

Nampa gets peek at urban renewal plan

By Dan Black

Idaho Press-Tribune, October 10, 2006

NAMPA — The Nampa City Council got its first peek Monday at a potential urban renewal district and how it could help fund major city projects during the next 24 years.

Heather Richards, the city special projects coordinator, presented the steps Nampa officials could go through to establish the district as part of a special council meeting.

A draft plan proposes Nampa use \$140 million in tax money from new industry and commercial property over 24 years to fund redevelopment projects including a new library downtown.

Richards said the district is about a quarter of the size of a previous urban renewal zone that dissolved a year ago. In a citywide referendum, 60 percent of Nampa voters opposed renewing urban renewal and it was allowed to expire at the end of its 10-year lifespan.

Mayor Tom Dale said there are specific purposes for urban renewal that have been on the city's agenda for years.

The report names the following goals:

- Build industrial infrastructure for North Nampa near the new Costco for \$4 million to attract new employers
- Build a public safety building downtown for \$17.5 million
- Make improvements on Nampa-Caldwell Boulevard for \$5 million
- Provide freeway interchange improvements for \$1 million

Other projects to be financed using public-private partnerships would include:

- Work on the Franklin Boulevard right-of-way, including sidewalks, curbs and gutters, for \$3 million
- Downtown development, including a new public library, \$30.9 million
- Improvements on Garrity Boulevard west of the current widening project

The issue deserves a close look this fall, said Jim Cooper, of Stainback Public/Private Real Estate, a consultant hired by the city to help discover ways it can accomplish its downtown redevelopment plan.

If a district is enacted this year, he said, the Nampa Development Corporation can capture a great deal of growth and will be more capable.

Dale said council members and the public can read the draft plan and it will be on the council's agenda on Monday.

The district's boundaries would include a swath of land near the new Treasure Valley Marketplace, which spurred several questions.

Richards said that there is not adequate water and sewer service to the area and it should be made ready so the city can recruit industrial employers there. That kind of investment couldn't be done without an urban renewal district, Nampa Finance Director Debbie Mammone said.

The district also takes in the commercial areas along Nampa-Caldwell Boulevard, which could be improved with lights, sidewalks, curbs, gutters and trees. Cooper said that his economic studies indicated that area could deteriorate after the Karcher Interchange opens unless the city invests in its appearance.

It also includes the downtown area and a stretch of Franklin Boulevard that has no sidewalks. Cooper said it is "an underutilized property," that can attract new business. The district includes Garrity Boulevard from

11th Street to the existing widening project.

Richards said the district includes no residential land and is one of several tools that can help Nampa redevelopment.

Councilman Bob Schmidt said he wants to study the draft, but had questions about why the boundary includes some areas that are not dilapidated, such as the area near the Treasure Valley Marketplace. Councilman Stephen Kren shared his concerns.

"I'm extremely worried about how aggressive the boundaries are," Kren said.

Richards said that the area, as a whole, has had little investment in the previous 5 years, which meets the criteria set out in state law for including it in the district. She said there is a list detailing why each of the areas could qualify in the district and she will adjust the draft to make it more understandable before the council meeting Monday.

Schmidt said he was also concerned that the projected revenue for the Nampa Development Corporation exceeds the projects' price tag.

Cooper said any time a bond is used to pay for projects, its cost, due to interest over a long period of time, will make the total cost much higher. Mammone agreed, but Schmidt still had questions.

Councilmember Lynda Clark also expressed concern and said, "We don't want to generate more money than we need."

Mammone said that the effect on the city budget would be small. She said that based on her projections of the tax money lost to an urban renewal district, city tax levies would still go down about 2 percent each year, because of growth in the area.

"With a total taxable value of nearly \$3 billion, you take \$140 million — it's a small enough piece of the pie to not make that much of a difference," Mammone said.

Without the district, levies will drop from 2 to 4 percent each year.

Dale said the state has tightened rules for urban renewal districts considerably in recent years and that some of the problems of the past cannot occur.

"Investment takes dollars," the mayor said. "This is one of the places we can look." The council needs to discuss any concerns, he added.

At the next council meeting, he said, "We'll ask the question, 'Shall we continue?'"

Nampa activists don't like plan

NAMPA — Two residents who actively campaigned against Nampa's previous urban renewal district aren't impressed with the draft for a new version presented Monday.

Patty Hautzinger said she's concerned an appointed board would shield public officials from accountability if the corporation makes bad decisions. She also said the life of the proposed district is too long, at 24 years, and provides too much money.

Cathy Klimes-Garcia agreed. She said urban renewal should only be used for small projects. She said money can corrupt those in charge and that tax revenue siphoned off for public projects will eventually cost taxpayers.

If taxable value from growth is left to pay for regular city services without being siphoned off to a renewal corporation, she said, then each taxpayer has a smaller burden.

The two urban-renewal critics said they will study the draft report before the next City Council meeting.

Urban renewal districts

An urban development corporation collects money from new taxable value added within the borders of its

district. That means property valuations in a district are frozen, and the tax collected from any new value is delegated to the redevelopment corporation. That corporation usually governed by appointees or elected officials, can spend the money on designated projects