

Will Heart of Peoria group disband?

Commissioners suggest program's end in 2009 with no city funding

By John Sharp

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PEORIA —

At least two members of the Heart of Peoria Commission believe the time is near for the group to consider its end.

Commissioners Pat Sullivan and Henry Lawrence suggested at the end of Friday's commission meeting that the group should consider disbanding, something that had also been considered about a year ago.

"It seems to me this year that we have become more of an advocacy group rather than a commission trying to accomplish something," Lawrence said after the commission endorsed its 2009 work plan.

"Do we want to wrap up our business in 2009 and go out of business?"

Sullivan, a charter member of the commission when it was founded in January 2004, resigned from the commission following Friday's meeting. In his resignation letter to Mayor Jim Ardis and the City Council, Sullivan asked for the commission to be restructured as a committee since the group has lacked city funding.

The commission was instrumental in getting a new zoning code, the land development code, approved by the City Council last year for certain areas of the city's inner core.

But last year, Ardis suggested the commission become a private group, similar to Peoria City Beautiful.

Lawrence likened the commission's influence today as that of a neighborhood association.

He said if commissioners, in the future, want to push for something that appeals to the principles of New Urbanism - related to a development's function, architecture, density, pedestrian-friendliness and street setbacks - then the group can work as advocates and go before other commissions, such as the traffic or planning commissions.

Commissioner Joe Richey, however, said simply meeting as a regular advocacy group "will be difficult to do."

Despite the talk to disband, the commission did adopt a 2009 work plan that includes, among other things, a public relations outreach plan to meet with groups like Kiwanis and Rotary to discuss the city's land development code.

"We need to do some sort of community outreach," Commissioner Beth Akeson said. "We are struggling to have people know what (the code) is."

Also, the commission included in its work plan to continue assisting city departments in implementing the development code and support a future transportation charette process. The group is asking for \$25,000 to assist in the transportation work.

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