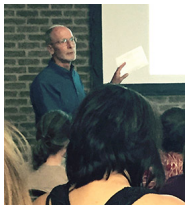

Breakout groups roll out ideas

There were less in attendance Aug. 22 at the Second Street Events Center for the main portion of the Revitalizing Downtown Community Workshop, but the enthusiasm level was just as high for the more than 50 participants. This was to be the culminating day for the ideas and plans of the workshop, after all, and Charlie Deans and his consulting team had done the preliminary work very well on Friday evening.

Deans followed up on Saturday with a one-hour slide show of inspirational ideas from other communities in the state and other areas, raising the hopes of many as he spoke. He discussed a variety of topics designed for this purpose: streets, placemaking, gateways, greenways, traffic calming, and wayfinding among others. Other topics included Arts and Cultural Districts, Heritage Tourism, the creative economy, historic preservation and the adoptive re-use of buildings.

Then it was time for a two-hour session of breakout groups with consultant team and committee members as facilitators leading each of the six groups. The main topic quickly turned to the large area just north of the BNSF Railroad tracks. That property was recently purchased by the City and the sale will become final on Sept. 20.

The groups each seemed to have one or two younger members – from high school or college, and were mixed in ethnic backgrounds, Native American, Hispanic and Anglo – and also had veterans of life or Gallup with similar ethnicity to serve as counterpoint in the discussions. A mix of ideas and concerns were printed out for later presentation to the group at large. Most groups filled two large (2’ x 3’) sheets of paper with their ideas.

One idea was the use of a Yei-Be-Chei on each side of Historic Route 66, and placed at both Y's. If you don't remember these giant statues – made of wood back in the early days – then you haven't lived here very long or you're just too young. The old ones were about 20-30 feet tall, painted yellow with Native American designs, and bore the legend at the bottom, "The Indian Capitol of the World." That moniker might have to be changed to be politically correct, but the idea is solid and sculptures – shorter in height – would be more permanent.

Interrupted only briefly by a fantastic lunch prepared and served by Jerry's Cafe, the groups worked diligently toward their presentations to the audience. It became evident after the first two of these that there were going to be many duplications, as the groups presented similar or identical concerns in some areas. But that only meant that some problems were more obvious than others. Some ideas could result in almost immediate changes while others were long-term and/or not immediately feasible or affordable, but all were spoken aloud to varying degrees of acceptance to all the participants.

The final part of this process will not happen until the first week in December, when the City Council adopts part or all of the finished draft.

In the meantime, Deans and his crew will have used the last week in August and the first three weeks of September to draft a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area Master Plan and an Arts & Cultural District Plan. The last two weeks of September will be used by the team for Implementation Strategies and Funding Sources and the first two weeks of October those plans will be reviewed by state agencies and revised in accordance with what the state desires.

Another Community Open House will be held in Gallup during the first week of November to explain why or why not some items are on the final draft. Then it will be up to our elected officials, who work for the voters. Only then will we see how serious they – and we – are about changing downtown's direction and reputation.

To contact Charlie Deans, email: charlie@communitybydesign.biz or call (520) 444-1267.