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Consultants Offer Vision For Windsor Locks

By SHAWN R. BEALS | Courant Staff Writer

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WINDSOR LOCKS - — Two phrases sum up a consultant team's recommendations for revitalizing downtown and the Main Street area: "Bring it back downtown," and "Spruce it up."

About 30 residents Thursday heard those strategies and others to make the town center something residents can be proud of at a meeting at Windsor Locks High School.

Bringing it back downtown would mean moving the old Amtrak train station back into the center of town and making good use of the Montgomery Mill building, said Christopher Ferrero, owner of one of the consulting firms, Ferrero Hixon Associates.

Revitalizing and redeveloping the key area of Main Street between the I-91 interchange and Windsor Locks Common, he said, would be crucial to attracting new development. Utilizing the town's existing unique features as a stepping stone to new things would get more people to come to town.

"We have to reconnect Windsor Locks with their downtown and maybe bring a sense of pride," Ferrero said.

A developer has shown interest in converting the Montgomery Mill building into housing, potentially for up to 200 people, he said. All of these residents would be within walking distance of an ideally bustling but pedestrian-friendly town center.

Windsor Locks would be an ideal stop on a Springfield to New Haven commuter rail line that could be in place by 2011, he said. The rail line would get people into the town and make it an important transportation link with nearby Bradley International Airport.

Downtown needs sprucing up, he said. There are great views of the canal that are blocked by thick brush and natural growth, and deteriorating buildings like the train station, which is "crumbling apart as we speak."

Preserving the heritage of the town is another strategy presented by Ferrero, which he said the Ahlstrom Corporation is committed to, along with other town businesses.

"It was a Main Street that was worthy to say you could walk into a storefront and see your neighbor," said First Selectman Steve Wawruck of Main Street's glory days.

The consultants have already met with state Department of Transportation and state Department of Environmental Protection officials as well as local town groups and business owners in drafting preliminary visions for the town center.