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## Redevelopment panel hears preliminary plan for downtown educational village

By JULIANN VACHON  
 jvachon@beaufortgazette.com  
 843-706-8184  
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Beaufort Redevelopment Commission members heard a proposal Thursday on a higher education village downtown that would provide housing for 800 students, faculty and staff at the area's local university and technical college. The village could also provide space for area professionals.

The idea, presented by Higher Education Trust member and local developer Dick Stewart, proposes building an approximately \$13-million village on properties bounded by Bladen, Duke, Prince and Adventure streets and the Beaufort County-owned block near the site of the old county jail.

The idea is still in the preliminary stages. Where the money would come from, who would own and manage the village, and who would receive revenues from its operation remain unknown, Stewart said.

One of two federal loan programs could help jumpstart efforts if the interest is there, he said.

"We want to see this happen," Stewart said. "I don't know what the next steps would be. ... I'm here to ask you is this something the Redevelopment Commission is interested in."

The recently reorganized commission's 2010 work plan does include goals to promote student housing downtown, member Martin Goodman said.

"Whether this (proposal) is it, or this scale is appropriate, I don't know," Goodman said during the meeting.

The commission's economic development committee will discuss the idea and gather input from University of South Carolina Beaufort and Technical College of the Lowcountry officials on their needs and visions for the future, commission members said Thursday.

USCB Chancellor Jane Upshaw said as the university grows its budding studio arts program, it needs more energy -- and housing -- on campus, especially for freshmen.

"If we have students coming from afar ... parents will want them to be with us," Upshaw said.

The university would still need housing for upper classmen throughout the community, she added.

Thomas Leitzel, TCL president, said he likes the idea of an educational village that puts adults, students and professionals near one another in a community with flexible lease options.

"The commingling of that is so rich," Leitzel said.

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