

# Space is big issue for growth in Isabella

## Vacant land is hard to find in Mt. Pleasant

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While Isabella County has seen booming commercial growth in the past five years, Mt. Pleasant has been running out of space, according to city officials.

Vacant land for new development in the city is down to a few hundred acres, said City Planner Tony Kulick.

Residents shouldn't expect chain stores like Art Van and Kohls to move into the city because there simply isn't enough room, Kulick said. Most new business, residential and industrial growth will have to take place in Union Township, he said.

Despite tightening commercial space in the city, businesses are still moving in and property is being redeveloped. T.J. Maxx, Old Navy and D.E.B. are a few of the major new additions to the area, while more small businesses and national franchises are moving in soon.

Tim Hortons is scheduled to move in this summer across from Meijer, on Pickard, Kulick said, and a coffee shop and restaurant is also being added where the current Pretty Paws building is located on Mission.

Completion of Phase 2 of the Broomfield Mall has also opened an additional 16,000 square feet of retail space.

A new retail mall by Encore Development is in the works on Bluegrass Road between Mission and Isabella. Five of the stores are expected to be "big, national, highly recognized, well-known retailers," Middle Michigan Development Corp. President George Dunn said.

"I just happen to know who four or five are, but I shouldn't be the one to release them," Dunn said.

A site plan for Menards is being reviewed, said Union Township Zoning Administrator Woody Woodruff. Other stores have not been announced.

The retail and restaurant industries will continue to grow in the county, since most of the large, urban markets



A Tim Horton's is slated to go in in this empty lot on Pickard Street in Mt. Pleasant.

Sun photograph by LISA YANICK

have become saturated, said Dunn.

Isabella County will continue to experience growth due to the presence of an untapped secondary market, the Searing Eagle Casino and Resort, the continual growth of quality golf courses and Central Michigan University's growth, Dunn said.

"We are still basically perceived to be, and I think in all reality are, a college town, Dunn said. "That's really what makes Mt. Pleasant who it is and what it is," he added.

The presence of the university and continual growth make Isabella County an ideal secondary market for national franchises, he said.

While growth in the retail sector is healthy, it is the manufacturing and industrial base that worries most mid-Michigan residents.

The lack of industrial park properties makes new industrial development difficult, said Kulick. A 10-acre parcel in the Broomfield industrial park near Isabella is virtually the only space left, he said.

"Once that's sold, then new industrial development in the city is going to be difficult to do without tearing something down and rebuilding," he said.

MMDC is still working to bring in new industrial busi-

nesses, but the majority of its efforts are spent on retention and expansion, Dunn said.

"We have an excellent track record in this community of growing and attracting and retaining quality industry," he said. Companies such as Bandit Industries and Morbark Industries continue to thrive despite the state's economic woes, he said.

"I don't think the state of Michigan is dead in the water like many would suggest it is. I think it's tragic to believe that we will no longer attract industrial manufacturing firms, because I think we will. That's our bread and butter, that's our strength, that's who we've always been since the early 1900s and that's who we'll continue to be. So to give up on the industrial attraction I think is foolish," Dunn said.

The birth of the technology sector through CMU has brought an entirely new type of industry to the county. The Center for Applied Research and Technology at CMU is a "shining jewel" for the area, according to Dunn.

The nanotechnology program has already drawn companies like Dendritic Nanotechnologies and MultiGen Diagnostics. It has created 23 new, high-paying jobs and led to the expansion of the univer-

sity's wet laboratory, said Brent Case, technology business development manager for CMU Research Corp.

"The nanotechnology research that they're doing here is putting Mt. Pleasant on the map as a biotech hot spot," he said.

Apartment-style housing also continues to boom as a result of the university, though it's difficult to tell whether the effects will be beneficial.

Tallgrass Apartments, The Village at Bluegrass, Copper Beach and Chase Run Apartments are all substantially sized complexes that have been added in the past five years.

When there are more apartments than renters, it compels owners to continually reinvest in their properties by adding amenities to compete, but there may be downsides, Kulick said.

The overabundance of housing is "gross" and "absurd," according to Dunn. "One of these days, we're going to find ourselves with a lot of half vacant apartments," he said.

Preservation and improvement continue to take place in downtown Mt. Pleasant, Kulick said. Landscaping and parking changes are being

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implemented in order to preserve the area and make it a place for people to gather and shop, he said.

"Downtown is important to a community. It's a sense of place," he said.

The Bronze Legends project is also contributing to the historic value of the area by placing bronze statues of historic items downtown. The bronzes include a handbill for the "Miracle Man," the first film shown at the Broadway Theater.

Development and growth in Isabella County's diverse set of industries is expected to continue with goals of using current space efficiently and enhancing collaboration between government and private organizations.

In order to continue growing and improving the area, duplication in the public sector has to be eliminated, Dunn said. "I think the growing partnership and cooperation among governmental entities is absolutely essential."