

Mayor Mingus shares optimistic outlook for 2010

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By Jeanette Kendall
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East Peoria, Ill. -

Even though he does not have a crystal ball, East Peoria Mayor Dave Mingus does have some predictions for 2010.

“We’re going to continue a high quality of life for our residents,” Mingus said. Public services, such as police, fire and public works, will remain status quo despite any budget issues, he said.

However, Mingus acknowledged that the city council will have a laborious task establishing the 2011 budget.

Despite economic hard times, Mingus said the city has maintained enough revenue to be in good financial condition, thanks to investing and good development.

It will be in even better financial condition if city leaders receive the \$26 million awarded as part of President Barack Obama’s stimulus package.

These funds will help pay for infrastructure on the Downtown 2010 project, the biggest project on the docket.

Mingus said he has received favorable indication from legislators that the \$26 million will arrive in the spring.

Then, citizens should see infrastructure and structures erected by summer. The first building that is planned for the new downtown site is the Fondulac District Library.

A referendum was passed by voters in April to support the construction of an \$8-million, 32,000-square-foot library, which will share a common atrium with a new city hall.

“We will probably begin construction on the atrium to complement the library, but wait for city hall,” Mingus said, adding they have not made any firm decisions.

The overall project is shovel-ready and homework has been done with engineers and governmental agencies, Mingus said, adding when funds are received, the project will be bid.

On Jan. 5, the city council approved an architectural services agreement with PCM+d architects for the civic complex at the downtown site.

The complex would be situated on a triangular parcel bound by Old West Washington Street, new West Washington Street and the Edmund Street extension.

The civic complex would house the new library with public parking, the outdoor civic plaza, a common area atrium with restrooms and entrances to the library and city hall, and a shared meeting space.

Since funding is not yet secured for the new city hall, space will be set aside for that building. Space will also be set aside for the Caterpillar Heritage Museum and restaurant.

But before any buildings take shape, roads need to be constructed. Mingus said this will help people visualize what the area will look like.

“When people see roads and parking lots, some of these potential projects will come,” he said.

“Prior to that, you have to have a pretty good imagination.”

City officials are in talks with AmerenCILCO about getting the necessary power to the site for high-end use.

“That will attract businesses to the site. We have constant interest,” Mingus said.

In September, city leaders, along with master developer, Cullinan Properties Ltd., conducted a “Moving Dirt, Making History” event at the site. Area legislators spoke at the event.

“I think the moving-dirt event let legislators know we are for real,” Mingus said. “This is something our region wants and needs for economic recovery.”

To entice businesses to locate at the Downtown 2010 site, the area is in a Tax Increment Financing district; however, Mingus said they will be very prudent on what they bring to the site.

Once economic development is secure, Mingus said it will help offset the cost of the new city hall. “2010 should shoulder itself, not the taxpayers,” he said.

Currently, a development committee meets every Wednesday at city hall to discuss the project. Mingus said they are discussing landscaping to ensure the project is as green as possible. Community input will be sought as the project moves forward, Mingus said.

While Mingus is optimistic, he said if the funding does not come through, the project will take much longer.

“If that funding comes forth, we’re going to be a center for employment,” he said. “This will be a real draw. We’ll put a lot of people to work.”

Although Mingus cited the 2010 project as the most significant thing this year, he said the day-to-day operations of the city are no less important.

“I find personal satisfaction of our residents getting up every day and being able to enjoy a quality of life, to be safe, to have quality water. 2010 is icing on the cake,” he said.

“I really want people to feel good about East Peoria,” Mingus added.

Overall, Mingus' prediction for 2010 is favorable.

"The feel is optimistic with the realization there may be a few bumps in the road, but it's not insurmountable," he said.