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BUSINESS

The \$6 million question

West Side to discuss loans, future tonight

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What could Manchester's West Side become with a \$6 million loan infusion?

No one knows for sure, but they will be able to get a glimpse at a community meeting tonight that will bring together residents and community officials to hammer out a possible scenario.

Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission executive director David Preece said the commission has secured the support of a financial institution, which will be named at the meeting, offering loans at a favorable rate.

The loans will be offered to anyone on the West Side, not just in the Kelley Street neighborhood.

The neighborhood meeting will take place tonight at 6:30 p.m., at the Credit Union Museum, at 420 Notre Dame Ave., and will unveil the plan created by the city based on information from two past public meetings and data collected over 2006.

Planning director Bob MacKenzie said while the meeting will showcase plans, it's still an opportunity for the department to get feedback.

"We're looking for some ideas on the recommenda-

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tions," MacKenzie said. "We want to hear back from residents and businesses after a few months to find out if (the plans are) what they need, and or if they're uncomfortable with the ideas. This is not just an unveiling.

Several plans are working to breathe new life into the Kelley Street/Rimmon Heights neighborhood. The area has Kelley Street as the main artery and includes the streets and homes surrounding the thoroughfare.

In 2006, city planners began sectioning Manchester into neighborhoods with the idea of using those neighborhoods as a foundation for future planning and development.

Each one would be considered something of a village. Plans for improvements to the look and function of each area would be based on specific needs, strengths and weaknesses.

While sections of the East Side have received development funding in the past, Preece said the city's West Side has lagged behind other sections.

The city has already helped bring about a facade improvement program and the lead abatement pro-

gram. The \$6 million could be used for more improvements, such as low-interest business loans, for development, or a number of other purposes.

Ron Poirier, co-owner of Bob and Sons Automotive at 321 Kelley St., said he was looking forward to a return to the neighborhood he knew from his past.

"This was almost a separate city at one time," Poirier said. "You get everything you needed right in the neighborhood, from food to gas to a tailor and cobbler."

In the years since Poirier's father purchased the station in the late 1950s, the neighborhood has become fragmented, with fewer long-term residents and landowners and more transitory businesses.

"I think it's just the nature of people today," Poirier said of the shift to a more temporary population.

Despite the changes, there's still a core of neighborhood identity and pride that planners see as a plus for reviving the neighborhood ideal.

"These neighborhoods are the city's biggest asset," Meena Gyawali, a city planner, said. "Kelley Street is a healthy neighborhood, and we want to keep it healthy."

For more information on the meeting call Gyawali at 624-6450.