

YCV: State of Downtown Fresno Address Includes Fulton Mall

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It's a formal banquet setting. But Mayor Ashley Swearengin got down to business with her annual "State of Downtown" Address.

Ashley Swearengin has had a focus on Downtown Fresno since she first took office. And tonight, she talked about what's going to happen in 2014.

CBS47's Lemor Abrams was there and has more on the address.

Parts of Downtown Fresno are shiny and new, like the Iron Bird Lofts and the retail stores mixed in. But the next phase of reviving Downtown...won't be cleaning up the empty store fronts and abandoned buildings...but rebuilding the historic Fulton Mall, by opening it up to city traffic.

"We've seen the ups and downs of the mall and right now we're very optimistic," said Raul De Alba of Jalisco Jewelers.

Raul De Alba...a 25-year business owner at Fulton Mall, is part of the plan to make the six-block mall a street.

"The best advertisement we can have is people being able to see us and be able to park right in front of our store," said De Alba.

De Alba made it out to Mayor Ashley Swearengin's annual State of Downtown banquet Tuesday.

The focus: pushing the Fulton Mall Corridor Project, before the council votes.

"It's not all we need to do in Downtown Fresno, it is not going to change everything overnight. But we know it is an important first step...bringing life...while still allowing traffic on the mall," said Mayor Swearengin.

There's already a sixteen million dollar federal grant in place for the project, but some business owners have raised questions.

Darren Johnson recently moved his bike shop from the Fulton Mall to the Iron Bird Lofts. The thought of construction drove him out. Yet, he still believes in Downtown Fresno.

"We do like to think of ourselves as being on the tip of the spear...leading edge of what's happening down here...and if we can be the first...we'll be in the position to be the best," said Darren Johnson of Fulton Cycle Works.

The Fresno City Council is expected to vote on the Fulton Mall Project in just a couple weeks.