

## Lynn looks to its center

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item | Posted: Wednesday, December 3, 2014 3:00 am

**LYNN** — Making the downtown area a vibrant focal point for the city means giving people a reason to go there, said planning team members who took a close look at the city's center.

“You have a restaurant and a bakery — how about an ice cream shop? It's one step at a time with a multi-year approach. Bringing people in is critical,” suggested Eastern Bank senior vice president Joseph Bator Tuesday.

Planning organizations MassDevelopment and Urban Land Institute Boston assembled a team that reviewed downtown development and toured downtown Tuesday with local officials before meeting last night in City Hall to present their conclusions.

“There are a terrific amount of good assets in downtown Lynn,” said team member and Boston architect Laurence Spang.

He pointed to Veterans Memorial Auditorium's full schedule of concerts as “something that is building energy” with up to 2,100 show-goers going to restaurants or bars. He offered a similar description of the emerging Central Square arts district.

“The more you can make Central Avenue an attractive, walker-friendly corridor, the more you link these two anchors and give downtown a sense of identity,” Spang said.

Drawing North Shore Community College students into downtown can help boost activity in the area. Spang urged city planners and elected officials to not overlook small downtown spaces as possible sites for cafes and small restaurants or even public areas where vendors can do business.

“There's ways without spending a lot of money to get people saying, ‘Oh, that's an interesting place to be on Friday or Saturday night,’” he said.

Bator said city planners need to find a way for people to walk to the city's waterfront past places where they can spend money.

Transit-oriented development specialist Francis DeCoste Jr. said one key to downtown revival is figuring out how to make young adults “move out of their parents' homes in Swampscott” and into downtown Lynn.

“Create a place where people want to go and spend money,” he said.

He also said limited seating in local restaurants can be offset by allowing food trucks to do business downtown. DeCoste urged city officials to not forget downtown improvement basics: keeping the area clean and well-policed.

Any upgraded security should include keeping downtown parking lots patrolled so that downtown visitors feel secure, he added.

That effort, Spang said, can begin with an effort as simple as keeping vehicles from overlapping sidewalks when they park.

MassDevelopment vice president Richard Henderson said Lynn saw success in new housing development in the last decade before investment ground to a halt. He said the city can get money to revitalize historic buildings.

“If you’re in a historic district, it’s so much easier to get tax credits which are a huge boon to development,” he said.

Economic Development and Industrial Corporation Executive Director James Cowdell said the planning team focused, in part, on ways the city can improve on work it has already done downtown, including \$3 million spent on reconstructing Munroe and Mount Vernon streets, and EDIC’s \$2 million artist live-work project in Central Square slated to be finished next May.

Henderson said the city can build on those investments by working “aggressively” with banks to increase investments in projects. He said developers will build market-rent projects if they are convinced downtown is a place where people want to live; in other words, if the area is clean and safe.

“Work with the MBTA to provide dedicated, long-term parking for residential parking then developers don’t have to build it on-site,” he said.

Attracting retailers to downtown means mustering detailed information on who lives and shops downtown, Henderson said.

“You can do that very proactively,” he said.

Zimman’s — a renowned fabric, furniture, lighting and accessories store — attracts non-Lynn residents to its rows of fabric swatches and other decor items. The city can build on its popularity by creating a “design district” around the Market Street store.

“Attract other businesses related to design,” Henderson said.

Bator said the study team will round off its work with a detailed written study slated to be completed in eight weeks.