

7.0 THE COURTYARDS RECOMMENDATIONS

The various courtyards, unlike the streets and parks, are in private ownership. Development of these spaces as a secondary, through block pedestrian system, can offer potential for an integrated increase in commercial and residential floor space. This development could enrich both the quality of life and tax base of downtown. It should be noted that this initiative is beyond the direct control of the municipality.

Even with consolidated holdings and owners experienced in urban infill, there are a number of obstacles to approvals and financial viability to the redevelopment of these courtyards. Obstacles include the reluctance or disinterest of commercial lenders. Building and fire code issues contribute to lengthy and complicated approvals and their associated high costs. Additionally, once projects are completed, the taxes immediately reflect that increased value.

While the city cannot develop the courtyards, it could demonstrate their potential and facilitate and encourage redevelopment by the private sector. The potential system is identified in the Open Space and Inventory Analysis (Plan Two) and Open Space Master Plan (Plan Five). Further identification of ownership and study of market potential for redevelopment should be prepared. This could encourage property owners to consider business opportunities specific to their holdings. A proactive attitude between city staff, fire safety staff and proponents is needed in order to change the focus from protecting against liability, to one of facilitating responsible development. This change would add value to the approvals process by providing technical insight and expertise.

Information sessions and a resource kit of potential grants, funding sources and technical resources could be assembled to encourage initiatives. Additionally, a planning staff position could be created as a guide to brief proponents on the process and walk them through the approvals as a facilitator, rather than as a guardian role. Finally, tax relief, or deferment, could be considered to offset the investment expense, bearing in mind that development of the courtyards will improve the viability of the whole downtown and result in increased tax revenue.



The courtyards have potential to enrich the experience and tax base of downtown

7.1