last Monday, the City Council's Committee of the Whole gave the nod to Alpert International. Council members will vote April 7 to authorize the Downtown Development Committee to enter into 90 days of exclusive negotiations with Alpert.

Councilwoman Sue Singer noted that the city's negotiations with Alpert do not eliminate Stratford from consideration. After all, Singer said, the city could decide after the 90-day negotiation period to go in another direction.

"Until we've got an agreement," Singer said, "all possibilities remain open."

Actual costs will be worked out during negotiations.

Here in brief is something about the developers and their proposals.

### ALPERT INTERNATIONAL

Alpert International, a merchant banking firm with offices in Seattle and Dallas, specializes in the structuring, financing and development of diverse real estate projects throughout the world.

Among its many projects are the Rodeo Center in the City of Mesquite, Texas, comprised of a 150-room Hampton Inn and Suites, a 21,000-square-foot conference center, a 35,000-square-foot exhibit hall and a renovated 5,000-square-foot arena; and the 1,417-acre Falcon's Lair, a master-planned, mixed-use community in eastern Dallas County incorporating more than 500 homes and developed lots.

Its plans for Auburn Junction call for a 5.39-acre mixed-use, urban village spread out over 27 parcels between the Sound Transit Station, City Hall and Safeway, with underground parking and walkways. The city already owns 2.17 of the acres.

Alpert's proposal calls the Junction "a green, mixed-use, urban-style, upscale commercial and residential dominated project," featuring ground-floor retail and restaurant facilities that incorporate open space. Its main features are as follows:

- Condominium housing — from smaller studios and 1-bedroom units to units for families: an estimated 332,000 square feet.
- Lifestyle retail and entertainment — includes higher-profile restaurants, speciality retailers and possibly a theater complex: 150,000 square feet.
- Flexible commercial space — commercial uses of office-flex space, lodging, educational settings and/or work-live potential on the ground floor and upper stories: 275,000 square feet.

Auburn Junction proposes village green promenades to the north and northeast connecting to Main Street and Auburn Regional Medical Center and a green trail extending southeast to Safeway and south and west to the Sound Transit station. It incorporates a central open space called Auburn Junction plaza and underground parking connecting each of the facilities. Landscaped islands could incorporate large boulders, a waterfall and reflecting pool. One possibility is cutting edge "living room theaters," combining a European-style café and lounge with a relaxing place to see films.

Auburn Junction would be built in four phases over a four-year period. Phase 1 would be under way by 2009 and finished in 2013.

City financial participation is expected to include full or partial city funding of the promenade, the plaza, public parking structures and other public use facilities.

#### STRATFORD COMPANY

Stratford Company is a Seattle-based, real estate investment and development firm with a focus on commercial, multi-family residential, senior housing, mixed-use and master plan developments.

Its projects include the City of Puyallup's 55,000-square-foot Pioneer Park Condominiums and Activity Center complex fronting on Pioneer Avenue and the northwest corner of the park.

Stratford proposes to begin work in 2008 on the apartments, which will spread out over two blocks of downtown Auburn.

Each building would feature the following key elements:

10,000-plus square feet of retail space on the ground floor; 4 floors of apartments with 80-100 units per building; 30 on-site parking spaces; and design flexibility that allows the rest of the blocks to be developed when the marketplace supports it.

Stratford's project would be developed in three phases: Phase 1 — develop the Marvel Grocery Store block in 2008, the Crites-Huff block in 2009, negotiate with the city for the acquisition of the Gambini block on South Division Street and try to acquire the Cavanaugh block from the trustee overseeing the bankruptcy proceedings.

Phase 2 — develop the Gambini block based on earnings from Phase 1 development, then begin design work on Phase 3, the Cavanaugh block.

Stratford's concluded that the market would not support a condominium project at this time, but the company could convert the apartments to condominiums when the market returns. The company said it does not require the city to make an investment to get the project off the ground immediately.