

Salem council hopes to promote downtown living

By Leah Lorber
The Statesman Journal

Dennis Whitlock moved into the space above his downtown Salem business in May to save money.

During the past three months, he has remodeled the second story of the building at 455 Court St. NE into a six-room beige and cream apartment. Now he is adding a recreation room with hardwood floors, a bar and a tiled dance floor.

Downtown, it seems to him, is a Turn to **Housing**, Page 2A.

Editorial
Page 4A



Ron Cooper/Statesman Journal

Dennis Whitlock and his girlfriend, Kim Naas, may be getting new neighbors in the coming years if the Salem City Council has its way. The council hopes to promote living downtown in places like Whitlock's, a remodeled apartment above his downtown store.

Housing/Council promotes urban living

NP133/2

Continued from Page 1A.
good place to call home.

"I don't have any problem with neighbors living too close. I can play my stereo as loud as I want," Whitlock said, grinning.

"It cuts down on your driving time. Movies are closer. There's shopping. We do a lot more walking than we ever did. The only thing I miss is a garage to put my car in and work on."

Whitlock, 33, manages Whitlock's Vacuum Cleaner Clinic & Sewing Center. He and his girlfriend, Kim Naas, 26, are two of a handful of people who live in Salem's downtown core. But if Salem City Council members get their way, Whitlock and Naas eventually will see their circle of neighbors grow.

Council members want to see more upscale housing in Salem's downtown area, either through new construction or by converting the upper floors of commercial buildings into living space.

They also are considering renovating housing on the north end of downtown for low- and moderate-income people.

Council member Tricia Smith said: "We thought that the only way to really keep downtown vital on a long-term basis was to get people living there. We also thought that it could be a really good place to live."

Between 700 and 800 people live in the area bordered by Ferry Street SE, 12th Street, Union Street NE and the Willamette River, Everett Kendall, the chief service representative in the city's finance and utility department, said.

Whitlock said he liked the idea of encouraging downtown housing.

"I think it would be a real beneficial thing to the city if it's done properly," he said.

The city's Downtown Development Board is studying the issue and is expected to report back to the council in 1990.

Aspects of the study will include:

- The types of existing housing in downtown Salem.

- Ways to overcome stumbling blocks to downtown housing, such as zoning laws, the availability of parking and building code requirements.

- Loan and grant programs.

- Available property.

- The potential market for downtown housing.

A city committee conducted a similar study in 1979.

It found that although existing residents liked living downtown, many people might not want to live there because of the scarcity of parking and high housing prices.

Housing prices most likely would be high because of the cost of building on expensive downtown land or converting existing buildings, the 1979 study indicated.

Larry Dalke, a co-owner of the former Fitts building at 216 Commercial St. NE, said he and the other owners of Dalke Construction Co. had considered turning the top floor of the building into apartments.

They rejected the idea because of the high cost of renovation. Instead, he said, they hope to rent office space.

"A lot of people have asked us for apartments," he said. "There's a lot of interest in it. I just feel like the rent would be too much for the

average person to afford."

He declined to estimate the monthly rent of such an apartment because it would depend on how the building was remodeled.

Whitlock acknowledged that high prices and scarce parking might deter some people from living downtown.

He gets a break on rent prices, he said, because his family owns the building. Also, because the building was renovated in the late 1960s, it didn't cost an exorbitant price to bring the apartment up to city codes.

In addition, Whitlock and Naas use the parking spaces at night that his employees use during the day.

Eric Meurer, the executive officer of the Salem Home Builders Association and the vice chairman of the development board's housing subcommittee, said it was uncommon for a city of Salem's size to promote housing in its downtown core.

Usually, he said, residents of big cities move downtown because they want to be in the center of activity without spending several hours commuting.

"They get tired of spending two hours in their vehicles, so they move closer in. That's not true here," he said. "If I want to go home and eat dinner, 10 minutes each way, and it's no big deal.

"Anything downtown has to rely on people who say, 'I want to live here because I want to live here.'"

John Russell, a senior city planner working on the study, said the committee didn't know how popular downtown living was in other cities of Salem's size.

That is one thing the study will determine, he said.