

I-94 business-loop makeover moves forward

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The I-94 business loop may be destined for a makeover that will change it from an eyesore into an eye-catching eastern entryway into downtown Kalamazoo.

After almost one year of meetings and discussions with community leaders and residents, the group working on the project expects to be able to seek funding after anticipated approval of final plans in August or September, said Harry Burkholder, a community planner with the Land Information Access Association. The Traverse City-based LIAA is part of the project group.

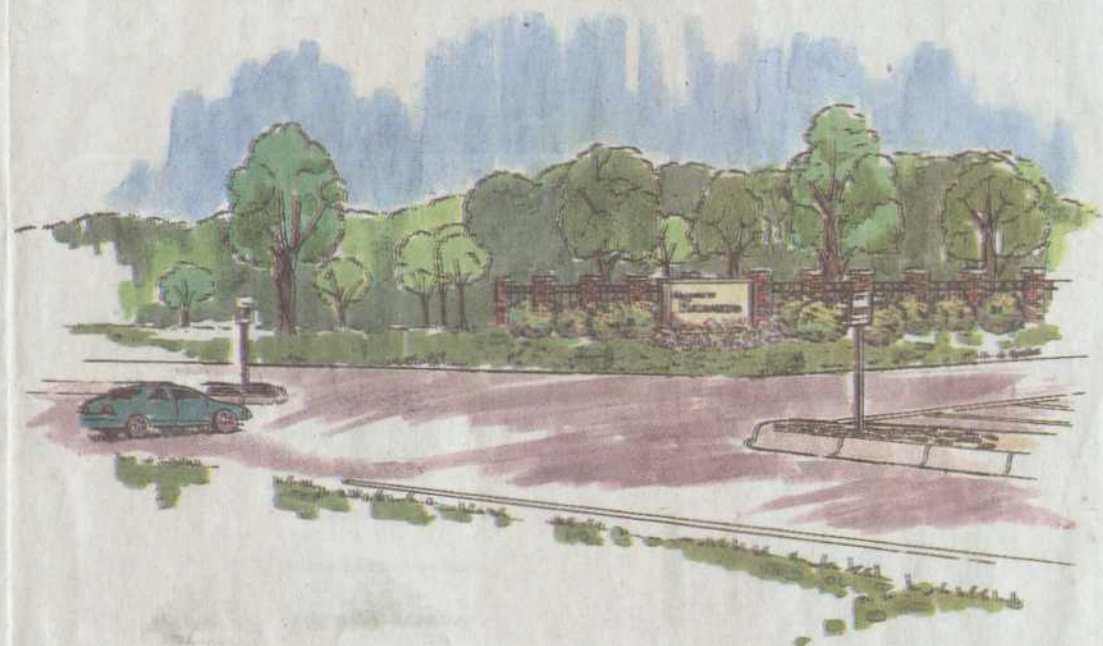
In addition to the LIAA, other participants are the township, city and county of Kalamazoo; the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study; and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Representatives with each of these organizations attended a meeting July 12 at the Kalamazoo Township offices to hear what audience members thought of the improvement plans.

Deb Killarney, a resident of downtown Kalamazoo, said pride is the reason she wants the business loop spruced up.

"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 the meeting to discuss plans for creating a more attractive portion of the business loop that runs east from Sprinkle Road to Michigan Avenue and downtown Kalamazoo.



COURTESY OF MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

A proposal to create an eye-pleasing entry point for the area on the eastern side of the I-94 business loop was unveiled during a public meeting in this month. The draft of the Business Loop Gateway plan focuses on the part of the business loop that runs from Michigan Avenue in downtown Kalamazoo to Sprinkle Road.



The Michigan Department of Transportation has proposed improvements, above and below, for the I-94 business loop. Among them are improved signage, crosswalks and landscaping in addition to better links with surrounding neighborhoods and community venues.



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Developed from community input gathered at earlier meetings, the plan focuses on improved signage and the addition of landscaping, lighting, and walkways and pathways along the business loop.

The project likely will cost in excess of \$1 million, Burkholder

said. The group spearheading the project hopes to secure grants from MDOT to cover the cost, he said.

Randy and Sara Roberts, residents of the Lakewood neighborhood near the business loop, said sidewalks on Lake Street are needed for neighborhood children who walk or ride bicycles.

During the Kalamazoo County Fair, which takes place at the fairgrounds on Lake Street, sidewalks or bike paths would be definite benefits, said Tammy Barnard, executive director of the Edison neighborhood.

"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."

Even though 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."

Between 6,900 and 10,700 vehicles travel the business loop each day, Harden said.

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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