



November 25, 2008

Revitalized downtown good for all of B.C.

Monday's announcement of a \$85 million plan to revitalize Battle Creek's downtown, including construction of a \$22.5 million six-story office building, represents a major step forward for all of Battle Creek.

The proposal is more than just a bright spot amid today's economic gloom. It even stretches beyond the importance of bringing hundreds of employees into the downtown area.

The plan announced by Battle Creek Unlimited and Kellogg Co. could help redefine Battle Creek's role in the food sciences industry and lead to related businesses bringing additional skilled, well-paying jobs to our community.

The fact that business, government, philanthropic and education leaders are working together to strengthen downtown Battle Creek offers exciting prospects for this city's future. The benefits of a thriving downtown will reach across this community, enhancing neighborhoods and encouraging business development.

The construction of a new office building across from Kellogg Co. headquarters, along with the current expansion of the W.K. Kellogg Institute for Food and Nutrition, signal that more workers are coming downtown, and those workers will want to have facilities nearby for shopping, dining and entertainment. Some might want to live downtown and take advantage of the "corporate campus" atmosphere being created by Kellogg.

The proposal doesn't require starting from scratch. The plan builds on the assets which downtown Battle Creek already offers: necessary infrastructure in place; attractive architecture from various eras; green space along the riverfront and at nearby parks; a variety of dining and entertainment spots; and a fledgling residential sector.

If Battle Creek is to succeed in carving out a niche as a leader in food sciences, it is vital that we as a community support education and encourage our young people to get the skills they need to compete in the work force. That is why it is important that schools are involved in the revitalization effort.

The possibility of the Battle Creek Area Math & Science Center relocating downtown could open up many learning possibilities for its students. Construction of the new Battle Creek Central High School campus will enhance downtown's northern border. St. Philip Catholic Central High School already is moving toward a curriculum in which students interact more with the community, and Western Michigan University's Kendall Center is well-positioned to take advantage of the changes that will be taking place in its midst.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by all the bad economic news affecting our state, nation and world. Monday's announcement should remind us that better times are ahead. At this point, Battle Creek seems to be positioning itself to take full advantage of an economic turnaround when it comes. Not only does the downtown plan provide reason for optimism about the heart of our city, but the development of the FireKeepers Casino on the eastern edge of town and construction of the United Solar facility in Fort Custer Industrial Park should help convince us that we are on the right path to a more prosperous future.