

# Planner: Establish connections

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**LAFAYETTE** — A key challenge for downtown Lafayette is to expand on the redevelopment of its core in recent years and to improve the connections between downtown, the neighborhoods that surround it and the nearby campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

That was the assessment offered by consultants Tuesday at a meeting to set the stage for crafting a long-term plan to guide the area's growth and development in the coming years.

A major issue that needs to be addressed for downtown redevelopment is to open up the psychological and physical barriers that separate the area from the residential neighborhoods that surround it on all sides and the thousands of students next door at ULL, architect and planner Bernard Zyscovich said.

His Miami firm is helping to shape the long-range plan for downtown.

“There is a perception problem that these districts are remote from each other when they're actually next to each other,” Zyscovich said. “The barriers are a really big problem.”

The most obvious physical barriers are the heavily traveled four-lane roads that bound the downtown area on every side — Johnston Street, University Avenue, Congress Street and the Evangeline Thruway, Zyscovich said.

Another need is further residential developments in downtown to bring in the residents whose presence will attract further commercial activity, he said.

Zyscovich said a plus for downtown is that 39 percent of its residential population is young, from 20 to 34 years old, but most of downtown is inhabited by renters with low household income compared with the remainder of the city and parish.

And there has been little new residential development, according to an assessment from the consultants that found 90 percent of the housing stock is more than 50 years old.

Zyscovich applauded past initiatives that have revitalized the core of downtown and have brought a host of new restaurants, shops, performance spaces, parks and



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Advocate staff photo by BRYAN TUCK -- Naaser Sawaf, left, and Monte Balbesi walk along Jefferson Street in downtown Lafayette on Tuesday afternoon. Organizers of the Lafayette Comprehensive Plan held a downtown summit Tuesday night that allowed residents a chance to state their vision for the future.

museums.

“There is a lot that’s working,” Zyscovich said.

The challenge, he said, is expanding the renaissance beyond the core of downtown.

“How do we have spinoff that goes to the outer edges?” Zyscovich said.

And there is still more work to do within the core of downtown, where vacant plots still dot the street and parks are few, Zyscovich said.

He said 1 percent of the land in the downtown area is devoted to parks.

“That is a very, very small number,” Zyscovich said. “... Parks and schools become a major component in determining where someone wants to live.”

Figuring out how to address those issues for downtown is the subject of a series of forums planned over the coming months. No dates and locations have been set.

The development of the long-term plan for downtown is taking shape as part of an overall “comprehensive plan” for the future growth and development of Lafayette.

No specifics on the overall plan for Lafayette have been determined, but such plans generally address a wide range of issues, including how best to guide commercial and residential growth, where to build new roads and parks, and how to encourage economic development.

A series of forums for the overall plan is scheduled for Nov. 14-17.

The development of the plan is being overseen by the planning firm of Wallace, Roberts & Todd, which is working under a \$1.2 million contract with city-parish government.

For more information, visit <http://www.lafayettela.gov/comprehensiveplan>.

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