



THE MISSISSIPPI PRESS

Moss Point waterfront should be focus of design, planners say

Thursday, March 05, 2009

By **AMBER CRAIG**

MOSS POINT The future downtown area here should point toward the natural beauty of the waterfront, according to a group of professional architects and planners who visited for an urban design session this week.

The city hosted teams from the Regional Urban Design Center at Tulane University, the Mayors' Institute on City Design and the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio. The groups spent two days touring and designing before making a formal presentation Wednesday.

The presentation focused on the placement of a new civic center and city hall, while keeping open space in down town for people to take advantage of the riverfront.

The presentation noted that the city has lost a strong connection with the water, even though it is bordered by the Pascagoula and Escatawpa

rivers.

"We've got basically a city with a 'lost identity,'" said Grover Mouton, director of the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center.

The architects and planners proposed placing a civic center and city hall along McInnis Street and using the central fire station as a meeting room.

They warned against building a large facility in the middle of the downtown green space that would cut off access to the water.

"You would end up blocking that relationship," said Ginette Bone, professor of practice at Tulane University who teaches design studio.

The city has been approved for nearly \$12 million from the Mississippi Development Authority for downtown redevelopment, including a new fire station, river boardwalk and marina repairs, Main Street reconstruction and a new city hall.

The projects are expected to be completed by July 2010. In the meantime, the city will temporarily move city hall to the Bellview Shopping Center on Main Street.

The visiting group proposed adding a covered pavilion to one end of the boardwalk and a nature education center on another end. The education center could serve as an "anchor" to the civic center as well as the waterfront.

Mayor Xavier Bishop said the plan was "brilliant in its simplicity." The one-term mayor, who has announced that he will not seek re-

election this year, even joked that the presentation momentarily made him consider another term.

"For me, it's the perfect melding of common sense and logic," Bishop said.

The Mayors' Institute on City Design is a partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Architectural Foundation and the United States Conference of Mayors. The program holds six to eight urban design sessions for mayors annually.

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