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Work to begin on next vision for downtown Fort Worth

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FORT WORTH – In January, hundreds of "visionaries" will begin the yearlong process of designing the fourth, 10-year master plan for downtown Fort Worth.

Downtown residents, business and property owners, civic and government leaders and representatives from surrounding neighborhoods will be asked to participate in so-called visioning sessions conducted by Downtown Fort Worth Inc.

The process has worked well in the past, so Andy Taft, president of Downtown Fort Worth Inc., a nonprofit advocacy group that oversees downtown, decided to continue it.

The past three plans are responsible for much of how downtown looks.

"The last strategic plans were very well-received," Taft said.

The first master plan went into action in 1982. The plan now being used will be completed at the end of 2012. The new plan will take effect in 2013.

Several committees will be established to address issues and explore ideas on housing, transportation, urban design, business development, retail, arts and entertainment, and education.

In the end, a strategic action plan with specific objectives on how to change and improve downtown and to guide growth will be put together. The city of Fort Worth and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority also participate.

"It will be a very wide outreach," Taft said. "I'm really curious what these folks will come up with."

Downtown Fort Worth Inc. will begin the process Dec. 1 at its quarterly luncheon.

Chris Leinberger, a professor and founding director of the Graduate Real Estate Development program at the University of Michigan, who is called one of the "Top 100 Urban Thinkers," will deliver the keynote address.

Leinberger, a founding partner of Arcadia Land Co., a New Urbanism/transit-oriented development firm, is expected to "underscore the thoughtfulness of planning," said Taft, who has heard him speak. "He's a bit of a futurist."

At the luncheon, Taft said he expects to announce the name of the person who will volunteer and be chairman of the planning efforts next year. He said the person will be a broad thinker, good at consensus building and someone who has a 360-degree perspective.

The group is also looking for a consultant to facilitate the process and put the end report together.

Many of the 2002 plan objectives were put into place, according to Downtown Fort Worth Inc., and others remain in progress.

Hyde Park at Ninth and Throckmorton streets, the redesign of Burnett Park off Seventh and Lamar streets, the new design of the bus passenger shelters, Molly the Trolley and parking improvements are examples of some completed projects.

"More cities than not go through elaborate planning," Taft said.

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