

POST FALLS MOVES TOWARD FORMING RENEWAL DISTRICT

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Courtesy of the City of Post Falls The city of Post Falls has declared 548 acres in the central part of the city as “deteriorated,” the first step in forming an urban renewal district. A plan to make infrastructure improvements to spark economic development could be approved by the end of the year after public hearings.

POST FALLS — Post Falls is priming the pump on economic development for 548 acres in its downtown district.

The City Council has declared areas on both sides of Interstate 90 in the central part of the city "deteriorated," which is the first step in creating an urban renewal district.

"The primary reasons for this new district would be to assist with infrastructure to support and attract business in the city center area, which could include curbing, sidewalks, street work and lighting, parking and landscaping and assist with the development of the (Post Falls Landing) and Idaho Veneer sites," said Diane Fountain, Post Falls Urban Renewal Agency executive director.

Urban renewal is an economic development tool to create jobs and spur activity with infrastructure improvements. It allows a city to be competitive with other regions to attract business, and the burden is on the developers for the district to be successful.

Urban renewal districts created by a city and administered by a URA have a base tax rate when the district is

created. That base tax rate continues to be collected by the county and remitted to taxing entities over the life of the district.

As a district is improved, has new construction and increases in value due to improvements, the incremental tax created by those improvements in excess of the base tax goes to the URA to pay for public improvements made within the district.

In most cases, the tax increment received by the agency is used to reimburse proponents who have completed and paid for the improvements and dedicated them to the city prior to reimbursement.

With the proposed downtown district, the council accepted a report that states 151 of the 674 structures in the district showed signs of deterioration. A lack of sidewalks, unfinished streets and underdeveloped land was also cited.

The City Council could adopt the development plan for the district by the end of the year.

The Urban Land Institute of Idaho will deliver a presentation to the City Council, URA and Planning and Zoning Commission on Tuesday, Aug. 27, at 3 p.m. at the Post Falls Police Department's Community Room on the development of downtowns.

The proposed district would be an expansion of the City Center District that closed in 2018.

Fountain said several circumstances have occurred since that closure that make the area ripe for development. They include anticipated closure of Idaho Veneer, new interest in the Post Falls Landing site along the Spokane River, a new park area along the river, demand for bike and pedestrian connections, and a new apartment complex east of Idaho Veneer. Kootenai County Fire and Rescue's station on Idaho Street is also on a septic system.

"All these should spur interest and development to create a downtown in Post Falls," Fountain said.

Idaho Veneer and Plummer Forest Products use the BNSF Railway spur line in the proposed district, but those businesses are expected to give way to development in the future so acquiring railroad right of way for recreation opportunities is also envisioned, said Bob Seale, Post Falls' community development director.

"The hope would be to possibly purchase properties when the railroad no longer needs them," Seale said.

While Post Falls' future downtown has been somewhat slow to develop, flickers of new development in recent years have included the condos and marina in Post Falls Landing, City Hall and the chamber, DMV and several new businesses.

Seale responded to the question of whether the district would increase taxes for property owners. He said improvements would likely increase property values, but added, "(The city) only taxes on budgetary needs. We wouldn't necessarily go for additional revenue."

The city began discussing a new district in the city center in September 2017, but the proposal was tabled last

year when the 831-acre Post Falls Technology district in the Highway 41 corridor was created.

That district was Post Falls' first created since East Post Falls and West Seltice II were formed in 2005. It became Post Falls' fifth open district.

Post Falls has led the way statewide with closing districts, as three have been closed, including the 231-acre City Center District that was closed last August. With that early closure, excess increment totaling \$448,435.64 was rebated to the taxing districts.

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