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### DEPOT SQUARE

#### ***Bristol About To Switch Focus Of Downtown Development***

By DON STACOM

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BRISTOL —

More than five years after planning its downtown renewal around a mix of new public buildings, a performing arts theater and a retail complex, the city is about to try an entirely different approach.

The city council next month is expected to approve Renaissance Downtowns LLC as its preferred developer for the Depot Square site. The company's plan shares little in common with the idea that then-Mayor Gerard Couture's administration put forward when it was maneuvering to buy the property in 2004 and early 2005.

Buildings for government agencies and nonprofit groups aren't part of Renaissance's plan, but housing gets a dominant role: The Long Island-based Renaissance is proposing 750 apartments or condominium units, mostly in mid-rise towers on the 17-acre, city-owned property downtown.

Retail had been a centerpiece of the Couture plan, but Renaissance is proposing just 60,000 square feet of retail development — significantly smaller than an average Kohl's or Macy's.

Couture's plan never got far: The city bought the property in 2005, but voters turned Couture out of office before he could make any other progress. Plans were stalled for more than two years after that, and then the retail market collapsed in the economic downturn.

For more than a year, the Bristol Downtown Development Corp. has been looking for a company to lead the redevelopment. On Monday, it recommended Renaissance.

The city council expects to hold a public forum on the company and its proposal, and has tentatively scheduled it for Jan. 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Bristol Eastern High School. The council is then expected to formally endorse the choice of Renaissance at its meeting Jan. 12.

"I have no problem with them. I think the questions that are out there will be answered [before the vote]," council member Cliff Block said Tuesday. "I think we have at least four votes. I think this will go through. And doing it now will give Bristol a chance to do some planning while the economy is bad and get ahead of some of the other towns."

Council member Ken Cockayne said Tuesday that he'll endorse the Renaissance recommendation.

"The board made its choice. They have my support," he said.

Renaissance and D'Amato announced Monday that they'd worked out a deal to share some elements of the development work.

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