



Left to Right-Congressman Bud Cramer, Darden Heritage, Bert Peake, Mayor Loretta Spencer

## Five Points plan gets big check

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Cramer delivers the last \$500,000 for \$1.4M improvements

The design work is done. The money is in.

The only thing holding up the Five Points improvement project now is final state approval.

City Planner Marie Bostick hopes construction on the \$1.4 million makeover of Huntsville's trendy east side business district can begin by summer.

Bostick made that prediction Friday following a news conference plugging the project. The state Department of Transportation must sign off on the proposed improvements. The City Council authorized the work last October.

Plans call for landscaped sidewalks; a narrower, pedestrian-friendly Pratt Avenue; benches; lantern-style streetlights; new parking configurations, and other improvements.

U.S. Rep. Bud Cramer, D-Huntsville, made a ceremonial delivery Friday of a \$500,000 federal check. The money is from an appropriations bill signed by President Bush in December. Cramer helped secure nearly \$1 million from the previous two budget years.

Cramer said the planned Five Points makeover is an example of how cities can spruce up their inner core. "This could be the beginning of a model that could be used for other parts of downtown," he said.

Mayor Loretta Spencer agreed. "It's a great test program to see what offshoot neighborhoods can do. When you have the attitude like they have here in Five Points of wanting to make a difference, that encouragement spins over to City Hall that it's a good investment."

Cramer said the Five Points makeover will help revive a simpler way of life with clusters of small shops and restaurants all in a historic, pedestrian-friendly setting.

"Neighborhoods and cities have changed. You have a suburban way of life now with strip malls and shopping centers. Neighborhoods aren't quite as neighborly as they used to be," he said. "When one visits Five Points, one can truly feel removed from the hustle and bustle of city life."

City officials are lobbying Cramer and other members of the congressional delegation for several million dollars for as many as three more parking garages downtown. More parking, Spencer said, will help draw more condominiums, restaurants and retail development.

The garages would cost about \$6 million each, said City Planning Director Dallas Fanning. Tommy Brown, director of public parking and transit for Huntsville, said the city hopes to "partner" with private developers in building the garages in conjunction with a retail or residential development.

"We don't want to go out and just build a stand-alone garage," Brown said.

The Five Points recommendations stemmed from a \$5,000 city-funded study in 2001 by Auburn University's Center for Architecture and Urban Studies. Other recommendations called for extensive underground utilities, better crosswalks, decorative new storefronts, a kiosk sporting a Five Points logo, and other streetscape improvements.