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Emporium vision includes plaza, parking structure, library

By Sean Dolan staff writer Jul 10, 2018



Dan Lofgren talks about ideas for developing the Emporium site during a meeting on Tuesday in Logan.

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Developer Dan Lofgren said he learned a lot over the course of a lively, 90-minute Emporium visioning meeting Tuesday night at Logan City Hall.

Through an interactive process of identifying and ranking priorities for the vacant, city-owned shopping center in the heart of downtown Logan, Lofgren, CEO of Salt Lake City-based development firm Cowboy Partners, learned that the people of Logan are interested in a plaza, a parking structure, a public library and mixed-use residential and commercial development.

“With respect to the specific uses, I’m still trying to catch my breath about how much consensus — how uniform that is, how focused that is,” Lofgren said.

The process Tuesday began when Lofgren opened up the microphone to members of the public — of which there were many in the crowded council chambers — to quickly state what type of use they would like to see at the site. Then, members of a “visioning committee” — including members of the Logan Library Board, Municipal Council, Planning Commission and Economic Development Committee — placed stickers on their favorite uses.

Out of 30 suggested uses, four clearly stood out as priorities. Lofgren said one of those four is essentially guaranteed: an above-ground parking structure.

“It’s just in-our-face obvious that a parking structure is going to be part of the configuration somehow,” Lofgren said. “We’ve got to figure that out.”

A lack of space isn’t one of the challenges. Logan owns the Emporium, both buildings on either side of it and essentially all of the parking lot on the interior of that block — about 130 parking stalls in all. He said the challenge will be fitting in a parking structure while maintaining walkability and the existing mid-block pathway going north-south.

A parking structure is a no-brainer, but the top-ranked priority was some sort of plaza or park. There are some challenges there, Lofgren said, as plazas don’t automatically make money. He said his team will have to figure out how to make that economically viable.

Libraries similarly don’t make money, but they do attract people and families. For about a year now, however, Logan officials have had a different location in mind for a new public library. Beginning last summer, the city worked with a team of architects from Portland, Oregon, and seemed to have agreed on building a new public library a few blocks to the south, at the blighted V1 gas station next to Logan High School.

Based on the discussion Tuesday, those plans may now be scrapped.

“My own bias is to include the library in all of this because the library is a perfect setting to create that plaza out front,” Lofgren said of the Emporium site. “It gives people a reason to come.”

Another popular element of the Emporium block seems to be mixed-use residential and commercial development. Lofgren said people living downtown is the key to attracting restaurants and retail. He said the combination of housing and a library would “activate” and “animate” the block.

“The most certain way to attract people is to have people,” Lofgren said.

Tuesday’s visioning meeting was only the first step in what will be at least a yearlong process. Mayor Holly Daines said she and Lofgren are planning on meeting with several other stakeholder groups in the coming months, and she hopes to have a project approved and ready to go by August 2019. Currently, there is no binding financial agreement between Logan and Cowboy Partners.

“It’s not going to be fast,” Daines said. “We will go through the steps. It will take time.”

Daines, now in her seventh month as the city’s executive, set the Emporium process in motion in March when the city issued a [request for qualifications](#), asking developers to send in their resumes. The city then interviewed three firms and landed on Lofgren’s Cowboy Partners.

Based on the large turnout and enthusiasm from Logan residents on Tuesday, Daines and Lofgren seem to have the community behind them.

“People are excited to see a project downtown and a development in center block,” Daines said. “I think there’s clearly community support.”

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