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Glendale renovating key downtown alleyway

*by **Derek Quizon** - Feb. 10, 2010 08:37 AM*
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Glendale will begin a $429,000 beautification project this year to make downtown more accessible to pedestrians.

The project, funded entirely by federal stimulus money, will turn an alleyway just east of 58th and Glendale avenues into a brick-paved, lighted walkway leading to the Civic Center.

Glendale Transportation Director Jamsheed Mehta said the walkway is part of a larger plan to make the historic downtown more of a tourist attraction by becoming more pedestrian-friendly.

"It's all about creating an environment so you can draw people and keep them in downtown longer," he said. "We're trying to create a more dynamic, active environment."

Businesses likely to be affected by the project include A Mad Hatter's Antiques and Collectibles shop and Bitz-ee Mama's Mexican restaurant .

Ray Ralls , owner of A Mad Hatter's, said he favors the plan because it could attract new businesses.

Ralls said he sees the potential for the alleyway to become a busy pedestrian walkway. Entrepreneurs and business owners could open up shops on either side of the walkway, sometimes by renting space from existing property owners, making it a focal point of downtown, he said.

"If we ever decided to divide the building, we could actually create alleyway shops," Ralls said. "When they improve the alleyway, it makes it possible for us to improve (the area) by adding more shops to downtown Glendale."

Lisa Dowd , who owns a coffee shop in the area, said the alleyway in its current condition is not conducive to attracting business owners or customers. Dowd's shop, A Shot of Java, faces the alleyway rather than the street, which means customers have to walk down the alleyway in order to get to it.

"It looks dangerous, it's not well-lit and it doesn't look like there's anything down there," Dowd said.

She added that city officials have promised to improve the area since she opened her business but have not acted on it until this year.

"For four years, they've been talking about doing this," Dowd said. "They should have done it years ago."

Mehta said the project was planned about

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five years ago but that the city had trouble getting it off the ground because of construction costs.

"It was bounced around as a plan, but there was no construction (money) available at the time," Mehta said.

Construction on the project is scheduled to begin in mid-February and last until May.

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