

# 'When it's done, we won't recognize the city of Clio': Movers and shakers meet to unveil master plan for downtown Clio renovation

by Jared Field | The Clio Messenger

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Jared Field | The Clio Messenger Don Lee, of THA Architects and Engineers, gave a truncated presentation of the master plan for downtown revitalization to the Clio Area Board of Education. He gave a much longer and more involved presentation to interested parties at Mott Community College's Northern Tier campus last week.

**VIENNA TOWNSHIP, Michigan** -- As Clio area movers and shakers all seem unified in their desire to build on downtown Clio's past, it's clear that the first fruits of the future are starting to get heavy on the vine.

On Monday night at Mott Community College's Northern Tier campus, members of the Downtown Development Authority and other interested parties gazed through an open window into Clio's future.

Don Lee, of THA Architects and Engineers in Flint, rolled out the master plan with slides of what downtown Clio could look like in the coming years -- renovations to the north and south alleys, a coordinated facade program, new buildings, downtown festivals and major landscaping projects.

The grand plan is to preserve the historic elements of downtown while ushering in a new, more modern look.

After the presentation, Clio Mayor Bob Smith, whose City Commission has worked with THA from the very start of its downtown blueprints program, tried and failed to be guarded about his optimism.

"We've taken massive strides to get this (master plan) done; it's going to be great," said Smith. "But, it's going to be a five- or six-year process.

"When it's done, we won't recognize the city of Clio."

Lee said that the ethos of the entire downtown project is to, in simple terms, bring people back into downtown Clio -- and hope they bring their purses and wallets with them.

"We have a plan and I think we've identified the most important things ... and I think we're moving to the next stage, which is implementation," said Lee, who said that the DDA plans to offer incentives to get business owners involved. "I think a lot of the (business owners) want to participate. Many are looking for direction and some are saying, 'I'm ready to go, tell me what to do.' We've had about five (participate), altogether. I think there's quite a bit of interest, of course there are some that are hesitant. I mean, it's a tough economic decision this year."

In order to hasten implementation of the plan, the DDA hopes to be able to provide no-interest short-term loans and low-interest loans to business owners in Clio that wish to participate. Another incentive, according to Lee, could come in the form of state and federal stimulus grants for infrastructure improvements. Such grants received by the DDA for facade or building improvements would be distributed on a formula basis to those participating in the program.

The key, according to Lee, is private participation -- renovation of public facilities is only one small part of the broader plan for development. It's going to take a renewed economic vigor to invest in Clio's future -- a belief that better days are ahead.

There is, of course, a tinge of reality injected into the conversation -- it all takes money, and lots of it -- and it's becoming clear that locals shouldn't expect stimulus package funds in the near future.

But, being prepared never hurts anyone.

"A stimulus package would be a real blessing," said Lee, who also said that the DDA should expect three to four participants in the program, annually. "Usually with these downtown projects you're looking for some source of public money. But, the businesses can't just set back and wait for the DDA to do it. We have to get everyone involved, and I think we're doing a much better job of that."

Smith echoed the sentiment, and is confident Clio's preparedness will pay off in the future.

"There's no doubt in my mind we will benefit from being prepared," he said. "It's like the projects with the stimulus (package), if they're shovel-ready, they'll go. And our shovels in the ground already."



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Clio Messenger This rendering of downtown Clio's northern facade program greeted visitors at the unveiling of the downtown master plan at Mott Community College's Northern Tier campus in Vienna Township on Monday night. Don Lee, of THA in Flint, showed off future plans for downtown revitalization.

Lee also discussed the prospect of a more permanent home for the Clio Area Farmers Market, redesigns to the downtown bump-outs, a fall 2009 music festival in downtown and small improvements (including investment in signage) to make downtown Clio more navigable for out-of-towners.

Lee also made the rounds to the Clio Area Board of Education on Tuesday night, where he presented a truncated version of the master plan.