



February 17, 2009

Dear Ypsilanti Neighbors and Friends:

The dire state of the economy is making headlines daily. Automotive plants all across Michigan are threatened with layoffs or closure. Many communities in our state are only now beginning to deal with the economic crisis. But the city of Ypsilanti has long been confronting serious economic problems. For example, after years of winding down operations, Ypsilanti's largest taxpayer, ACH, closed its doors in December.

In 2008 the city met its economic challenges head-on by passing a balanced two-year budget. Thirteen vacant city staff positions were eliminated to balance the budget. Water Street bond payments have been set aside through 2011. The [2008 audit report](#) gives the city a "clean" rating.

With this firm financial footing, the city of Ypsilanti is transforming itself from an industrial city to a city of knowledge, culture, and entertainment. This change is evidenced by the swift renovation of the Mack and Mack storefront on Michigan Avenue where the SPARK East small business incubator will be moving in soon, the announcement that the Midwest Sliders minor league baseball team will be playing this summer at Oestrike Stadium on the EMU campus, and the Internet data transferred by the 12,000 users of Wireless Ypsi.

The city of Ypsilanti's transformation will continue in 2009 with these efforts:

Consideration of Water Street Offers

At the end of 2008, the city had received two offers for property along Michigan Avenue and two letters of intent for property south of the Michigan Avenue parcels. Developers are now taking an interest in established communities like Ypsilanti instead of in green spaces that require building a new community. The [Water Street](#) redevelopment project is a direct beneficiary of this development shift. City council has decided to divide Water Street into parcels that can be bundled together or sold separately. This strategy allows smaller developers to bid on portions of the property.

To evaluate proposals from developers, city council decided on this process:

1. City receives letter of intent and purchase agreement from developer
2. City staff reviews purchase agreement and negotiates with developer
3. City advisory committee makes recommendation
4. City council decides to stop or proceed

5. Developer performs due diligence (approximately one year)
6. Developer closes on property
7. City grants approvals and developer starts construction

As you can see, this deliberative process will create a Water Street development that will serve downtown Ypsilanti for future generations.

In the meantime, city council is considering funding options for demolition of the remaining buildings on the property. Special city council meetings updating the progress of the Water Street redevelopment will be held on the fourth Tuesday at 7 p.m. through June 2009. All meetings will be held at city hall and will be open to all.

Expansion of Riverside Arts Center

Ypsilanti's [Riverside Arts Center](#) is increasing its space in downtown Ypsilanti. The RAC has installed an elevator to provide a fire stair and handicapped-access for the RAC and its three Off-Center floors (the RAC Off-Center is recently acquired space in the DTE building just south of the RAC). This space is being renovated along with the RAC lobby. The lobby renovation features the historic ticket booth from Ann Arbor's Hill Auditorium.

Currently the RAC is a popular venue for local theater groups and for *Telling It*, a community-based creative arts and literacy program for young people ages seven to twenty-one. The new elevator, expansion of space, and renovation will further the RAC mission of sustaining a thriving cultural arts center in downtown Ypsilanti.

Vetting of Blueprint for Downtown Ypsilanti

This past year, the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority contracted with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and consultants HyettPalma to create the five-Year [Blueprints for Downtown strategic plan](#). With infrastructure improvements like the Michigan Avenue median now in place, the emphasis can shift to marketing and to making downtown a vibrant, walkable historic community. The strategic plan outlines a four-point initiative:

- *Organization*: Getting everyone working toward the same vision for downtown
- *Promotion*: Getting more people to visit downtown
- *Design*: Getting downtown working well and into top physical shape
- *Economic Restructuring*: Making downtown businesses healthier

On January 24, about forty downtown business people and community volunteers met to kick off the four-point plan. Look for further progress in 2009.

Opening of Rutherford Pool this Summer

Even though the infrastructure of Rutherford pool is aging, the Friends of Rutherford Pool are happy to report that the pool will open again this summer. In the long-term, the [Ann Arbor YMCA](#) is interested in sponsoring recreation programs in Ypsilanti and is specifically interested in Rutherford Pool. The Y will first conduct a marketing study to determine if Recreation Park is an appropriate place for a new pool. Next, the Y will conduct a funding and operational feasibility study.

In the meantime, the Y sponsored a sports day camp in August 2008 and is interested in sponsoring more programs in Ypsilanti in 2009. The involvement of the Ann Arbor YMCA has been a welcome addition to recreation in Ypsilanti.

Ongoing Ave Maria Campus Renovations

The former Ave Maria Campus on West Forest is now owned and under renovation by Schoolpictures.com, a private company that provides affordable photographic services for students and also makes donations back to schools. The renovated site will feature offices, a photographic studio, and production space. A total investment of \$4 million is anticipated. The city is supporting Schoolpictures.com with a brownfield tax incentive.

This outstanding example of adaptive reuse will put the campus back on the tax rolls with a business that will capitalize on its proximity to EMU, U-M, and Washtenaw Community College.

Renovation of Riverside Park Gazebo and Deck

In 2008, the [Depot Town Community Development Corporation](#) began renovations in Riverside Park. In collaboration with Washtenaw Community College, the DTCCDC [renovated the Riverside Park gazebo and deck](#) on the Huron River. In 2009, the DTCCDC will continue to [work with regional partners to secure funding for more renovations](#) in Frog Island and Recreation Park.

Completion of College Heights Neighborhood Walking Path

For nearly a decade College Heights neighbors have lobbied for a walking path that connects the west end of their neighborhood to Hewitt Road. Over the years, the path was delayed because EMU and the city couldn't agree on a location for it. Late last year, EMU president Sue Martin ordered the installation of a paved and lighted walkway on the University House grounds. With this decision, President Martin has initiated a new era of cooperation between EMU and the Ypsilanti community. We can all look forward to even more beneficial partnerships with EMU in 2009.

Filming of *Whip It*

The movie *Whip It*, directed by Drew Barrymore, was shot in Ypsilanti this past summer. The filming included a mix of excitement, renovation, and happy inconvenience around downtown and a couple of Ypsilanti's neighborhoods. The movie is not set in Ypsilanti. When you see the movie, you'll have to decide for yourself if Ypsilanti looks like Bodeen, Texas.

Kudos to City Staff

Special thanks go to Ypsilanti city manager Ed Koryzno and city staff for doing an exceptional job in 2008. Not only have they kept the city humming with fewer employees, they make our city a place where we can love to live, work, and play.

In spite of the economy, the transformation of the city of Ypsilanti will continue in 2009.

With best regards,
Paul Schreiber
Mayor, [City of Ypsilanti](#)