

Vision for Journal Square unveiled

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A new vision for Journal Square, where people come from all over to shop, eat and find entertainment, was presented at the Loew's Jersey Theatre last week by a group of Princeton graduate students.

About 50 people, including local residents and business owners, gathered last Wednesday night for the presentation in the lobby of the theater, itself a focal point of the students' vision of the area. The proposals, aimed at creating a lively night life, more green space and a safer environment, were the fruits of an urban planning workshop at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

The workshop is designed to give students hands-on experience with urban planning. For the Journal Square project, the Jersey City Economic Development Corporation was a client, said Paul Buckhurst, the professor who taught the class.

"We believe the Loew's Theatre is a great asset that the city owns currently, and coupled with the community, and quality of life, our proposal can lead to an active daytime and night life for the city," said Fernando Cazares, one of the students who worked on the project.

The students suggested that in order to maximize the area's potential, the city should establish a formal board to run the Loew's that would include professional theater managers and close involvement by Friends of the Loew's.

While Friends has renovated much of the theater through volunteer work and by showing classic films that have attracted thousands of people, they lack the legal authority to schedule dates beyond two months or to conduct large-scale fundraising.

At its best, the Loew's could become a regional arts center and attract additional people, the students said.

Additional trees and plants, updated store facades and public



Journal photo by Bill Bayer

A VIEW OF Journal Square in Jersey City.

art would make Journal Square more attractive. More restaurants and retail options, public furniture and outdoor cafes would draw people to the area, before and after shows at the theater.

Kiosks and maps could highlight business, historical attractions and other destinations.

"Imagine if residents could make a day of it in Journal Square," said student Ralph Rosado.

The 45-minute presentation was followed by 30 minutes of questions, many of which reiterated the need for changes mentioned by the students. Others were skeptical that anything would change.

"I mean it's great," said area resident Delber Casco of the proposal, "But it's not going to happen if you don't start addressing basic needs." Clean streets and walkways should be the first priority, he said.

"In my opinion, there is no

(collective) future vision for Journal Square," said Wayne Anderson, who works for the Neighborhood Improvement District.

Until local businesses, residents and the city get together and hammer out a master plan, nothing will happen, he said.

"We are hoping that this will motivate everyone to put a lot of energy into the rehabilitation, marketing, and creating an environment where people can come and meet and make this a destination," said Roberta Farber, urban enterprise zone director of the Economic Development Commission.

Farber was the one who first brought together the students, Mayor Glenn D. Cunningham, city councilman Steve Lipski and community groups.

The students presented the proposals last month, but presented it again last week because they wanted to attract more business owners and residents by

scheduling the meeting in the evening.

After the students turn in a written report, the Economic Development Commission will determine if any of the suggestions are economically feasible, Farber said.

"I think it will help continue the discussion of what can be done by all of us to improve the square," said Don Smartt, district administrator of the Journal Square Restoration Corporation, which operates the Journal Square Special Improvement District.

Coordinating the various stakeholders in the area is one of the biggest challenges facing the revitalization effort, Smartt said.

"It's not as if we don't want to work together, we just have to find a way to do it," he said.

The students worked on the project knowing that Jersey City had not set aside funds to implement their suggestions. But they said they would be happy if their presentation spurred discussion.