

Movers and shakers convene for downtown improvement

By Jared Field

jfield@cliomessenger.com • 810.766.6314

VIENNA TWP. — So what's up with the downtown anyway?

There's a growing undercurrent of support from the movers and shakers in the Northern Tier to give Clio's downtown business district a major shot in the arm.

On Nov. 13, a group of at least 75 residents came together as part of a forum sponsored by the Healthy Community Initiative and the Regional Planning Board at Mott Community College's Northern Tier campus.

The focus was to create awareness and support for forward-thinking cooperation with the goal of creating fundamental health improvement in the region — and to breathe some life into downtown Clio, to boot.

"The consensus of the entire Clio area is that we want to support downtown Clio," said Nate Jonker, chief executive officer of the Regional Planning Board and director of the Healthy Com-



Staff photo • Jared Field

▲ Organizers of the Healthy Community Initiative and Regional Planning Board's recent forum on community health hope to rid the downtown business district of For Sale signs like the one pictured.

munity Initiative. "We really don't know how exactly to go about that, but we really want the Clio downtown business people to step up and let us know what we can do to help."

The keynote speaker at the event was Candace Bales, executive director of the Downtown Management Board and Development

► Shakers, Page 2



Submitted photo

◀ This photograph of downtown Clio in the roaring 1920s adorns a wall at city hall. The photograph was taken at the intersection of Vienna and Mill Streets, pointing west.

Shakers: Locals
leaders want
improvement | Page 1

Authority in Bay City.

Bales spoke about historic trends that have hastened the decline of once-vibrant city centers and how to curb that.

"The city was the center of commerce," said Bales, who presented photographic evidence of the decline of city centers. "But something happened. ... We lost something."

What happened to cities and the businesses that supported them, at least ostensibly, isn't solely the fault of that four-letter word: mall.

Changes in consumption patterns, new and different forms of transportation and even the manner in which taxes are levied changed cit-

ies fundamentally.

In the past several years, Bay City has become a model for restoring not only urban infrastructure, but also the very idea of what it means to live, work and play downtown.

Bales hammered home the concept of a vibrant central business district being the force behind even broader revitalization plans.

"How a place looks and feels is fundamental to downtown development," said Bales.

For Jonker, Bales' presentation wasn't an inspiration as much as a reaffirmation of plans that are expected to come to fruition in Clio in coming years.

Don Lee, a long-standing volunteer in the Clio community and an architect with THA & Associates in Flint, is at the center of much of

the long-term planning for downtown Clio.

Lee has been a designer for many local projects involving the Clio School District, Clio Amphitheater and Clio Fire Department. He is also involved in the Safe Routes to School project, which has been planned for future implementation.

"Don Lee is already heading up a group to look at the refurbishing of downtown, and they are starting to make some plans now for the outsides of buildings," said Jonker, whose vision also includes strategies to make Clio a more "walkable" city. "Our new Clio Chamber (of Commerce) office downtown has already shown some good results, and the farmers market has been a big success. So, there are little things that tell us that people are willing to

come from outside to downtown. Many people believe that downtown should be vibrant."

Jonker also touched on other plans being discussed, including art walks and galleries downtown and a free health clinic sponsored by local churches.

However, the most important message, at least for Jonker, is that a healthy city isn't built in a day.

"One of the things that I took away from (the presentation) was that it's going to take some time," he said. "It doesn't happen overnight. You have to have money for events to draw people to downtown, and you need to market all the time."

The forum had representation from numerous local organizations, including the school district, the Ruth Mott Foundation, the Genesee

County Health Department, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint and the Rotary Club.

Henry Hatter, member of the regional planning board and president of the Clio Area Board of Educa-

tion, spoke with obvious glee about the progress of the Healthy Community Initiative in 2008 and praised the continued cooperation among organizations at all levels.

"We are very excited about the future," said Hatter.