

Nevada's oldest town strives to keep its roots as it changes

By Anne Knowles

The more things change, the more Genoa wants to stay the same.



That's the idea, so to speak, behind Destination Genoa, the project to update Nevada's first town while maintaining its historic integrity and appeal.

The project is a key piece of Douglas County's economic vitality plan, the county's nearly 2-year-old, 12-pronged strategy to jumpstart its economy.

"We refer to Genoa as the glue or the hub," said Dave Whitgob, chair of the Genoa Town Board and designated "champion" of Destination Genoa. "We have committed to make a collaborative effort to draw attention to South Lake Tahoe, Minden and Gardnerville as well."

Whitgob heads up the Destination Genoa team, which he has affectionately dubbed the "posse," that includes Randy Falcke, Chad Coons, Dan Aynesworth, Genoa Town Manager Sheryl Gonzales and Lisa Granahan, Douglas County economic vitality manager.

The project is being funded with more than \$1.5 million from Douglas County's Redevelopment Agency as well as money from the town and private donations. It consists of several pieces, some of which, like the 1.3-mile trail between David Walley's Hot Springs Resort and the center of town, should be done by year end. The biggest piece – the downtown improvement project

– is nearing design completion and is slated to break ground this summer with a ribbon cutting in spring 2013.

The goal is to bring to town more businesses and more tourists. At an update on the economic vitality plan last month, Aynesworth said the town has recently added seven businesses, including three restaurants, a 46 percent spike, while room nights recently went up 6 percent.

Destination Genoa takes elements from previous plans, such as the 10-year-old Genoa Main Street Master Plan, that for one reason or another never got off the ground.

“The difference is all the work Sheryl (Gonzales) did to coordinate public outreach,” said Whitgob, which got nearly everyone in town on board this time.

That outreach included two public meetings with public comment as well several meetings with the historical commission and ongoing dialog with the town’s businesses. Last fall about two dozen people showed up to take a walking tour outlining the plans.

The downtown improvement project is being designed by Sandra Wendel & Associates, a landscape architect in Gardnerville, and Resource Concepts Inc., a civil engineering firm with offices in Carson City and Zephyr Cove. Gonzales said the design would be completed within weeks, then permits would be applied for and the various pieces would go out to bid, with the goal of breaking ground sometime this summer. This is an artist rendering of what may occur.

The downtown face lift includes new streetlights, walkway, signage and parking.

Six to 10 reproduction streetlights will join a handful of existing historic lights downtown. The lights have to be custom made, despite availability of some old ones, to comply with Nevada Department of Transportation’s “dark skies” rules

which require that the lights do not reflect back into the sky, obscuring views of the night sky and stars.

A new, 4- to 6-foot cobblestone walkway will begin at the southern end of town and run to at least Candy Dance Lane, Gonzales said. The walkway will meld with the 8- to 10-foot Walley's Trail made of asphalt.

Landscaping using all native plants, signage and some seating will be placed on Mill and Nixon streets to create corners.

"The southeast corner of Main Street and Genoa Lane with the island with the utility and light will go away and that will become a four-way intersection," Gonzales said.

A non-asphalt parking lot will be added at the north end of town, where the county owns the right-of-way, as well additional designated parking will be created by finishing off the rough edges of Nixon, Mill and Carson streets.

In addition, at least three informational kiosks will be placed around town to help guide visitors to local businesses and sites.

The town has spent \$20,000 and is working with Nevada Energy and affected businesses to take down four electrical poles and run the utilities underground.

The Walley's trail, made possible with easements granted by Walley's, should be open by Candy Dance, the town's signature event every September, which brings in the bulk of the revenue that funds the town's annual budget.

A separate project by The Nature Conservancy will double the length of that trail, extending it to the conservancy's Whit Hall Interpretive Center on Genoa Lane. In May, the Carson Valley Trails Association expects to open 16 miles of trails called the Genoa Trail System, including the Discovery Trail and the Sierra Canyon Trail, a 9.6 mile trail that connects to

the Tahoe Rim Trail.

Private entities are working on other Destination Genoa pieces. The nonprofit that manages the town's cemetery is working on a beautification project being funded by Sparks casino owner John Ascuaga. And a new town sign made of a covered wagon is being paid for by the Greater Genoa Business Association with the cover being made and donated by North Sails, the Minden-based sail manufacturer. The sign should be installed just off Highway 395 by the town's third annual Cowboy Poetry & Music Festival in April.