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DDA Taylor Park concept plans under way

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The Romeo Downtown Development Authority (DDA) is moving forward with design plans for a pedestrian park.

At its Dec. 17 meeting, the DDA board approved having Chairperson Robert Lipka sign a contract with Earth Environments to design a concept plan for a pedestrian park in an alley north of E. St. Clair on N. Main Street.

The plan calls for converting the alleyway between Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow and the BP gas station on N. Main Street from a one-way alleyway to a park.

Once finished, the concept plan would be submitted to the village Planning Commission for review. Should it recommend approval, the plans would go before the Village Council before the project could begin.

However, business owners have expressed worries that the change would be a loss of parking spots and potential business.

DDA Coordinator Janine Saputo said any insurance issues involved with contracting Earth Environments were resolved, allowing Lipka to sign the contract.

The idea originated when the DDA asked residents to come up with designs for converting the alleyway. Around 19 plans were submitted by professionals like Jason Arnott of Earth Environments as well as local students.

Two Romeo High School architect students, Manny Tapia and Maddinah Ahmed, were chosen to work with Arnott and to fuse their three plans into one, calling it "Taylor Park."

"It would draw people to that area to relax and shop in the stores nearby," said DDA Treasurer Carol Humphreys.

Arnott said the designs include installing a water fountain, electricity and even a possible space heater for the colder seasons. He suggested lines from three or four utility poles could be put underground to reduce clutter.

"You won't have the visual of it, so that's one of the things that we're thinking of," he said. "If you can start dropping them underground that would really clean things up."

Lipka pointed out the price of putting them underground would likely cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, but could coincide with another DDA project that calls for repaving Van Dyke.

"Now is the time to look at it and get rough estimates of costs," he said.

DDA member Bob Hart brought up speaking with Bill Parker, who owns properties next to the alley. Hart said they discussed an idea where benches would be installed, but the alley would still be accessible to vehicles.

"The discussion kind of went to a point where . . . there would be some way that vehicles could still get in and out for parking," he said. "But there are concerns on whether it should be closed."

Arnott confirmed this, saying if the spots are removed there would potentially be only four spots available for customers after counting tenants or employees.

If Main Street were to be repaved, he said, there could be extra angled parking in the front of the building.

"A lot of their clientele is a little older, so the distance to walk is a concern for the clients," Arnott said.

Dumpster locations were also a concern of the owners, he said. For instance, Parker would possibly give up parking to relocate his dumpsters.

"There are several things that come into that quadrant that you have to look at the same time," Arnott said.