

All signs pointing to Atherton ‘Town Center’

So says Civic Center Advisory Committee, if the City Council agrees



An artist's rendering of the planned courtyard for the Atherton Town Center, looking from behind the administration building toward the library. At right is the only part of the old Civic Center that will be retained, the council chambers, which will become program space and a cafe. The fountain is to be planned to look like a sculpture during droughts, so water won't be needed. (WRNS Studio / SWA Group)

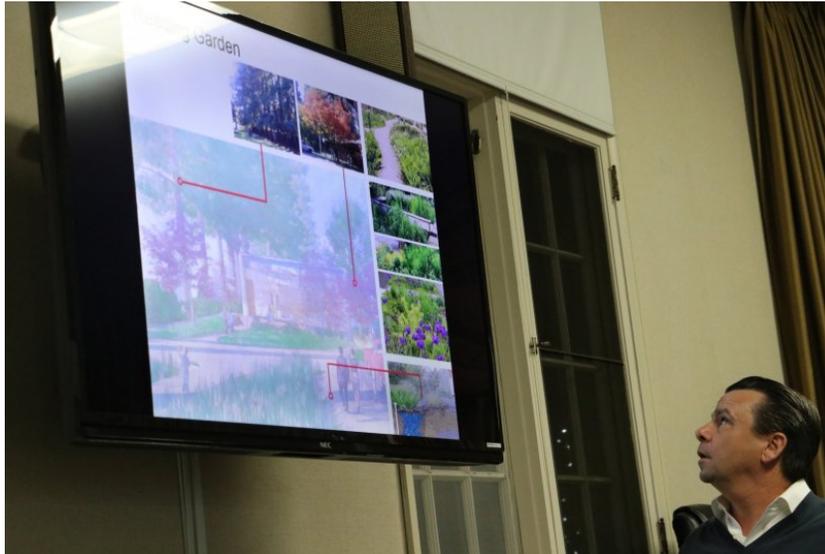
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When all is said and done, and the signs go up, it will be called Atherton Town Center, not Civic Center, if the Civic Center Advisory Committee has its way.

That was one of several issues considered at the Monday meeting of the panel in what will be called the “Historic Town Hall,” while the new building housing the administration offices, council chambers and police department will be called the “Town Hall.”

Signage was a big part of the discussion, which was about the landscaping of what will be a public courtyard and gardens. Where to put the rhododendrons was also an issue.



Ren Bihan of SWA Group explains landscaping options to the Atherton Civic Center Advisory Committee on Monday. (John Orr / Daily News)

After looking at several options for the main sign for the “Town Center,” which will be in front of the administration/police building, a fairly simple, steel-framed wooden sign received the most agreement. The sign might be made of wood milled from one of the trees that is scheduled to be removed in the remodeling of the current town complex.

It might carry the round Atherton logo, much like the one that hangs on the wall behind the city council dais.

The committee asked WRNS Studio, which is overseeing design of the project, and SWA Group, the landscape architects, to design sturdy pillars for the other access points to the area. Something like the intersection signs elsewhere in Atherton, but more attractive.

Public Works Director Steve Tyler was cited for telling the story of why Atherton needs something like concrete for such signs, instead of wood, like the original sign pillars used in the town in the 1920s and 1930s.

It all has to do with “The Big Game,” the annual meeting between Stanford and Cal on the football field, Tyler explained on Wednesday.

“At one time, right around when the town incorporated in 1923, all the sign pillars were made of wood,” he said. “But in the early ’30s, there was a big theft of them, and the town had to replace them. It turned out the theft of the pillars coincided with the Big Game, the Stanford-Cal game.

“They were just the right size to build a bonfire. Get 15 of them, stack them up, light a match, and it’s ‘Boola Boola.’”

The placement of flags also drew some discussion. One flag, or three? U.S., state and Atherton, or just the U.S. flag? In front of main building, or in the courtyard?

After some discussion, the panel agreed to recommend placing two flag poles in the complex, one in front of the administration building and one in the courtyard, both carrying the U.S. flag only.

The committee is to hear back from WRNS and SWA at its Feb. 6 meeting, which Chairman Steve Dostart said he hoped would wrap up the panel’s work.

After that, a report will be made to the city council, which will get to add its own tweaks and changes as needed.

Fundraising remains behind schedule. After the meeting, committee member Didi Fisher said that the Atherton Now fundraising committee, which she co-chairs, had not fulfilled the \$1 million matching grant it was promised. “We will have to ask for an extension for that,” said Fisher, who said she is hopeful the grant will be fulfilled.



Atherton Civic Center Advisory Committee members Elizabeth Lewis, Steve Dostart, Didi Fisher and Clive Merredew, from left, listen to a presentation on landscaping at a meeting on Monday in the city council chambers. (John Orr / Daily News)

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John Orr John Orr edits and writes for Daily News feature pages, including arts and entertainment. He also reports on the Town of Atherton and some other cities. Previously, he was mysteries and thrillers books columnist for the Mercury News, and also wrote about movies and blues music.

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