

A thing of beauty – group plans improvements to eastern gateway

By Michelle Miron

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If a group of county, city and township officials has its way, the I-94 Business Loop from Sprinkle Road to Kalamazoo Avenue will receive a face-lift.

The group representing Kalamazoo County, the city of Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo Township, is teaming with the Michigan Department of Transportation to develop a makeover plan for the passageway — considered the eastern gateway to the city — and parts of the 2.5-square-mile area surrounding it.

Ideas being discussed include new sidewalks, paved bike trails,

street lights, landscaping, better litter control and new signs to welcome visitors.

Using \$40,000 from the Traverse City-based Land Information Access Association, plus \$3,334 from each of the three municipalities, the I-94 BL Planning Group has been gathering input to form what will become the I-94 Business Loop Gateway Plan.

The initial stages will be discussed at a public meeting at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, in Room A of the Hazel Gray Building at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center and Fairground.

“Our intention is to take a look at the road area and (the) abutting property and see if there’s some-

thing we can do to upgrade the whole area as you come through the township into the city,” said steering committee member Gary Cramer, who is supervisor of Kalamazoo Township.

“We have events in places like the fairgrounds and Mayors’ Riverfront Park, so we actually have hundreds of thousands of people traversing this roadway, and we’d like to make it a welcome addition with a positive look and feel.”

Cramer said the planning process is expected to last through August of 2007, then the three municipalities will be asked to approve the plan.

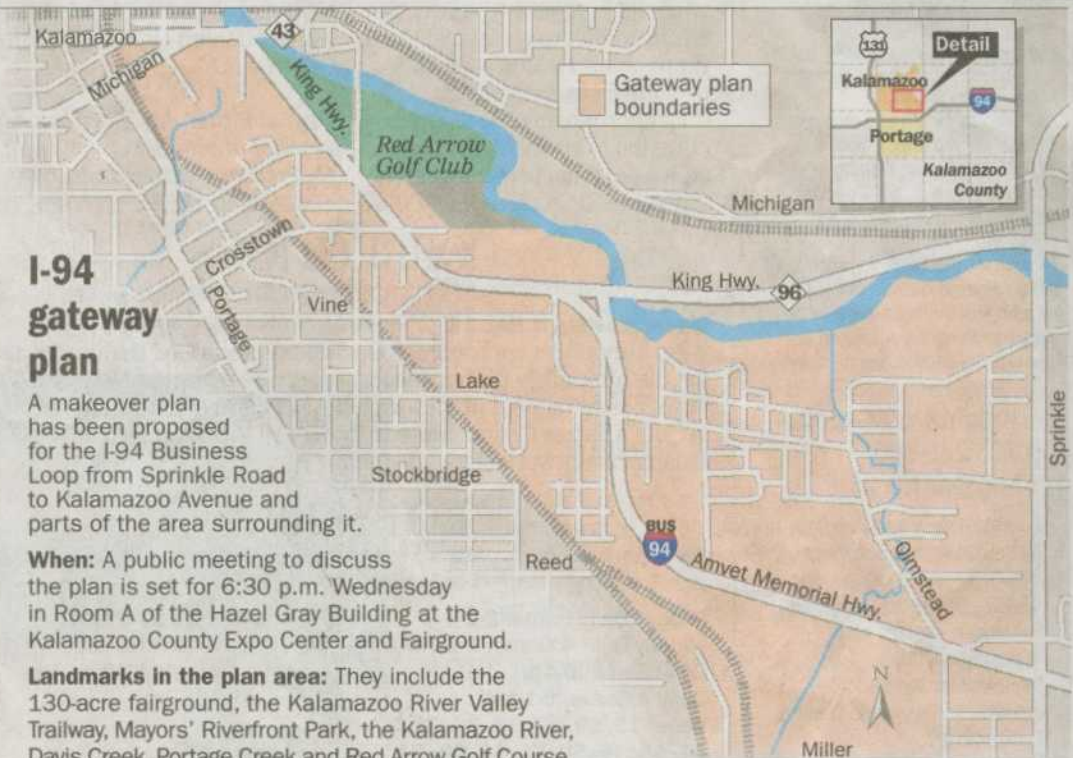
Please see **GROUP**, A2

I-94 gateway plan

A makeover plan has been proposed for the I-94 Business Loop from Sprinkle Road to Kalamazoo Avenue and parts of the area surrounding it.

When: A public meeting to discuss the plan is set for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday in Room A of the Hazel Gray Building at the Kalamazoo County Expo Center and Fairground.

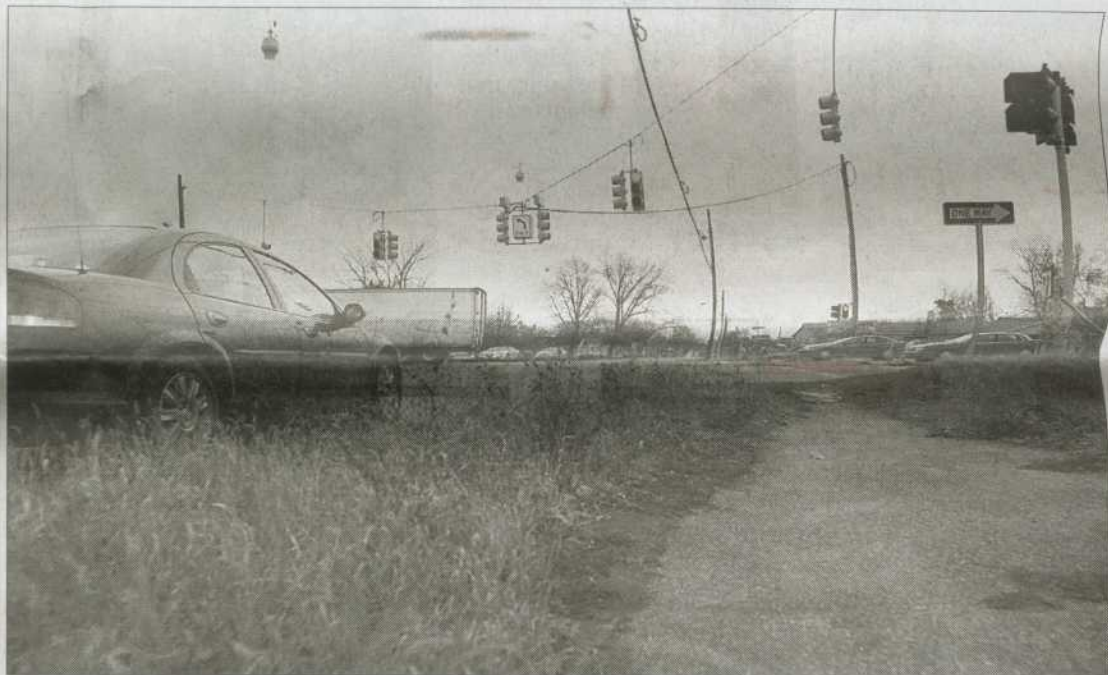
Landmarks in the plan area: They include the 130-acre fairground, the Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway, Mayors’ Riverfront Park, the Kalamazoo River, Davis Creek, Portage Creek and Red Arrow Golf Course.



Public Safety Appeal and Review Board later this month to

not treated appropriately by

complaints. Anderson did not name the physicians or hospital involved.



JILL MCLANE BAKER / GAZETTE

A planned makeover of the I-94 Business Loop from Sprinkle Road to Kalamazoo Avenue could include improved sidewalks and bike trails.

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Group plans gateway improvements

After that, he said, the group will begin seeking grant money or municipal contributions that could pay for the proposed improvements.

"I suspect when we get something a little firmer in place we'll go back to the public and ask for comments," he said when asked Thursday about future public meetings.

Cramer said the area to be studied is bounded by Sprinkle Road to the east, the Conrail Railroad tracks to the west, Michigan Avenue and the Kalamazoo River to the north, and Miller Road to the south.

The parcel is described as "a very complex mixture of industrial, commercial and residential zoning," with residential areas split between the middle- to low-income Edison and Lakewood neighborhoods.

Representatives from the two neighborhoods have met with

the I-94 BL Planning Group, he said, and suggested a number of actions.

The suggestions include eliminating sewer odors and adding better pedestrian crossings and bike trails that connect to the Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway. Neighborhood representatives also suggested landscaping on traffic islands along the Business Loop, and improvements to the intersection of the Business Loop and Lake Street near the fairgrounds.

Updates near the fairgrounds may be part of the gateway plan, he said, but only if they can be integrated with a 10-year master improvement plan for the facility already in the works by Kalamazoo County.

Precluding aesthetic changes like "roundabouts" where traffic can stream around a central island — and possibly improve-

ments to intersections — major alterations to the area road network are unlikely but possible, Cramer said.

MDOT and the Kalamazoo County Road Commission are both represented on the planning group.

"I don't see the major route changing," Cramer said. "But maybe there's some way we can work with the property owners that are abutting to try to help them with what they have."

Kalamazoo was one of 13 Michigan communities to receive grants through the Partnerships for Change Program sponsored by the Land Information Access Association, a non-profit group that promotes better resources management and planning between municipalities.

For more information about the project, go to its Web site, www.partnershipsforchange.cc/i94bizloop/.