

Officials: Changes to enliven Lynn

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item | Posted: Thursday, May 15, 2014 3:00 am

LYNN — Injecting downtown with more arts and cultural programs and reshuffling its parking and zoning requirements will bring more people into the city’s center, elected officials and business leaders say.

They are moving to make changes in the downtown area over the next several months, including repaving three downtown parking lots and scheduling a council hearing on zoning code adjustments that City Councilor at large Brendan Crighton said might attract a microbrewery or “brew pubs.”

Crighton has led discussions with councilors and business community members focused on finding ways to make it easier to open businesses in the central business district.

“We’re really trying to encourage people to walk around downtown,” Crighton said.

He wants to schedule a late June council hearing on downtown zoning and said the central business district could be a destination for “businesses priced out of Boston.”

Newly hired city Cultural Director Emily Ruddock said downtown can attract people from outside Lynn to attend arts and cultural events and spend money in downtown restaurants. She said someone attending an art event spends an average of \$24 on food or other expenses.

“We’re talking about folks from Boston and across Essex County coming downtown,” Ruddock said.

Longtime local art institutions Lynn Arts Inc. and Raw Art Works are located downtown, and Veterans Memorial Auditorium is the city’s primary concert hall.

Ruddock wants to find ways to attract families to weekend downtown activities just as “urban pioneers” living in downtown lofts and condominiums have been involved in weeknight arts and cultural events.

She also welcomes opportunities to coordinate downtown events with North Shore Community College’s Lynn campus.

“I see a lot of ways to get students involved,” she said.

City Off Street Parking Commission Chairman Taso Nikolakopoulos said downtown parking lot repaving and other improvements underway during the summer are part of the commission’s effort to ensure lot users pay for parking on a consistent basis in four downtown lots.

“Parking will not be free. We are spending money, we need to make money — hopefully it will go back into the downtown district,” Nikolakopoulos said.

Central Square resident and www.lynnhappens.com founder Seth Albaum said more parking is not the chief concern for downtown residents.

“They want improvements in how lots are managed,” he said.