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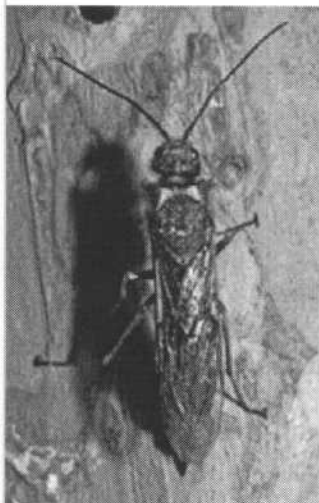
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Kalamazoo Gazette 24/7

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Business-loop upgrade takes shape

Friday, July 13, 2007

By Jane Parikh
jparikh@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8558

Pride is Deb Killarney's reason for sprucing up the I-94 Business Loop in Kalamazoo.

"As people come into town, it's not a great first impression," Killarney said of the business loop. "They don't see any city from the freeway. There are no signs to tell them how many miles it is to get to downtown."

Killarney was among about 20 residents and business owners who attended a meeting Thursday to discuss plans for creating a more attractive portion of the business loop that runs from Michigan Avenue in downtown Kalamazoo east to Sprinkle Road.

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The project is a joint effort involving Kalamazoo Township, the city of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo County, the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study, the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Traverse City-based Land Information Access Association. Representatives from each of those organizations attended the meeting to hear what audience members thought of improvement plans.

Based on community input gathered at earlier meetings, the plan focuses on improving signage along the route and adding landscaping, lighting, walkways and pathways along the business loop.

The project is likely to cost more than \$1 million, said Harry Burkholder, a community planner

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Kalamazoo Talk

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- Good comments, but ... by *JohnH65OH* 07/16/2007 9:02 p.m. ET
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from the LIAA. The group spearheading the project hopes to secure grants from MDOT to cover the cost, Burkholder said.

Randy and Sara Roberts, residents of the Lakewood neighborhood near the business loop, said sidewalks on Lake Street are needed for neighborhood children to walk or ride bicycles. Tammy Barnard, executive director of the Edison Neighborhood Association, said that during the Kalamazoo County Fair, held at the fairgrounds on Lake Street, sidewalks or bike paths would be definite benefits.

"The bike path was one of those things that I felt was necessary," Barnard said. "Hundreds of kids use that street to get to the fairgrounds."

Although the business loop was not originally designed to accommodate alternative modes of transportation, MDOT officials are being asked to create roadways that could include space for scooters or bicycles.

"When the business loop was designed, it was very much to move cars," said Darrell Harden, transportation director for MDOT's southwest region. "We are under pressure to provide accommodations for other types of transportation."

Burkholder said he expects the three jurisdictions to approve a final draft of the plans in August or September. The next step, he said, is to apply for funding from MDOT.

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