

BCU touts older sites for renovation

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With only two downtown apartments available for rent in downtown Battle Creek, city economic development professionals are hoping to boost that number to more than 40 in the next year with funding incentives for developers.

Battle Creek Unlimited's Downtown Partnership is marketing three historic structures built in the early 1900s for renovation into first-floor retail and upper-floor condominiums.

The buildings at 115 and 119 W. Michigan Ave. and 15 Carlye St. each have been vacant for several years and have housed retail

businesses and a hotel in the past. BCU spent three years and \$730,000 to purchase all three of the buildings. The organization is selling them for \$400,000 combined along with financing help, said Kathleen Eriksen, director of the Downtown Partnership.

"Right off the bat, they'd be saving more than \$300,000. We are saving a lot of time and money for the developer," she said.

The organization has guidelines for the renovation of the space, including the development of at least 30 market-rate condominiums and first-floor retail. Preservation of the historic character and facade of the buildings also is required, as well as meet-

ing specific construction schedule deadlines or the buildings' ownership reverts back to BCU.

This is the first time BCU has invested in residential property to encourage development in the downtown area, Eriksen added.

The organization sent informational flyers to more than 400 developers across the country and in Canada to promote the development.

"We sent the post cards out on Sept. 15, and by Sept. 17 we sent out 30 requests for proposals," she said.

The condominiums would be owned and sold by the developer to encourage home ownership in the downtown area. The retail space will be renovated by the chosen developer but owned and leased through BCU.

The organization anticipates the retail would include specialty and boutique shops, with some business owners already informally expressing interest, Eriksen said. One of the groups considering a move to the new retail area is BCU's downtown office, she added.

"It would be a great location because we want to be accessible to the community," she said.

Proposals are due by Nov. 11, and it is anticipated a developer will be picked by December,



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Downtown Partnership's Kathleen Eriksen says.

Photo by Shawano Cleary

with units completed in the spring of 2006.

The buildings are not the first attempt by BCU to encourage residential development downtown.

The city received the state's Blueprints for Michigan's Downtown designation last year.

Under that designation, the **Michigan Economic Development Corp.** and **Michigan State Housing Development Authority** committed a total of \$200,000 to fund a detailed marketing analysis of Battle Creek and to determine its long-term economic assets and challenges.

One of those priorities identified was a lack of downtown residential space, and the Blueprint plan called for building 20 residences in the city during the next year. Under the program, developers can receive up to \$25,000 to build residential units downtown.

"Our goal is to make downtown more of a neighborhood, more welcoming and inviting and able to attract more customers and users," Eriksen said. "We also want to highlight downtown Battle Creek's history and preserve its remaining historic structures."

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