

PRESS & GUIDE

Student housing, transit system on city's docket

Dearborn, Heights to be a part of large real estate open house

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By Jason Carmel Davis, Press & Guide Newspapers

DEARBORN - Bob Behrens, University of Michigan-Dearborn vice chair for business affairs, said Washington, D.C.-based Brailsford & Dunlavey, which specializes in facility planning and program management for colleges and universities, has looked at three areas where a 250- or 500-bed housing community could be developed — two of which are off-campus locations in West Dearborn, while the third sits closer to the UM-Dearborn campus.

The school has partnered with a private developer, University Campus Communities, according to city of Dearborn Director of Economic & Community Development Barry Murray. He said that group also had a hand in the development of the new MGM Grand Casino in downtown Detroit.

However, Dearborn City Councilmember Doug Thomas doesn't believe any downtown sites should be considered. He said a better site for student housing would be closer to the campus, near Andiamo.

"The downtown area should stay upscale," Thomas said Monday during a study session. "It doesn't make sense to want to attract students with limited income to the area.

"People who come into the area for an upscale experience won't want to be around a bunch of kids. It won't work."

Murray said the students who would inhabit the apartments "wouldn't be broke" and the upscale downtown experience would remain. He added that plans for the housing to be erected downtown have hit a snag, as the developer was thought to have been in the running for an entire piece of land in the downtown area. Murray said the developer would only receive half that for the project.

Michigan Avenue roadwork to commence this summer

This summer, Michigan Avenue from Outer Drive to Brady Street will receive what is being called an intermediate fix, Murray said.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) originally had a plan to repair the pothole-filled road for about \$3.5 million. The department re-evaluated the condition of the road, and that figure has since ballooned to \$15 million to \$20 million, according to MDOT Spokesman Rob Morosi.

Morosi said MDOT, this year, will make substantial repairs to Michigan Avenue in the west end of Dearborn that will last until the road can be fully reconstructed, which will come in about two years, he said, adding this summer's repairs will take a couple of weekends to complete.

"Hopefully, we can start in May or June," Morosi said. "At worst, we can take out all the old coal patches and put in a hot, mixed-asphalt base. At best, we can put a clean coat over the road."

Morosi said the complete repair of Michigan Avenue would be complete by 2012 or 2013, but Dearborn officials have said that date is too far off and are working to have it moved up.

Dearborn Village Partners-North, Dearborn -Federal Savings Bank projects up in the air

The city is awaiting demolition plans for the site on Michigan Avenue between Military and Howard streets. The former Bally's, Brother's Tuxedo and Guiliano's are scheduled to be demolished this year; but, Murray said, the city has received no paperwork indicating the project will move forward.

"The city's done everything it needs to do for this to happen," Murray said. "Obviously, Oakwood is concerned because their computer center is right there and they share a wall with those sites. (Dearborn Federal Savings Bank) has also expressed some concerns."

Plans call for a movie theater and piano bar to be built in the area. Murray said he thought the project would be moving into the finance phase or that a developmental agreement would be signed, but the city is still awaiting demolition plans.

One demolition project is nearing completion, as the former Mercury Motel is almost down.

Bank officials have said there are no immediate plans to redevelop the site, but Murray said Monday it will be landscaped and may serve as the bank's headquarters.

Quality Inn being inspected

The Quality Inn Hotel at Michigan and Brady is being inspected to make sure it's safe in the event land near that site is redeveloped, Murray said.

"It's completely unsightful," said Councilmember Suzanne Sareini. "When it's secure, could we make sure it looks nice?"

Murray said Les Stanford Chevrolet and Andiamo employees park their vehicles there, and city officials are looking at the possibility of leasing those spaces.

Transit system project progressing

Murray told councilmembers the demonstration project for the Dearborn Intermodal Station, which will run from downtown Detroit to Ann Arbor, may be up and running by spring 2010.

He said he will receive the results of a recent study early next month and that a meeting will take place with all the mayors along the proposed railway's corridor.

"It's a big deal to get this project running because it will allow (the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) and all the communities involved access to money," Murray said. "We'll also have to prove ridership, and we'll start with eight trains a day and work our way up to 15."

Sareini said the idea of a mass transit system is appealing and Murray cited use of the mode of transportation by the Illitch family as evidence the venture could be a success.

"(The Illitch's) rent a train and bring it in from Oakland County and it sells out instantly," Murray said.

Montgomery Ward update

Environmental remediation is taking place at the Montgomery Ward site, Murray said, as asbestos and other hazardous materials will be removed from the building in the next eight weeks.

July 1 is the next "big day" for the project, Murray said, as all parties involved must sign a closing agreement.