

Residents have high hopes for Live-Work-Create district in Garden City

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Irene Deely, owner of Woman of Steel Gallery, bought her building on Chinden Boulevard about five years ago with the vision of creating a studio and local hangout in an artist community.

She believed if she put her heart into it, she would attract like-minded people to Garden City.

Thursday night, 75 people mingled at an open house there, asking questions and expressing their views about a Live-Work-Create zoning district proposed for the city's east end, known as Old Town.

The overlay zone would be an option for property owners who want to remodel or develop property in the area bounded by 37th Street on the west, the Boise River on the north, and the city limits to the east and south. It would allow commercial and residential uses on the same lot.

City officials hope the zoning provisions will attract artisans, bring in small-scale manufacturers and support start-up businesses.

Residents at the open house said they want to see the city become a place where people get out of their cars and walk around. "I think this is terrific, and I think it will put a lot of life in Garden City," resident Rita Fell said.

"It's kind of a way of slowing down the use of the automobile," Ed Fell said. "It brings the community back together, rather than everyone living and working in a different place."

Rod McDowell opened his business within the boundaries of the proposed district in 1989 and moved to Garden City in 1996.

"I've always told everybody Garden City is a diamond in the rough, and that's why I'm here," McDowell said. "I'm so excited about the potential for Garden City, I can hardly sleep at night."

He started his business, West Pac Equipment Co., in his home in Southeast Boise and knows first-hand why it makes financial sense. "It's not necessary to pay \$500 rent and \$700 for a space," McDowell said.

The company has grown to the point that he isn't considering using the zone to add living space to his property. "If I had the right type of business, or if I was starting out — yes," he said.

Efforts to create the new zoning district grew out of the city's comprehensive plan, drafted by citizens and adopted last year.

The plan calls for directing future development in Old Town through form and design, not separation of uses. "We don't want to be all bound up by a one-shoe-fits-all approach, particularly in the original Old Town area," Mayor John Evans said.