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# RON SMITH

**Lancaster City Council**

## CITY OFFICIALS KICK OFF EFFORTS FOR DOWNTOWN TRANSFORMATION PLAN

**Marrissa Belles**  
**Antelope Valley Press**  
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LANCASTER— Downtown Lancaster will be transformed into a premiere destination if the city's redesign plan succeeds.

Monday morning, city officials kicked off their efforts with a press conference highlighting an ambitious schedule for the coming year.

Al Zelinka of RBF Consulting said this year will offer "transparent, inclusive, meaningful process, driven by stakeholders and grounded in market research."

The firm will first take time to understand the area and then, through a series of community forums, the community will take part in the vision shaping process. At this time next year, a specific plan will be presented and implementation will begin.

"This is really a jumping off point in the renaissance of Lancaster Boulevard," Zelinka said. "There is an alignment of economic feasibility and downtown fabric that will really contribute to a specific plan."

City Manager Bob LaSala has long named downtown revitalization as one of the city's priorities and said the contract, combined with the effort of city staff, will cost the city "hundreds of thousands of dollars."

"This was approved by the council in July and will work in conjunction with other revitalization projects we have going on, including the North Downtown Transit Village Plan as well as the General Plan update," LaSala said. "We want it to become a place to visit, work, play and meet with friends."

The idea for transforming Lancaster Boulevard into more of a destination point first was initiated a few years back by Planning Commission Chairman Ron Smith.

"I believe we need a focal point, and that point should be Lancaster Boulevard," Smith

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### ***Continued***

said in April 2004. “I’d like to see downtown Lancaster be a destination point and not an afterthought or a shortcut.”

The commission is in the early stages of looking at form-based zoning codes that would include signage, benches, water fountains, landscaping, a bicycle path, walkways, reducing the boulevard to two lanes and possibly bringing back diagonal parking.

“We have a lot of excitement about downtown,” Smith said Monday. “The great thing about this is engaging the community and making this our hometown project.”

Councilman Ed Sileo, who remembers being excited about Smith’s initial proposal, said this plan is “a long time coming.”

“This is not just a façade, this is an involved process to engage the community in what they want their downtown to look like,” Sileo said. “From beginning to end, citizens will be involved.”

Zelinka said if the city weren’t interested in community-driven revitalization, RBF wouldn’t be interested in the project.

“Downtowns are our specialty and the firm has more than 20 years experience with them,” Zelinka said.

“The city has shown a real commitment to redesigning downtown with the participation of local businesses as well as Valley residents.”

This specific plan is not the only step the city has taken to revitalize Lancaster Boulevard. In the mid-1980s, some renovation took place, including updating business façades along the boulevard as well as the addition of new signage, streetscape, parking and landscaping.

The city also shed light on downtown when it approved the installation of new streetlights and the removal of overhead power lines.

“All around us we have some of the best assets in Lancaster, our theater, our library and a solid financial business presence,” Mayor Frank Roberts said.

“We need to help them attract a lively crowd of customers to the street.

“We need to transform Lancaster Boulevard into a destination that draws people.”

