



On mission to save historic Lebanon

by SAM HATCHER

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Leaders of a program being orchestrated to revitalize much of what they term “historic Lebanon,” made their first public presentation yesterday to members of the Lebanon Morning Rotary.

This is our first roll out” said Lebanon architect Mike Manous, who presented the program, explaining that it was the first public presentation of what has been in the making for over an extensive period of time. He cautioned that the Historic Lebanon Tomorrow (HLT) program should be considered an “initiative” because the word “initiative” signals that the progress of the program will be ongoing for several years.

Manous pointed out that a number of preservation programs are ongoing in several Middle Tennessee communities currently. “Success starts with the Square,” is a principle theme of the revitalization effort, according to the spokesman who said it is important to save and preserve historic buildings. He said the program, which is “all about economics,” will focus on the Public Square first, but will be designed to encompass much or all of Lebanon’s historically prominent areas.

Concerning the Square, Manous said one primary concern is adding parking and trying to relieve certain parking issues. He showed an illustration in which much of the parking around the Square was rearranged so as to tighten the circle around the Gen. Hatton monument and in doing so create more parking spaces closer to store fronts.

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He said the attention to the Square would also include improved lighting, landscaping and an effort to ensure that paint colors, awnings and the exterior appearances of buildings were historically appropriate.

Manous said the program will be sensitive to property owners realizing that they will have the final say on what they may do or what they will be willing to do through their participation in the preservation project. He said property owners will be extended an opportunity to apply for grants through HLT to help with the expense of certain revitalization projects.

He said the parking lot on the south side of the Square, generally recognized as the site on which the old Wilson County Courthouse once stood, could see a number of changes including landscaping, a special parking lane for a commuter trolley and other enhancements. Plans also include placing a clock, once housed in the old courthouse, in a special area on the site.

Manous stressed that the revitalization program is about building property values and making positive improvements on the economy. He said the program should be directed so that it encourages business development in the downtown area.

One idea he said the revitalization panel has reviewed is the farmer's market project on South Maple Street. He said it could become an important element with respect to attracting visitors to Lebanon and particularly to the downtown area. Besides a market for agriculture products, Manous suggested the area reserved for the market could also host an open air amphitheater and could provide other amenities to lure visitors.

He said the overall plan for the revitalization project steps beyond the Public Square and the immediate block or so surrounding the Square. "We hope to develop nodes" so different areas of the town can be placed together and identified as a unit or specific neighborhood. Manous said banners to be flown from utility poles along the street would be designed to identify these specific areas or neighborhoods.

He said funding for the project is going to be expensive. He said the revitalization group is currently working under the umbrella of the Lebanon/Wilson County Chamber of Commerce and working closely with the City of Lebanon and the City of Lebanon Beautification Commission.

Manous said the City of Lebanon had made a \$25,000 commitment this year to support the efforts of the group but said there will be an ongoing need for more revenue. He said one idea for the continuation of funding on an annual basis would be to go to individual companies and seek their support as a fund-raising mechanism to purchase street banners which would be flown in the area in which their particular company is located. The banners could feature a company logo and denote that the company was located in one of several particular historic sectors of the city.

The HLT program is registered as a nonprofit organization and is eligible to receive financial contributions that would be tax deductible. Because of this, Manous said there may also be an opportunity for the program to collect contributions from individuals or businesses. He told the Rotarians that once the program is initiated there will be an opportunity for the city to receive matching state and federal grants.

Similar revitalization programs are established and are ongoing in other Middle Tennessee communities. Manous said revitalization programs have been started in Franklin, Ashland City, McMinnville and Gallatin.

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