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City stays true to 'vision' for downtown

Officials hope to bring upscale retail, restaurants to area

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FERGUSON

City of Ferguson officials recently confirmed that Family Dollar Stores is interested in moving into the vacant bowling

alley in downtown Ferguson next to the Savoy.

But the city has decided it is not interested in any business that doesn't match its vision for the downtown area. That vision is to create an arts and entertainment district similar to the Loop in University City.

Civic and business leaders in Ferguson for the most part have decided to commit

to a vision outlined by the downtown business district several years ago.

At its last meeting, city council members also decided against a hair salon in the Shop 'n Save shopping center at the corner of Florissant and Airport roads because it didn't match its vision for downtown.

"If you look around us, you can see the
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Downtown:

critical mass building around us — Northland redeveloped in Jennings, Cross Keys in Florissant, the St. Louis Mills in Hazelwood, and certainly Express Scripts and the North Park development," said City Manager A.J. Krieger.

"We're the hub in the wheel," he said. "Now is the time for us to be selective, to be choosy and stay committed to the vision for our downtown."

That vision would include restaurants and upscale retail,

said Shannon Howard, executive director of Ferguson Citywalk, formerly the Ferguson Station Business District.

"One thing people don't understand is that it's easier to bring quality businesses into vacant buildings than to bring them into a sub-par business," she said.

A discount retailer such as Family Dollar would be a great fit in other shopping areas in Ferguson, she said.

"But when you talk to different retailers, one thing they want to know is who they're going to be next to," Howard said. "They want businesses that will complement their business.

It's completely driven by demographics, income level and purchasing power."

That's why Krieger said the city and the business district would try to steer discount retailers such as Family Dollar to other commercial districts in town. However, that might mean more empty storefronts in downtown Ferguson, at least for the time being.

"I definitely think the brightest days for our downtown district are ahead of us," Krieger said. "But if it were easy, it would be done tomorrow."

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