

A downtown urban village for Auburn?

City in talks to build \$260 million mixed-use center

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Redevelopment of downtown Auburn has gone in fits and starts the last eight years, but the city is now talking to a Seattle developer about a \$260 million project to revitalize four downtown blocks.

The Auburn City Council chose Alpert International to negotiate building Auburn Junction, an urban village of mixed retail, residential and public spaces. It would be located east of the Sounder rail station.

The city also considered a smaller mixed-use proposal from Seattle-Tacoma-based Stratford Co. The roughly \$40 million proposal was part of a larger version submitted two years ago.

“At this time the council felt the proposal from Alpert had more of Auburn in mind,” Auburn Mayor Pete Lewis said. “They seemed to have a vision for us.”

Pedestrian-friendly corridors would run from Main Street and the rail station into the project site. Up to five-story buildings – retail/restaurants on the first floor with condominiums and apartments above – would surround a central plaza that could support a large fountain.

Lewis said the city was attracted to the concept of two diagonal pedestrian corridors from A Street Southeast to the Auburn Junction Plaza at the center of the four-block site.

What the city doesn't want, he said, is an urban village that's walled off from Main Street and downtown Auburn.

The project could start as soon as next year and would proceed in four phases through 2013, according to the proposal. Underground parking would accommodate 2,380 cars.

The city owns about half of the four-block area. One entire block is owned by Project Ace, a proposed hotel-condominium project now in bankruptcy. The rest of the site is owned by Stratford.

Lewis said there is no guarantee the city will come to terms with Alpert on a public-private partnership, but Auburn brings land as well as control over downtown zoning to the bargaining table. The negotiations are scheduled to last 90 days.



COURTESY OF CITY OF AUBURN
Auburn Junction, a proposed mixed-use center, would include public space and room for retail.

Spencer Alpert said in an interview that his team's goal is to "provide a very green, sustainable, state-of-the art, world-class project."

He said he was encouraged by the chance to turn an area with little commercial business into a vibrant retail space. The proposed design of the buildings and the liberal use of brick will echo the city's railroad heritage, he added.

Alpert said his company looks forward to being part of Auburn's future for years to come.

Alpert International isn't new to South King County. The developer came in second to a Canadian firm to build a mixed-use urban village in Federal Way.

Lewis said the city also plans to stay in contact with Stratford Co.

George Webb, a principal investor with Stratford, said his city wants to work with the city and Alpert "and break ground. We all have the same common goal."

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