

Auburn applying for state grants



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AUBURN — The Auburn Common Council voted Tuesday to apply for grants to study revitalizing the city's downtown and to improve sewers in north Auburn.

For the downtown study, the city will seek a \$50,000 state grant and would match it with at least \$5,600 of city money.

Goals of the study call for distinguishing Auburn as a tourist destination; improving the appearance and function of downtown; marketing and promoting downtown; looking at downtown organization; and supporting economic restructuring to retain businesses.

Jonathan Moss, president of the DeKalb Convention and Visitors Bureau, spoke in support of the study.

“We've got a great resource in the downtown area. It's in danger of becoming less than savory due to various reasons,” Moss told council members.

In order to apply for the grant, the council voted to declare downtown a blighted area “with a desire to eliminate the blight.”

The designated downtown area runs north and south from Fourth to Twelfth streets. Its east-west limits are Van Buren Street to Cedar Creek, not including some residential blocks or Messenger Corp.

Councilman Mike Walter voted against declaring downtown as blighted.

“The plain-English meaning of blight, I don't think fits downtown Auburn,” Walter said.

Mayor Norman Yoder said the downtown area is at least “distressed” and said the city needs to take proactive steps to help. He cited a growing vacancy rate in downtown buildings.

Auburn will apply for up to \$1 million for a sewer project on the city's north side, on both sides of Main Street between Van Buren Street and Cedar Creek.

The city plans to match any grant it receives with \$980,000 of its own funds.

Auburn would use the money to build new storm sewers, allowing the city to remove storm water from combined storm-sanitary sewers.

Existing sewers would become sanitary-only and would be lined to reduce inflow of storm water.

“We’d like to apply for some money to offset that cost,” Yoder said.

The city qualifies for sewer grants due to 2009 flooding, said Bill Spohn, director of Planning, Building and Development.

Auburn faces a court order to reduce the amount of combined sanitary-and-storm sewage entering Cedar Creek.

Receiving a grant for that project would keep sewer rate increases smaller.

“We are in a very competitive situation for these funds,” Spohn said about the sewer grant. He said it will help that Auburn’s share of the population with low-to-moderate incomes has increased to nearly 53 percent.

Also Tuesday, the council approved rezoning land on Wesley Road, east of Smith Farms Manor, to permit building a new Auburn Birthing Clinic LLC.

All of Tuesday’s actions will require second votes by the council at its meeting June 15 at 6 p.m. in City Hall.

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