

News

Downtowns get a boost

Clawson, Hazel Park included in county mentoring program.

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By Elizabeth A. Katz, Daily Tribune Staff Writer

Officials in both Clawson and Hazel Park were pleased to learn recently that their respective downtowns have been included in the Main Street Oakland County Mentoring Program.

Inclusion in the program is designed to provide communities insight into the service offerings and benefits of participating in Main Street Oakland County and allows them many of the same benefits as those communities with full-fledged member status.

The announcement that Clawson and Hazel Park were included came late last week at the 11th annual Heritage Conference, put on by the Oakland County Planning & Economic Development, which runs the Main Street Oakland County program.

Joan Horton, secretary for the Clawson Downtown Development Authority, said she believes inclusion in the mentoring program will allow them the chance to define Clawson's own sense of place

"Clawson has such a wonderful, rich history," she said. "The intent is to revitalize the downtown while keeping our identity. The goal isn't to turn us into a clone of another city. It's to preserve our whole sense of space. I think we need some help to develop that."

Clawson Mayor Penny Luebs, who attended the Heritage Conference, said inclusion in the mentoring program provides the city with the technical and training pieces for revitalization.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for Clawson to continue to grow," she said. "I think it will be a win-win situation for the businesses and those of us who live in Clawson. Oakland County has the resources that we don't have."

Oakland County Commissioner Tim Burns, who represents Clawson and Troy, said he assisted in putting Clawson DDA officials in touch with those at the county.

"I've been a supporter of having Clawson included in this program since I was elected," he said. "It's a great program that really works to leverage the resources of the county to promote walkable, family-friendly downtowns."

Burns, as a former planning commissioner, said Clawson has made strides in the last few years in revitalizing the downtown. Efforts include redistricting portions of the downtown and abutting neighborhoods and establishing rules governing the look of businesses, building uses, signs and parking.

Selected communities can participate in the mentoring program for up to two years. It is meant to increase the number of communities participating in the Main Street program, which strives to maximize the economic potential of a downtown and to preserve a sense of place for Oakland County's historic commercial districts.

Right now, Royal Oak and Ferndale have full-fledged status as members of Main Street Oakland County. Ferndale officials will work with Clawson officials through the mentoring program.

Hazel Park is yet to be partnered with a neighboring community but city officials say they are eager to learn what sort of resources they can use

through the county. The city already has made strides in improving the downtown, specifically with façade improvement grants.

"From my standpoint, the City of Hazel Park is very pleased to be part of the Main Street program and we look to use this as a tool to bolster economic development in the city of Hazel Park," said City Manager Ed Klobucher.

Hazel Park has been working with their marketing staff to become part of the mentoring program.

"We're just really excited to work with the county and for them to bring their resources down to us," said Angela Schofield, economic development coordinator with Hazel Park. "I think that will do a lot to spur additional economic development. Hazel Park is just really perfectly positioned to take part in these programs."

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