



## Investors, ideas sought for downtown

To mold a more thriving business district while reducing economic blight, Battle Creek city leaders have launched an aggressive plan to market seven downtown commercial properties.

The effort by Battle Creek Unlimited was announced Thursday night during a community forum at Burnham Brook Community Center, sponsored by Project 20/20 and BCU.

"If there are investors or people with great ideas, BCU will work with you" to rehabilitate the buildings and restore them to use, said Jim Hettinger, BCU's senior adviser.

The targeted properties are:

- » 17 W. Michigan Ave., a four-story building plus basement, with 42,680 square feet of space.
- » 28 W. Michigan Ave., a two-story building plus basement, with 19,050 square feet of space.
- » 50 W. Michigan Ave., a two-story building that once housed a JC Penney store in the 1970s, with 22,000 square feet of space.
- » 64 W. Michigan Ave., a three-story building with 13,500 square feet of space,

near the Battle Creek Tower.

» 119 and 121 W. Michigan Ave., a three-story building with 13,600 square feet of space, plus basement areas.

» 15 Carlyle St., a two-story building with 13,150 square feet of space, being promoted as ideal for a residential development.

» 55/57 N. McCamly St., a one-story building with 4,700 square feet of space, near Battle Creek Central High School and W.K. Kellogg Auditorium.

Purchasers will be required to complete renovations within 24 months, Hettinger said. A purchaser would have to enter into a development agreement and deposit \$10,000 into an escrow account -- money that would be returned after renovations are completed, he said.

"We want community-generated ideas" for the properties, Hettinger said, "and BCU will do its part to make these ideas work,"



including help with tax incentives.

Those interested in touring the individual properties may contact Cheryl Beard, BCU's director of commercial development, at 441-1664 or [beard@bcunlimited.org](mailto:beard@bcunlimited.org).

The announcement came near the end of a meeting that drew about 120 participants and focused on the city's long-elusive need for a more attractive and lively central business district -- the goal of a multi-year, \$88 million revitalization project launched in November 2008.

In addition to Hettinger, speakers at the event were:

» Julia Bradsher, president and CEO of the Global Food Protection Institute, who outlined ongoing plans by the institute and Battle Creek-based International Food Protection Training Institute to create a national hub for food-protection training here.

» Linda Hicks, superintendent of Battle Creek Public Schools, who discussed the district's efforts to augment its outreach to students, including its multi-year initiative to develop career-based education focusing on science, technology, engineering and math.

» Karl Dehn, president and CEO of BCU, who discussed increases in new and relocated businesses downtown, and the rising number of jobs and the amount of building space occupied in the past three years. Dehn said 116,554 square feet of

building space downtown remains blighted and is "one of our greatest challenges."

» Ken Tsuchiyama, Battle Creek's city manager, who said city staff are working with BCU to create a consistent method of dealing with blighted properties. He said about 250 such properties have been demolished in and around the downtown area since 2008, and that about 80 more are still to be removed.

After the presentations, participants formed discussion groups to focus on ideas to promote downtown Battle Creek and to improve the physical maintenance of its structures.

The results of those discussions will be posted at [www.BCProject2020.com](http://www.BCProject2020.com), and additional information about the ongoing effort may be viewed online at [www.bcunlimited.org/transformation](http://www.bcunlimited.org/transformation).

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