

Downtown area eyes new housing

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March 13, 2009 10:15 am

— CLINTON — Area leaders are hoping to pursue redevelopment projects that will transform unused upper floors in downtown Clinton buildings into apartments and condominiums. According to Julie Allesee, president of the Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce, there are a lot of buildings downtown with upper floor room for residential housing. “Clinton has an inventory of underutilized space downtown,” stated Ward 2 councilman Michael Kearney. “The unused space could be converted into housing, which would benefit Clinton in multiple ways.”

According to Kearney, the project would help create jobs. During rehabilitation projects, 60 to 70 percent of expenditures go toward labor, with the balance being materials. New construction project costs are 50 percent labor and 50 percent materials. With labor being local, these redevelopment projects would create a local return through re-circulated paychecks. Kearney also stated that this project will create housing opportunities for young professionals and empty nesters who want to live in an urban area. “Clinton could have a lively downtown if we had enough people living here,” Kearney stated.

Kearney indicated that downtown areas were originally designed as walkable neighborhoods. Individuals living downtown have the benefit of proximity and are able to save gasoline for longer trips. An increase in people living downtown would in turn have a positive effect on local businesses. It could potentially form a centralized business district downtown, Allesee said. Allesee also stated that the city is looking to grow the business district to Lyons. “(Rehabilitation) puts the building on the markets and tax rolls at a higher rate and helps support lower floor businesses,” stated Allesee.

Yet another benefit of redeveloping existing buildings is energy efficiency. “The greenest building is the one that already exists,” Kearney said. He indicated that it takes 40 years for a new energy-efficient building to recuperate the amount of energy used in its construction, and 65 years if an existing building is demolished to make way for the new. At this point in the process, funding is being sought for rehabilitation projects. In the rehabilitation of the Van Allen Building, funding was derived from a number of sources. These included grants and tax credits.

According to Allesee, the State Historic Tax Credit can be used toward the rehabilitation of buildings listed on the historical registry. Allesee stated that currently, up to \$20 million in Historic Tax Credits is available, but the legislature is looking to raise that amount to \$50 million.

As for which buildings would be redeveloped, Allesee stated that the city has a listing of unoccupied upper floor buildings. From this list a building with high impact and appeal would be selected. Along with the Van Allen Building, the Armstrong Building and the Howes Building are examples of structures which have had upper floor residential rehabilitation.