

# Architect unveils downtown plans

By Chris Handal, August 23, 1988

Forty Rock Hill citizens saw Landscape Architect Duane Christopher's dreams for the downtown area Thursday afternoon.

These dreams include a special arts/historic district for the core of the city, taking the roof off Town Center Mall, creating a system of trails, a doorway to downtown and an elevated pedestrian plaza.

Christopher made his presentation to interested citizens and members of the Garden City Theme Group of the Central Rock Hill Plan, called Empowering the Vision.

Christopher, who opened a Landscape Architecture firm in Rock Hill in 1981, presented his plans in two parts.

The first part dealt with a system of trails linking Cherry Park to the Winthrop Farm and eventually TechPark. Trails also could connect to Glencairn Garden. The common theme, Christopher said, is that the trail would end downtown.

In all, the city could have eventually 30 miles of trails including a pedestrian overpass linking Charlotte and Oakland Avenues, said Christopher, who has designed more than 250 projects including subdivisions and commercial and industrial projects.

One of the key's to Christopher's trail system is burying many of the overhead electric lines around town, an expensive and time consuming process.

The second part of his presentation concerned the downtown area and ways to revitalize it.

"We're not going to bring business and commercial activity out of the blue," he said.

By making the downtown and arts/history district and removing the roof of the mall, the city's distinctive architecture can be uncovered, Christopher said.

A focus on arts-related activities could bring people downtown, which in turn would generate more business, he said.

The city also could remove the SCN building and create a doorway to downtown in the form of a plaza or square, he said.

"We have gateways," Christopher said referring to the city's plans for a gateway at the intersection of Dave Lyle Boulevard and Quantz Street, "but we don't have a doorway."

Christopher also recommended connecting the Post Office, Law Enforcement Center and City Hall with trees and trails.

The massive plan would have to be supported by a public and private effort, he said. Christopher didn't have a price tag, but he has said that the work could be accomplished in five to 10 years.

"I think it's outstanding plan," Rock Hill Planning Commission Chairman Bob Mallaney. "I think it's going to take a lot of coordination; .and not just between the Empowering the Vision group."

Winthrop College professor Richard Houk said these are the kinds of ideas the Empowering the Vision process needs.

"We need more vision. You've given something that is very graphic," Houk said. "Most of the time it's the city telling us how things could be developed."

Downtown merchant Jim Bazemore, owner of the Central Newsstand Bookstore, called the plan interesting, but cautioned that removing the roof from the Town center Mall in itself would not solve the area's problems.

"People forget the bad shape and blight that was here 20 years ago," he said. "I think the presentation had a lot of good points."