

Downtown Beautification Committee members:

The Committee's long-term "Identified Projects" list includes such items as replacing the pavers, adding greenery, adding planters, and more, within the next three years. According to contractors we've consulted, these projects can easily be accomplished in less than a couple weeks, and this with no disruption to downtown businesses or to our visitors.

Therefore, there is no reason to extend these improvements out three years, when they can easily be accomplished in the near-term. Now that this committee has more information than was available to it during the first two meetings when the long-term status was assigned to these projects, we ask that this committee recommend to the council these deferred projects begin sooner. Create a near-term timetable, recommend a commitment of funds, and advise the council to initiate these projects this year.

I'd like to read to you a few of the comments from citizens concerning the Plaza. The reason I emailed them to you previously is so that you will get an idea of the overwhelming sentiment in our community: This Plaza is in need of some major first aid! The goal is to bring the Plaza back into the fold of our historic downtown district. Neil has some great Ideas, and so do many residents here. Mr. Kanner and his staff have also advanced some very creative suggestions.

Since my involvement in this issue beginning early last year, I've talked with hundreds of people here who have expressed concern and shock at the look of our new Plaza. Hear some of their comments:

Katherine Freeman ASHLAND, OR

- **I grew up in Ashland and recently moved back here. That was an historic plaza and important to the image of Ashland as a charming, cultured small town. The plaza did not need renovating and now looks like the cold, vacant plazas they put outside transit centers (i.e., Eugene, Oakland) It's an outrage really!**

Patricia Millen ASHLAND, OR

The Plaza may have needed some improvement but what was created is a dreary, bleak space. It is not fitting for the specialness of our town especially given the high quality art community present. Please admit you made a mistake and take action to restore our Plaza to a place of beauty that creates a welcoming, uplifting and special ambiance.

• Bev Collins ASHLAND, OR

I love my city, and have always been inspired and proud of it's aesthetic. I have lived here for over 35 years, owning property on High St. and now Valley View. The recent alterations to our lovely plaza are shocking... I know no one who likes it. That's rather telling.

It was not enough just to satisfy the perceived interests of one segment of the business community by creating a bare-bones looking Plaza design, just to discourage what one commissioner has termed the "vagrants" of our town. Doing so meant disenfranchising a larger segment of our long-term residents and a majority of our community. We don't want to foster a civil war over the Plaza in our community. Besides, it hasn't worked, the transients are still there due to the proximity to handouts. Our Plaza can still be made to look attractive, to fit in with the downtown historic district, and continue to retain its openness and it's usefulness.

What is needed is an overriding concept plan to harmonize and coordinate all the different ideas for the Plaza, into a cohesive whole; we need to seek a community consensus on these vital issues affecting everyone, so that the downtown Plaza really comes together in a unified way, so that it blends in and supports our historic downtown district. In the near and long term, both the interests of the business community and the majority of the folks in Ashland will benefit from fostering a beautiful Plaza for all to visit and enjoy.

David Sherr
Petitioners for Restoration of Our Plaza

The Downtown Beautification Committee's list of "long-term" projects for the Plaza appear to be easily accomplished in a short time, as estimated, below. Would someone on this committee please clarify for me why these projects have so quickly been assigned a "long-term" designation status by the committee extending out to 3 years? And this even before the scheduled meeting on future Plaza improvements? Why?

Downtown Beautification Committee's Long Term Projects per committee website:

Long term projects (could be completed over the next three years):

Plaza Projects:	Estimated time to install:
Free standing planters -	1 day to install
Moveable tables and chairs	1 hour
Replace pavers installation time, per contractor estimate. No disruption to businesses or pedestrians (per Pete Cislo).	10 days
Trellis over seat walls on Plaza	Three weeks
Add denser (pedestrian-unfriendly) plants to planting beds on Plaza	1 week or less

As the committee's thinking is refined over the coming weeks, I feel a more specific and immediate timeline needs to be developed for this Plaza's refurbishments.

These Plaza projects, above, appear to have been advocated without an overarching point of view, just as the copper top to the info booth is soon to be installed without an overall plan in place. I believe no Plaza refurbishments should be implemented without a Master Plan which addresses the concerns of 65% of Ashlanders recently polled. These plans should be published and made known to the public for comment before implementation. Randomly executing the identified projects above may leave us with a "window-dressing" hodgepodged effect for the Plaza, and a disjointed overall look that continues to fight the feeling and flow of our historic downtown. The end result will likely be more people dissatisfied with the Plaza. I realize Mr. Kanner and his staff are trying their best to salvage the Plaza which has displeased so many and for which they are responsible, but I think their approach so far is rather piecemeal.

I believe the city commissions and city staffers are hesitant to make innovative suggestions, for fear of stepping on someone's toes. That's unfortunate, but a common problem in bureaucracies. All the more need for outside intervention and objective guidance. The Plaza needs to be restored with conscious oversight of a designer with an architectural/historical background, so that it can be refined in keeping with its historic downtown backdrop. I urge the committee to consult such an individual.

The fountain at the Chamber can be restored for under \$20,000 per the plans that were submitted by David Sherr. This would free up an additional \$15k to \$20k in the proposed identified projects budget. The Plaza should take precedence over the Chamber's fountain, in my view.

Preserve Ashland's Historic Plaza

December 5, 2013

Excerpts from a "Guest Opinion" piece written by Historic Preservation Consultant George Kramer (Mail Tribune 11/28/12): "Cities have a choice to rush toward the mundane or to be creative and visionary where they can"..... **"the fact of the matter is that brand-new designs, smack dab in the midst of a historic downtown, no matter how well-conceived, have a strong tendency toward sterility.** Hardscape parks, by their very nature, can be especially sterile as concerns about durability and low maintenance tend to trump the very things that make a park space beloved." "The thing about preservation, particularly issues like this, is that most everyone thinks you're crazy when you bring them up. I'm used to that. When the doubting Thomases lose, and the preservation happens, it is rarely seen as a mistake."

George was speaking about the Greyhound arches in Medford and he is not affiliated with our Plaza efforts, but his words and sentiment are the same as ours.

The newly created modern Plaza in the midst of our downtown Plaza is not working. Everyone agrees the Plaza is a work of art in progress: But sometimes, an artist needs to scrape the paint off the canvas a bit and redo a portion of his work. So too, with our Plaza. I feel Neil Stewart's plan, presented would be perfect for the Plaza. It's very well thought out, it undos the cold, stilted feeling the Plaza now presents, and offers a warm, inviting and universally appealing Plaza that will welcome our visitors and residents. It's a superb refinish of the Plaza, fits our historic downtown very well. Hopefully this committee will realize the potential for improvement, and agree.

Sincerely,

David Sherr