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A sensible approach

Rental project good way to enhance downtown

For years city officials have sought to promote residential development downtown. Having people live in the central city would add vitality to the area, provide greater support for businesses and encourage more entertainment and dining venues.

It's been an uphill battle. An effort to market condominiums along the Battle Creek River offered a neat concept, but few takers.

However, down the block at 70 W. Michigan Ave., the Hinman Co. has found success in renovating the 1931 landmark structure into a combined residential and commercial facility. Renamed the Battle Creek Tower, its luxury apartments are filled, with a waiting list of prospective tenants.

While the tower's success has been enhanced by its Renaissance Zone tax incentives, we also think rental housing, as opposed to condo ownership, is better suited to drawing residents downtown.

So we're enthused about Battle Creek Unlimited's plan to promote a rental development at the riverside condo site. We think it is a more sensible approach toward attracting young professionals who might want to live downtown but are not interested in investing in property. They often change jobs every few years and are much more inclined to sign a lease than be pinned down by the obligations of a mortgage. With a housing market that no longer guarantees an easy or profitable resale, renting makes more sense to them and their lifestyle.

BCU is open to proposals to either renovate the current structures on the site or raze them and build new. Either prospect offers interesting potential. The current buildings have a lot of character that could be incorporated into a residential setting, yet a new building might be able to take better advantage of the site, which is nestled between the river and Kellogg Co. headquarters.

Either way, another successful rental development, complementing Battle Creek Tower while also widening the price range of available housing, could help spark a real community of residents and become an important component of downtown revitalization.