



December 18, 2009

## Public shares streetscape suggestions

*Elizabeth Willis*  
*The Enquirer*

Organizers behind a plan to improve downtown Battle Creek on Thursday sat down with a few dozen residents to compile a wish list of street amenities.

Battle Creek Unlimited hosted the four public input sessions in the Burnham Brook Community Center. Most participants had been invited to the session after attending a public forum in November summarizing the first year of the downtown transformation plan.

Participants watched a montage of design images gathered from around the world meant to spark ideas. They were encouraged to say what they liked and what they want changed about downtown Battle Creek.

The meeting was intended to help architects focus their design, but the conversation broadened to include everything from the city's lack of a cereal factory tour to the presence of mentally disabled and homeless individuals downtown.

"The number one question I get asked at the CVB is, 'Where are the cereal factory tours?'" said Dawn Whitcomb, a Battle Creek/Calhoun County Convention & Visitor's Bureau employee. "We get yelled at -- at least twice a week."

Of the infrastructure elements discussed, most people agreed that the city's biggest eyesores were its vacant buildings.

"Some of our buildings look junky," said Karl Dehn, BCU's president and chief executive officer, said on behalf of his group. Blight can lead people to think the area is unsafe, although most agreed it was just a perception.

"We did generally agree that it is clean and walkable," said Mac McCullough, Battle Creek Enquirer general manager and executive editor. "We just need more people downtown."

City Commissioner Laurie Sullivan asked if heat from nearby packaging plants could be used to warm sidewalks downtown and encourage walking even during the winter season by melting snow and ice. Jim Hettinger, senior adviser to Battle Creek Unlimited, said the idea is being considered.

Sullivan said she supported the idea but acknowledged it might encourage homeless individuals to sleep on the sidewalks instead of under cold bridges.

Hettinger said the city also is working on an idea to incorporate urban gardens downtown for public and private use. Participants expressed an interest in green features, such as rain gardens, which can collect and filter automotive runoff, and more trees -- so long as they don't block signage.

The infrastructure wish list also included more lighting behind buildings, an interactive water fountain or park, better access and use of its river, and possibly a center where people can eat cereal and purchase memorabilia.

People wanted to keep or enhance Michigan Avenue's distinctive red brick pavement and restaurants' outdoor seating. Some suggested the Art Center of Battle Creek be moved downtown.

Organizers also asked participants if they would be opposed to closing a portion of Jackson Street between Kellogg Co.'s headquarters and 67 W. Michigan Ave., also known as the Fifth Third building, where the cereal giant is considering leasing space to bring more employees downtown.

While no one opposed the idea, people encouraged the city to keep the space open for public use and not to block parking or access points for businesses along the street.

Among the improvements already under way, Kerri Bennett with Beta Designs described two sets of arches to be installed along the east side of I-194/M-66. Each is 150 feet long and stands 9 feet above the guardrails. They will have children's artwork secured to back-lit screens and light-emitting diodes inside to make the arches twinkle at night.

One of the proposed highway screens can be placed near the intersection of I-194/M-66 and East Hamblin Avenue. The other can be closer to the East Dickman Road exits, though some people said it would be hard to see because people tend to drive fast there.

There has been some confusion about the arches, Bennett said, because in the original concept design there was an arch proposed over Michigan Avenue. That idea has not been pursued.

Cheryl Beard, BCU's technology and marketing director, said the screens' artwork will be rotated every few years to continue engaging citizens in the project.

"We don't want to limit it to youth art, but this was a first step," she said.

Another meeting will be held on Jan. 14 to unveil three concepts the architects will have designed based on public input. People who were not able to attend can still share their thoughts through the Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/battlecreektransformation](http://www.facebook.com/battlecreektransformation).

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## Additional Facts

If you go

**WHAT:** Downtown infrastructure design presentation

**WHEN:** 11:30 a.m. Jan. 14

**WHERE:** Burnham Brook Community Center, 200 W. Michigan Ave.

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFORMATION:** R.S.V.P. to Cheryl Beard at [beard@bcunlimited.org](mailto:beard@bcunlimited.org) by Jan. 11.

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