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DIDI FISHER: REALIZING A 25-YEAR DREAM TO BUILD A VIBRANT CIVIC CENTER IN ATHERTON

By: Kimberly Young

Didi Fisher is co-chair of Atherton Now, the non-profit established to raise private funds for the construction of a new town center.

What inspires you to give so much time and service to Atherton?

Civic service is in my blood. My mother worked tirelessly for the garden club and Catholic Charities in my hometown back east. And my father was a CPA who wrote our Congressman—weekly! — about budget matters. He also championed fire and police personnel; it was vital to him that they be fairly compensated. We have that concern in common.

Service is also important to my husband, John. During the Nixon-Ford administration, we moved to Washington, D.C. where he worked in the Office of Budget & Management. When we returned to Atherton, he was elected to the Town Council and then I got involved, too.

You were elected to the Atherton Town Council in 1990 and became mayor. What were the concerns back then?

We worried about the size of new construction homes, infrastructure and whether we wanted a Little League field. Sound familiar? And, even then, we were concerned about our police facilities. They looked bad twenty-five years ago!

Why is now the time for a new Civic Center?

We don't actually have a town center—just a hodge-podge of old buildings, trailers and sheds. Until recently, many residents didn't realize there is such a disparity between the homes in which we live, and the deplorable facilities in which our police and staff work. Decades ago, we purchased "temporary" trailers to accommodate additional personnel. Over time, our temporary trailers became permanent eyesores.

Campaigns to build a new police station have gained and lost momentum due to funding issues. Now, folks understand what's at stake. Our well-trained police and staff cannot adequately serve and protect us in their current facilities. We've arrived at a historic moment where we can build a vibrant Civic Center that will serve our residents and staff for generations to come.

What does the Civic Center offer residents who feel they have everything they need at home?

It will help us experience what it means to be neighbors—a place where we can share our interests and concerns. Let's say you want to talk to a council member about traffic issues, or simply meet a friend for coffee. Our plans include a café for small, informal meetings that will be such a nice alternative to crowded commercial coffee shops. The center will also have welcoming spaces for author events, art shows and so on. Outside, we think our young families will really enjoy the pedestrian green, picnic tables and play areas. For the first time in Atherton history, we'll have a true community center.



Photo by Nicole Scarborough

Didi Fisher, co-chair of Atherton Now and former mayor, with architect's rendering of the proposed Atherton Civic Center.

In the library-tech center, residents will be able to access the latest computer and digital resources. We're also proposing a "Makers Workshop" where inventors and artists can access 3-D printers and other tools.

Tell us about the "Legends of Atherton" heritage area.

Excitement is growing for these spaces where we will celebrate our renowned athletes, inventors, artists and leaders. Willie Mays, Peggy Fleming and Joe Montana are just a few of the greats who have owned homes here. Mel Lane, of Sunset Magazine, and Ann Sobrato, real estate pioneer, lived here, too, and many other entrepreneurs and philanthropists. We're in the research phase of this heritage area and welcome suggestions.

Who are the early supporters of your campaign?

Our Civic Center is becoming a reality due to the generosity of George and Linnea Roberts, Ned and Carol Spieker, Mark and Mary Stevens, Tod and Cathy Spieker, Merv and Roz Morris, Chuck and Helen Schwab and John and Marcia Goldman. We still need to raise \$24 million, but their leadership gifts have put us on target for breaking ground in early 2017.

How can Atherton residents learn more about our new town center?

Please visit our website: atherton-now.org

Kimberly Young is a volunteer with Atherton Now. ■

Unveiling of Final Atherton Civic Center Concept Design

Join us March 21 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Jennings Pavilion, Holbrook-Palmer Park

Wine, cheese, desserts & refreshments