


TIMESNEWS

Railroad lease helps Fort Mill downtown project

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By Jonathan Allen
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Appearances matter.

Fort Mill recently signed a \$700 per year lease with Norfolk Southern on up to three acres straddling North White Street from Spratt Street to Massey Street. Securing the lease was a major hurdle in a downtown beautification project.

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The property includes the former home of Fort Mill

Hardware and the other long vacant white cinderblock building next to the railroad track, a small warehouse building across the street and the hill side next to it.

"We plan to tear down the buildings and make it green space," Town Manager David Hudspeth said.

With new landscaping, the hillside and the soon to be open land adjacent to the tracks will become a gateway to downtown coming from Spratt Street. Fort Mill is working with a company called LandDesign on the landscaping plans, Hudspeth said. Lighting and sidewalks are included in the preliminary discussions.

"We hope it will be a place people will want to go," Hudspeth said. "We're going to make it into a passive park."


Ideally, the property would be redeveloped as commercial space, but a lack of parking and the fact that Norfolk Southern will only sign off on the lease on a month-to-month basis means that prospect is impractical, Hudspeth said.

"No one is going to make an investment with only a month-to-month assurance," he said.


The park plan is not without costs, though. In addition to the landscaping work, the town has to first hire a contractor to demolish the buildings currently on the property. That work is complicated by the fact that the two buildings adjacent to the railroad tracks have asbestos roofing. Hudspeth said he planned to request bids for the work this week and give contractors one to two weeks to submit proposals. Additionally, Norfolk Southern will have to approve the contractor before demolition can begin. The town council will also have to vote on the contractor.

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