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Dayton seeks downtown vision



By: **Cliff Hightower**
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DAYTON, Tenn. — The chairman of Main Street Dayton said last week an architect has been hired to create a vision for the city's downtown.

Randy Wells said Knoxville-based architect Ross Fowler was hired for \$44,525. He said Mr. Fowler already has started collecting photos of the downtown area to see how it looked at different times.

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Randy Wells - Download MP3

Mr. Fowler plans to hold two public meetings next month and to meet with business and building owners and civic leaders, Mr. Wells said.

"All ideas are accepted," Mr. Wells said. "There's already been some good ideas sent our way."

Mr. Fowler could not be reached for comment Friday.

The work is made possible through a state pilot program that designated a six-block area around the courthouse as a revitalization zone. Part of the sales tax generated from businesses in the zone is returned to the city annually for downtown restoration.

Mayor Bob Vincent said last week the town had drafted a master plan almost 20 years ago.

"Nobody seems to know where that plan's gone," he said.

The Dayton City Council voted last month to transfer more than \$94,000 to Main Street Dayton for public restrooms in Centennial Park and for landscaping and lighting repairs around the courthouse, Mr. Vincent said. The money also will help pay for the master plan, he said.

Many business owners said they like being asked for input and hope the plan starts a renaissance for the area.

"It would be cool if we could get together and get something going like Franklin or Winchester," said Barry Walker, owner of Pooh's Catering on Market Street. "There's so much potential. Just in the last 30 days we've had six or seven new businesses come in."

He said his own vision of downtown would be cobblestone streets with matching awnings and color-coordinated buildings.

Melissa Cleveland, owner of Artcrafters on Market Street, said she filled out an e-mail questionnaire last week and suggested outdoor art.

"It looks like something cool is in the air," she said.

Mr. Wells said all input will be collected and out of it a plan will emerge.

"We're looking forward to what people have to say," he said. "I'm curious as to what comes out of it."

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