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Big Changes Coming to Downtown Arlington

By Tim Ciesco | Saturday, May 10, 2014 | Updated 7:07 PM CDT



Tim Ciesco, NBC 5 Arlington Reporter

Big changes are coming to downtown Arlington. The city is moving forward with plans to completely redo Abram Street between Cooper Street and Collins Street.

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redo Abram Street between Cooper Street and Collins Street.

Downtown businesses and organizations said it's a game changer for them.

It has signs, a logo and even its own economic development group, but the people who live and work in downtown Arlington said most folks still have no clue Arlington has a downtown.

"Generally, the community said, 'Where is downtown Arlington?'" said Tony Rutigliano, president and CEO of the Downtown Arlington Management Corporation.

He said they've made a lot of progress in recent years. Events at the Levitt Pavilion now attract thousands to the downtown area and more restaurants have popped up along Abram Street. But he said more can be done.

"We still have a long way to go," said Rutigliano.

Now, it looks like they'll get the shot in the arm they're looking for.

The City of Arlington is moving forward with a multi-million dollar plan to reconstruct Abram Street between Cooper Street and Collins. They'll use \$4.9 million from the 2008 bond issue voters passed to pay for the project.

"Abram has to be the heart of our downtown redevelopment strategy," said Rutigliano.

Randy Ford, who owns J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill in downtown Arlington, said he's excited about the possibilities this project brings.

"People want to go to a place where they feel safe," said Ford. "They want to be able to get out of their cars and they want to walk around."

He and other downtown business owners said they'd like Abram to be less of a connector between Cooper and Highway 360 and more of a pedestrian friendly place where people want to live and explore. Specifically, they'd like to see fewer traffic lanes along Abram, wider sidewalks, more streetscaping and art.

"We really want to focus on making those things happen quicker," said Rutigliano. "Then helping us provide that urban pedestrian environment that many people are looking for today that doesn't really exist in Arlington."

The city is still in the planning stages of the project. The Downtown Arlington Management Corporation had artist renderings made showing their vision.

"We've got a good opportunity right now that we won't see again for probably 20 to 30 years," said Robert Johnson, who owns Pinnacle Corporation in Downtown Arlington. "And if we make good decisions, I think we'll speed up that redevelopment activity."

The city has scheduled a public meeting to gather input on what the project should look like. It will take place Tuesday, May 20 at the Arlington Convention Center from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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