

Depot Market Square

A public/private partnership to create a community marketplace

March 9, 2004

Where we've been:

- Expansion of and creation of a permanent home for the Bellingham Farmer's Market has been the subject of a number of plans dating back to 1994. It is identified in the 1994 Railroad Avenue Action Plan, 1995 Farmers' Market Plan, and the 2002 City Center Master Plan.
- In an effort to move CCMP projects forward, staff had preliminary concept drawings prepared in 2002. Detailed design work did not move forward due to lack of funding.
- In 2003, the City received state funding from 2003 Legislature Capital Budget and additional funds were identified in the 2004 budget.
- Staff began moving forward with the project in January 2004. Staff quickly learned that the previous conceptual design did not meet the needs of the Farmer's Market nor the merchants on the 1100 block of Railroad.
- A group of private citizens, excited about the project, came forward with the recommendation of creating a public/private partnership to facilitate the project.
- The City has joined forces with the Depot Market Committee made up of Farmer's Market members, Railroad Ave businesses, and community members. The committee developed a conceptual plan that addresses both the needs of the Farmer's Market and merchants, but also reflects the goals and visions outlined in previous planning documents.
- The City and the Depot Market Committee submitted their work, a concept, merely a place to start, to the entire community on March 11 seeking its comment and participation.

Project Goals:

- Honor community history.
- Support and increase the vitality of downtown Bellingham.
- Create a visual terminus for Railroad Avenue.
- Provide a multi-use building and market square that provides a venue for many public activities.
- Create a permanent facility that will offer protection from the elements while maintaining the open air and festive quality that has defined the Farmers' Market experience.
- Maximize surface parking.

Project details to date:

- Located on Railroad Avenue (between Chestnut and E. Maple) right-of-way and adjacent city property.
- This site is the location of Bellingham's first railroad depot, an elaborate and charming turn-of-the-century structure remembered fondly in photos contained in the collections of the Whatcom Museum of History and Art.
- The grand glass-and-steel central community market building is reminiscent of the historic railroad building while providing contemporary function and amenities.
- The central building is surrounded by covered market stalls for use during weekend community events, doubling as covered parking during the business week.
- Builds on historic depot and Railroad Avenue themes using contemporary materials and meeting current needs:
 - Building and stalls designed for multi-purpose community uses.
 - City committed to minimizing impact on parking for area merchants.
- Conceptual drawings prepared by local architect John Stewart A.I.A., who has a distinguished record of landmark public buildings. The private project task force is expected to contract with him for on-going architectural services in support of the project.
- The public/private partnership will function much like the Fairhaven Village Green project, which was tremendously successful in developing support and community ownership, raising private funds to complement public funding, and completing an important community center.

Council Action to date:

- City Council adopted the City Center Master Plan (CCMP), August 2002. The South Railroad Parking Facility, including the Farmer's Market is listed as one of nine "opportunity sites" in CCMP.
 - The opportunity: "The Farmer's Market has good support from the community and offers a development opportunity that could create economic and aesthetic interest in this area of downtown."
 - The development concept: "The Farmer's Market should be formalized and made a permanent, integrated function on this and possibly adjacent sites. Its development can be incorporated into the redevelopment of the existing city owned parking lot.", page 10-17, CCMP.
- City Council established the following goal and performance objectives for 2003-2004. Budgetary decisions were based on these priorities. (Only listed the goal pertaining to this project.)

- Goal #2: Develop a vibrant downtown that includes a mix of residential, commercial, educational, retail, and cultural uses and amenities with connections between the downtown and waterfront areas.
 - Performance Objectives for the remainder of 2003: Determine and clarify the parameters of a Railroad Avenue redesign.
 - Performance Objectives for Calendar Year 2004: Initiate Railroad Avenue redesign and reconstruction.
 - Approved \$836,000 in REET funds in the 2004 budget
- City Council approved \$836,000 for this project in the 2004 budget.

Public funding already secured

\$450,000 State Capital Programs Grant (CTED grant)
 \$836,000 City of Bellingham Real Estate Excise Tax
 \$300,000 City of Bellingham Arterial Street Fund
 \$150,000 Wastewater Fund

Private fundraising and architectural services

- Private side of this partnership is envisioned by organizers as:
 - Creating an alliance of organizations and individuals recruited to conduct a major fundraising campaign – goal is to raise \$550,000.
 - Contributing architectural services for the project by contract with local architect John Stewart.

Preliminary project estimate

Not to exceed \$2.5 million

Design, construction and project management

City of Bellingham:

Mayor Mark Asmundson
 Tara Hardesty, Planning and Community Development Department
 Ravyn Whitewolf, Public Works Department

Design, construction, fundraising and community outreach

Depot Market Committee:

Brian Griffin, Community Member
 Rick Wright, Community Member
 Mike Finger, Bellingham Farmer's Market
 Jesse Williams, Bellingham Farmer's Market
 John Blethen, New Whatcom Interiors
 Ken Bothman, LaFiamma

Next steps: See attached timeline.