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Math and Science Center could still move downtown

Battle Creek could become hot spot for food science industry

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Moving the Battle Creek Area Math and Science Center downtown would help transform the city into a center for food science, Jim Hettinger, a senior adviser to Battle Creek Unlimited, told about 100 people at a public forum Tuesday night at the Burnham Brook Community Center.

At the September Battle Creek Public Schools Board of Education meeting, Battle Creek Unlimited proposed moving the center from its current Springfield location to the old Cereal City U.S.A. building.

That move carries an approximately \$18.8 million price tag, but Battle Creek Unlimited plans to seek sources of funding other than tax dollars, Hettinger said. Possibilities include receiving grants, selling the naming rights and finding a private owner to take over the center.

The center, which creates and distributes science kits to schools throughout the state, has outgrown its present location in the old Springfield High School gym, Director Connie Duncan told the school board in September.

This school year alone, the center has brought in \$3 million in kit sales, she said.

Sean Jagels, an estimator for Skanska, said Tuesday it would be possible to house the needed kit distribution center at another site instead of building a new facility at Cereal City U.S.A. He presented the old FedEx building near the airport as an example of a facility that could be renovated to become the distribution center.

But having the classrooms and distribution centers in different locations could increase operating costs, Duncan said. And having the distribution center and the classrooms on the same site would allow staff to move easily between the center's two main functions.

Hettinger explained how the center would fit into the overall downtown plan, which envisions the city as a center for food science. Moving the center downtown would encourage partnerships with downtown employers such as the Kellogg Co., he said.

This, in turn, could encourage students to stay in Battle Creek after they graduate, he said.

"Some people would say you're crazy for doing something like this at a time like this, but the other side of that is you have to plant your seeds while times are bad because we will recover," Hettinger said.

The center, which also offers training for math and science teachers, has been an asset to Battle Creek Public Schools, Board Trustee Susan Buckley said. Buckley said the board is supportive of the project.

"I have heard some concerns if we put money in the math and science center, it will be at the

expense of other students and the other schools, and that is far from the truth," she said.

Emily Cracolici, a senior at St. Philip Catholic Central High School who attends the center, said the center has helped prepare her for college even though she doesn't intend to study math or science. Cracolici said she plans to major in public relations at Michigan State University.

"These last few years I've been continually challenged myself to work hard and study hard," she said. "It's all a huge circle, and the math science center has been a big part of that."

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