

# Clovis plaza project planned for downtown

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Marc Benjamin

A downtown site where Clovis city officials once hoped that loft-style housing and businesses would be built may now become a plaza and downtown entry feature.

Clovis Centennial Plaza will feature a park-like setting built where the old state Department of Motor Vehicles used to be on Pollasky Avenue. Those with a longer memory can recall when the site was home to Clovis City Hall.

The plan goes to the Clovis Planning Commission Thursday night. It also must get City Council support.

After two failed attempts to build loft-style apartments with ground floor businesses, the city decided to strike out on its own, said Tina Sumner, the city's community and economic development director.

The 7,500-square-foot plaza will have a stage for plays and concerts, and cement pads on its two sides can be used for retailers, restaurants and possibly offices, Sumner said.

"This is a secondary space that will allow us to do some additional things without impacting the merchants who already have to deal with street closures" for special events, she said.

The two building pads measure 6,500 square feet and 4,000 square feet and are attracting developers' interest.

"We are open to what those might ultimately be," she said.

Bryan Araki, acting deputy city planner, said the buildings can each be built up to three stories.

The plaza is expected to cost the city about \$2 million that will come from bond revenues from a city pot created in 2008. Another \$1 million from the city fund will be used downtown for Americans with Disabilities Act improvements, landscaping and parking improvements, Sumner said.

The bond money came from the city's former redevelopment agency. The site was identified for a project before the state dissolved community redevelopment programs, Sumner said.

After the state Department of Motor Vehicles left the site in 2007, the building was razed. Now, it's a vacant lot used for the city's weekend farmer's market and overflow parking.

Carole Lester, Business Organization of Old Town executive director, said her organization is glad to see the property being developed as an entry feature with additional parking.

"The hope is that they are going to be able to sign a developer to build some restaurants and retail spaces to fill the surrounding areas," she said.

Three years ago, developer Darius Assemi of Granville Homes proposed a three-story, 35-unit project on the site, but Clovis City Council members rejected the plan. Assemi wanted the city to lower the \$645,000 price set by its appraiser to \$245,000.

He also wanted fees for the project reduced and said that without the concessions the project was not financially viable.

It was the second time Clovis tried to develop the land with loft-style apartments and ground-floor businesses. Developer Peter Herzog decided against building there in 2007.

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**If you go**

Clovis Planning Commission

6 p.m. Thursday

Clovis City Council chambers, City Hall, 1033 Fifth St.

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