

Who needs a downtown? Lacey has many centers

**Christian Hill,
Lacey Today**

By the time Lacey's 50th birthday rolls around, the question of where Lacey's downtown is might very well have passed into history.

Mayor Virgil Clarkson thinks that question has already been answered: The city never has and never will have a downtown in the classic sense of the word.

Downtowns cropped up in the early 20th century as U.S. society urbanized from its agricultural roots. Homes and jobs were created in a dense area linked by public transportation, the mayor explained.

Residents largely abandoned their downtowns in many communities after World War II as they could afford new homes away from the cities in the developing suburbs, he said.

Clarkson said he has visited many different U.S. cities and in all of his discussions about those cities' downtowns, the officials bring up a project to reinvigorate the area or lament its demise.

"We can do without," he said.

"We can skip over that phase and move on to something else."

Gateway

"Something else" in this case is Lacey Gateway, a 400-acre mixed-use development where residents and visitors can work, shop and play. The anchor store will be a 185,000-square-foot Cabela's retail showroom.

Tri Vo, a prominent South Sound developer, unveiled plans for the project this month.

When completed in 15 to 20 years, this development would house an estimated 8,000 jobs and 4 million square feet of mixed-use development. The development would bring a mix of family entertainment and nightlife to the community.

The city annexed the property - bordered by Interstate 5, Marvin Road and Carpenter Road - in 1989.

"At that time, we knew that this piece of property along I-5 between Carpenter Road

and Marvin Road was going to be a unique piece of property, a special place for the future expansion of Lacey," City Manager Greg Cuoio said during a recent event to unveil plans for Lacey Gateway and Cabela's.

The city will have other community gathering areas.

Historical area

Its historical commercial area, anchored by South Sound Center and the Fred Meyer shopping center, will remain. Officials will expand City Hall next year. Saint Martin's University isn't moving. Lacey Farmers' Market on the Green will open for its fourth season during the summer.

Farther south, a new shopping center will develop on the last vacant corner of College Street and Yelm Highway to feature a Lowe's home improvement center as well as restaurants and shops.

"I think having our major centers kind of in different places in the city probably traffic-wise and population-wise makes sense," Deputy Mayor

Nancy Peterson said. "You don't have everyone going to one place at one time."