

Project paves way for livelier 32nd St.

By Nicole Barrett

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The area of north 32nd Street in northeast Phoenix will see improvements over the next few years, including repaved roads, new sidewalks and bike lanes.

Officials hope the improvements will help in the community's effort to revitalize the neighborhood.

The area — between Arizona 51 on the south and Union Hills Drive on the north — is the focus of the 32nd Street Corridor Working Group, assembled by Vice Mayor Bill Gates and Councilman Jim Waring.

The group has met about a half-dozen times to discuss solutions to enhance the area, Gates said, adding that some of the meetings have attracted "50, 60, 70 people."

"My district is essentially all built out ... so it's about taking what we have already and getting creative," Gates said.

Decline linked to Arizona 51

The corridor has experienced a major decline since the installation of Arizona 51 beyond Shea Boulevard in 1999.

"Since I came on the council, the corridor has been a focus," Gates said. "After the freeway was built, a lot of people would simply jump on the 51 and drive elsewhere."

That traffic took northeast Phoenix residents to newer, trendier shopping spots like Kierland Commons and Desert Ridge Marketplace.

The result was from 19 to 20 percent vacancies along the 32nd Street corridor, and a drop in street traffic from 40,000 vehicles per day to between 15,000 to 18,000 vehicles, city officials said.

But Gates sees the vacant areas as opportunities for innovative and collaborative projects, and he said he wants to revitalize the proud history of the once-heavy retail area.

Gates represents Phoenix District 3, which is bordered by Bell Road, Northern Avenue, Interstate 17 and 64th Street.

Inspired by other areas

The non-profit Urban Land Institute, which specializes in researching land use and development issues, helped identify what projects — such as bike lanes or landscaping — or events they could develop to draw new businesses,



The 32nd Street Corridor Working Group, assembled by Vice Mayor Bill Gates and Councilman Jim Waring, has had several meetings to discuss reducing vacancies and enhancing the area. ROB SCHUMACHER/THE REPUBLIC

residents and shoppers to the area.

The city applied and received a grant from the Maricopa Association of Governments to repave and restripe the street, add sidewalk room for pedestrians and construct medians, Gates said. By eliminating one lane, the corridor will become a five-lane configuration, and the city will create two bicycle lanes on both sides of 32nd Street.

"Right now, there are no bike lanes on 32nd Street, and it's difficult," said John Barker, a landscape architect and consultant who helped design a logo for the group. "We've looked at doing some temporary cost-effective enhancements to beautify the area."

Officials are modeling the renovations after Melrose on Seventh Avenue and 16th Street and Bethany Home Road, Gates said. Both were once-vibrant urban retail areas that risked languishing in the 1990s, but were revitalized by amenities that made the centers more pedestrian- and bike-friendly.

"The folks in the area have been inspired by other areas of revitalization," Gates said. "They can sort of imagine their neighborhoods can have that."

The street project will take about two years to complete in addition to six months of construction, Barker said.

Ray Dovalina, assistant director of the Street Transportation Department, said the project will receive \$445,000,

but the city can't use the funds until fiscal 2016. However, Gates said the city could potentially begin work and use the grant money to pay the city back.

"We are trying to get a design plan started before the end of this calendar year," Dovalina said.

Gates said the city is working with the Parks Department to include public-art pieces with the project. And the group also has discussed utilizing the nearby preserve. One idea: create a major biking event.

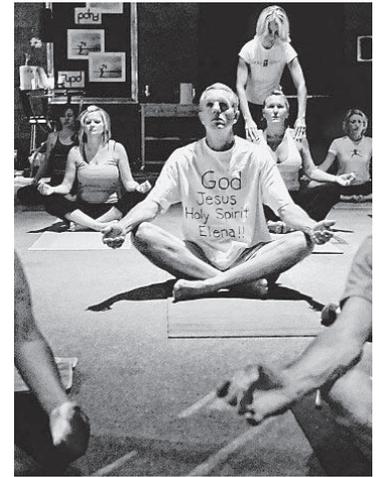
Attracting new business

Gates said the revitalization efforts already have attracted some youth- and family-oriented businesses.

"We've been working with the Mayor's Office to give the area a push forward, and we are encouraging businesses to work with each other," Gates said. "We've been very fortunate to attract some new entities."

A noteworthy partnership between Genesis Church and Alice Cooper's Solid Rock recently celebrated its one-year anniversary. What was once a vacant strip mall for two years, the Rock at 32nd Street is now a functional church and full-service community center.

Lead Pastor Pat Stark, 49, said he chose the North 32nd Street location because of the socio-economic diversity of



Holy Yoga takes place at the Rock, where the church and community center serve 32nd Street. MICHAEL CHOW/THE REPUBLIC

upper- and lower-income communities and room to grow. After existing as a "set up and tear down" church for 10 years, Stark was ready to open a church with a Monday-through-Saturday community center.

The collaboration began with a mutual friend who was both a member of the church and on the board of Alice Cooper's Solid Rock. The two organizations had similar visions and have since gained three new tenants in their building and seen a 20 percent growth in congregation.

"Because of our early partnerships, we've hopefully set the tone that there needs to be more collaboration for growth," Stark said.

In addition to the Rock, businesses such as the Original Breakfast House, at Thunderbird Road and 32nd Street, and Basis charter school have opened in the area.

Gates said the community has a big role in the project, which has three citizen-driven and community-led subcommittees.

"One of the best things about the project is great neighborhood involvement," Gates said. "People who grew up in this neighborhood are coming back to start their families."

Republic reporter Amy B Wang contributed to this article.