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DURANGO Downtown's Next Steps ready for next steps

City reaches 100% design plans for infrastructure project

BY GABRIELLE WALLACE
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Preliminary plans have been finalized for a proposed overhaul of downtown Durango – widely known as Downtown's Next Step – which calls for sidewalk expansions, restaurant bump-outs and infrastructure updates.

Downtown businesses have mixed feelings about the plan.

The plan is scheduled to be presented to City Council at a study session on Oct. 6, said Lily Oswald, multimodal manager and project manager. The plan would not only expand sidewalks, but also repair infrastructure.

Not every business and stakeholder is entirely on board with the project, but for right now the plans are just that – and there's no action to move forward.

Downtown's Next Step would expand sidewalks between Fifth Street and 14th Street along Main Avenue. The design process began in 2024 after City Council passed a resolution to pursue design plans, but not construction. In May, the 90% design plans were released. In July, the design achieved 100% completion, Oswald said.

Oswald said if council schedules the project as a new business item, it could then take action at a later date. The city could pursue the project as a whole – or just parts of it. She said council could direct staff to pursue the utility component of the project for water and sewer upgrades, or direct staff to pursue the full streetscape plan, which would expand the sidewalks and make them more accessible.

"Until then, this project is not reflected in any capital improvement five-year calendar, and we

See NEXT STEPS, 8A

Karen, Jerry Zink donate land to sustain community, protect open space



JESSICA BOWMAN/Durango Herald) photos

La Plata Family Center's Jenn Rast, agricultural manager, right, and Mariel Balbuena feed the sows Wednesday on the Pond Farm, a part of the 103-acre conservation easement south of Durango that was just donated to the Family Center.

FARM IS 'LIKE A FAMILY'

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

After a decade of searching for an organization to take over the Pond Farm, a 103-acre farm and conservation easement south of Durango, owners Jerry and Karen Zink have found a steward they believe can carry out their vision: the La Plata Family Center.

The center provides direct support to La Plata County families, helping with basic needs such as housing, clothing, utilities and food, while also operating a variety of community programs. For the past five years, the nonprofit organization has used the farm as a temporary home for its community garden, farming and entrepreneurship programs.

Last month, the Family Center became the farm's legal steward, giving those programs a permanent home and fulfilling the Zinks' longtime dream for the property.

"It was our dream for the property to grow things and to help sustain the community.



The Pond Farm is a 103-acre conservation easement and vegetable farm. The land is protected in perpetuity by the La Plata Open Space Conservancy and recently donated by Jerry and Karen Zink to the La Plata Family Center.

So we're getting our dream fulfilled," Karen Zink said. "And the Family Center has the capacity and the leadership

to be a good steward of the property." The farm has become a hub for the center's multigen-

eration work through the "Together We Grow," program

See LAND, 8A

Senator: Pipeline safety standard should be 'zero accidents'

John Hickenlooper visited site of massive Enterprise Products gasoline spill Wednesday

BY JESSIE BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

FLORIDA MESA – U.S. Sen. John Hickenlooper said he's not sure if the federal pipeline regulatory agency has failed to adequately protect residents and investigate pipeline failures like the one that occurred nearly two years ago south of Durango – but he intends to find out.

It has been 20 months since an Enterprise Products pipeline ruptured and released an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 gallons of gasoline into the ground within the boundaries of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

On Wednesday, the senator toured the site of the ongoing cleanup alongside about 30 other people.

The group included members of the Southern Ute Tribal Council; state Rep. Katie Stewart, D-Durango; Enterprise staff members; representatives from state and federal environmental agencies; and La Plata County Commissioner Matt Salka.

The 20-minute tour included a look at a soil-vapor extraction system that has removed about 70,000 gallons of gasoline from the ground, as well as biosparging wells that inject oxygen into groundwater to promote the



Sen. John Hickenlooper listens to Valerie Phipps, remediation project manager with Enterprise Products, as she describes the cleanup operation during a tour Wednesday at the site of the Enterprise Products pipeline rupture that happened next to County Road 219 south of Durango two years ago. Behind the senator is Marvin Pinnecoose, left, acting Southern Ute tribal chairman, and Andrew Gallegos, tribal council member.

JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald

how the contamination should be addressed.

Additionally, it has included larger critiques that the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration – the regulatory

breakdown of contaminants by microorganisms.

The cleanup has been marked

by disagreements between the tribe and Enterprise about the volume of gasoline released and

See HICKENLOOPER, 8A

