

Community contributes to blueprint

Curbing violence, bringing more people downtown voiced as priorities

ROBERT WARNER
The Enquirer

The strategists who developed Battle Creek's five-year Downtown Blueprint in 2003 stood in front of a crowd of 120 local residents Monday night, ready to redraw a game plan to meet the center city's changing needs.

During the next 90 minutes of brainstorming, the vision of the crowd seemed to come through binoculars, kaleidoscopes and rear-view mirrors.

The city's Downtown Development Partnership held a town meeting Monday night at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to kick off four days of reviewing progress made on the original plan and looking forward to the next five years of strategizing.

"I think you have achieved a lot over the last five years," said Dolores Palma, president of the Alexandria, Va.-based consulting firm of HyettPalma that developed the 2003

blueprint and is back to assist with the next step.

"What we've found in working with downtowns is working in five-year bites is what yields the greatest results," Palma said.

Asking participants to "reconnect with your downtown," with the ultimate goal to create another five-year strategy, Palma began the brainstorming session.

She solicited input on what residents wanted from their downtown, their likes and dislikes about it as it is, and their priorities for action now.

"Safety," was the first priority to arise, voiced by 17 West manager Jason Wright.

More calls came quickly: "Events to bring people downtown." "Bring jobs back downtown." "Parking." "Housing." "Marketing and branding of downtown and the city."

In the meantime, here are some of the ideas that sprang from the crowd:



PHOTOS BY JOHN GRAP/THE ENQUIRER

Kathleen Erickson, left, Battle Creek's downtown development director, poses in the city. Above, the Federal Center offers a view of Michigan Avenue in this file photo.

- Put Taste of Battle Creek on city streets, not in a parking lot.

- Revitalize neighborhoods near downtown.

- Draw 500 to 1,000 more jobs downtown.

- Have an old-fashioned street party downtown every Friday night starting June 1.

- Build businesses along the waterfront in the State Street parking lot.

- Do better advertising, marketing and branding of the city, downtown and downtown businesses.

- Open a new, 500- to 800-seat theater.

- Find a way to get more

Kellogg Co. workers to patronize downtown businesses.

- Communicate better about downtown events, not only to downtown businesses — to residents of neighborhoods, as well.

Bob Erwin, a retired salesman who recently moved back to Battle Creek, suggested that the community find a way to hugely capitalize on its Cereal City legacy by bringing Kellogg, Post and Keebler icons into the streetscape.

"You could have Ernie the Elf and a Hollow Tree right on the street," Erwin

said.

Downtown retailers met with the consultants before the town meeting and city commissioners held a session with them afterward. More meetings will be held through Thursday.

HyettPalma will discuss its preliminary strategy ideas with Battle Creek Unlimited's Board of Directors on Thursday and is expected to present a complete report within three months, said Kathleen Eriksen, the city's downtown development director. BCU is the city's economic development wing.

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