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Plan for Douglas impresses city

BY BRENT D. WISTRUM
The Wichita Eagle

Wichita City Council members say they often hear from people who expect the city to fix their problems without playing much of a role in the solution themselves.

So when a group of property owners approached the city more than a year ago with plans to remake a 2.5-mile stretch of East Douglas and said they would do as much of the work as they could afford and knew how to do, council members were impressed.

That continued Tuesday as the council learned more details of the 10-year, \$10 million plan to add on-street bike paths, repair sidewalks, build medians, replace street lamps and bury overhead utility lines between Washington and Oliver.

Sue Schlapp, whose District 2

includes eastern portions of the project, said she loves to see public-private partnerships emerge with so many dedicated people willing to play a role.

"I think this works," she said. "What you've got is more than

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DOUGLAS

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buy-in. The group itself is doing a lot of the leading."

The council's endorsement was unofficial, and it's unclear whether it will support major spending.

But city planners and Design District members now have the go-ahead to finalize detailed planning guides and begin inquiring about funding options.

It's expected that as much as \$5.5 million — or 55 percent — will come from local taxpayer dollars.

The rest would likely come through federal grants and other public-private agreements.

Some business owners and residents have told Design District board members they would be willing to share in the costs, perhaps through special assessments because the improvements will directly benefit their businesses and property values.

The city will present the plan to district advisory boards in September.

The span of East Douglas the group aims to remake has a wide variety of busi-

nesses, including design firms, car dealers, musical instrument shops, bars and restaurants. The street is also home to a racially diverse group of rich, poor and middle-class residents.

Design District members' vision is to make it a more economically vibrant place that is sustainable and friendly for walkers and bicyclists.

And they want it to embrace the street's history by putting historical markers in spots — perhaps relating to the trolley that once ran along the street — and install replicas of the street lights that lit the area nearly a century ago.

"The vision that they have for the street is just incredible," said Lavonta Williams, whose district includes most of the project. "They might need to watch out. We might need them for some other projects."

Mayor Carl Brewer thanked several Douglas Design District board members for their work.

"You followed through and did a great job," he said. "Now let's get it complete."

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