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Votes to shape downtown B.C.

Commissioners elect to sell The Rink to team

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The Enquirer*

The reshaping of downtown Battle Creek was a recurring theme at Tuesday's city commission meeting.

Along with approving tax breaks to help bring hundreds of Kellogg Co. employees downtown, commissioners voted to sell The Rink to the city's hockey team and set a public hearing on a redevelopment plan meant to help the city become a center for food safety.

Commissioners granted a 12-year tax abatement for 67 W. Michigan Ave. to help the property's owner, the Hinman Company, refurbish the office building to meet the needs of Kellogg, which wants to relocate around 600 employees from Porter Street to just across the street from its corporate headquarters.

The abatement, valued at \$1.5 million, passed with only Commissioner Ryan Hersha voting against it. Mayor Mark Behnke was absent.

The Hinman Company expects to invest about \$4 million in the property.

All present commissioners voted in favor of extending the Renaissance Zone designation for the Battle Creek Tower, which the Hinman Company also owns. The designation allows businesses and residents at the property to bypass many local and state taxes.

Hersha supported the extension saying it will encourage small businesses and residents to be based downtown.

The sale of The Rink, located at 75 Houston St., to Revolution Advertising LLC for \$25,000 came with the condition that the new owner invest around \$500,000 to improve the site and buy new equipment in the next seven years. Revolution Advertising LLC is made up of the owners of the city's minor league professional hockey team, the Battle Creek Revolution.

The city had been unable to fund needed improvements to The Rink because of budget constraints.

Commissioner John Godfrey said the sale benefits both parties because it puts The Rink in the hands of "hockey people" who have an interest in increasing the sport's presence and gets the city away from an expensive property.

Meanwhile, the public hearing set for Oct. 20 will focus on the redevelopment of 55. E. Hamblin Ave., the Semco office building. Covance, a Princeton, N.J.-based company, has proposed turning the property into a facility for food testing.

The company is expected to invest \$15 million in the site. Commissioners eventually will be voting on two tax abatements for the property.

Karl Dehn, president and chief executive officer of Battle Creek Unlimited, said a brownfield designation, which provides a state tax credit, would be the first in a number of steps to bring Covance to Battle Creek.

"We are definitely excited for the opportunity and we hope it happens," Dehn said, calling Covance a great corporate citizen with strong leadership and potential for growth.

Enquirer staff writer Elizabeth Willis contributed to this report. Barrett Newkirk can be reached at 966-0692 or bnewkirk@gannett.com.

Additional Facts

In other business

Also on Tuesday, the Battle Creek City Commission:

- Voted to designate City Manager Ken Tsuchiyama as the city's representative on the Local Revenue Sharing Board for FireKeepers Casino.
 - Heard from Peter Christ, who asked commissioners to meet with state Reps. Jase Bolger and Kate Segal to discuss legislation that would maintain nonpartisanship in city elections.
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