

Plainwell to get facelift

The Trojan Torch

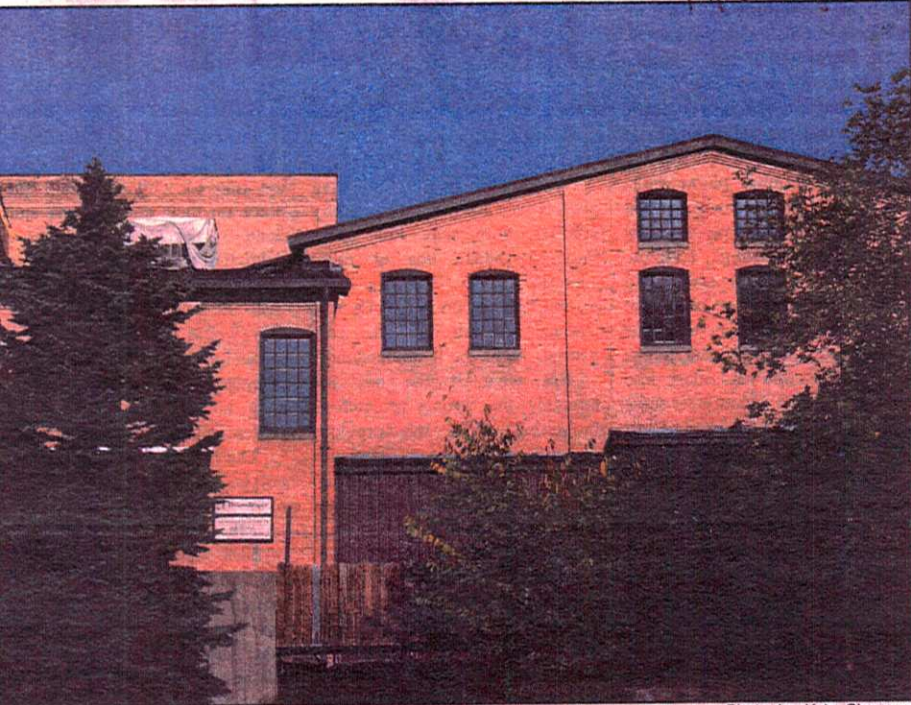


Photo by Kyle Simmons

Above is a shot of just one of the buildings that made up Plainwell Paper. The building, which has been vacant for nearly six years, will possibly become the new city hall.

After six years, city gets rights to paper mill

By John Jakimiak
Staff Writer

In November of the year 2000, Plainwell Paper Inc. shut its doors for good putting about 300 people without a job and leaving 35 acres of land rendered useless at the epicenter of Plainwell. Plainwell has revolved around this paper mill since it was built in 1886. The mill once consisted of 18% of the city's taxable value in 1998 before it's decline.

For six years the mill has sat vacant and untouched, except for the band of "ninja" vandals who visited every so often. About three years ago, the city started having meetings on what should be done with the land.

Plainwell mayor Rick Brooks said, "After six years the city has come up with the money to take back what the community deserves. This paper mill has always been a major factor in the small town of Plainwell. If you know anyone who has lived in this town for some time they are linked to someone who worked at the paper mill whether it is a friend, brother, sister, aunt, uncle or cousin you know someone who has worked at the mill. It is a relic of our community and the city now owns what it deserves."

On August 31, 2006 the papers were signed for ownership. Immediately after the finalizing of the purchase on September 1, 2006, Allegan County jail inmates were brought in to help

start the clean up process. Soil samples have been taken to start the environmental cleansing. Weyerhaeuser, the company responsible for environmental contamination cleanup, will be taking care of all the environmental issues. Weyerhaeuser has been very cooperative about meeting clean up standards and very easy to work with through clean up process.

Brooks said, "This is a rare opportunity to redevelop 35 acres of land at the heart of the city and I want to make the best of it by doing it right and making it look good with the most benefit for the community." Brooks also stated, "The Geographic location

Please continue reading, B1

Paper mill to get face

of the mill is a prime spot for redevelopment. Not only is it in a unique city, beautiful Island city to be exact, but it is also only one mile away from a major highway, ten mile away from Kalamazoo, thirty miles from Grand Rapids and thirty five from the shoreline but to top it all of it's right next to a river!"

Most of the buildings will be taken out except for the three story brick office building will be renovated and eventually become the town hall. More parking space will be required and some green space would be desirable for a court yard, traffic flow improvements will also be needed. The redevelopment will mostly consist of mixed housing and condos along the river front.

The feelings of the people of plainwell is generally the same, optimism. Plainwell science teacher Tom Rembowitch said "It's really fantastic to see the downtown area moving along, it will be nice to see something done with it." Plainwell english

teacher Jackie Hope said "If they built condos my husband and I would buy one, but I think they need to keep them to one story high for the aging population that will be living there." Plainwell english teacher Robert Kouw said "I hope they build the new building with a traditional look to keep the continuity of the town."

One former employee and mother of Plainwell student Sue Lacoss said, "It was really sad to see the place get shut down, working there was like one big family. I still see people who I used to work with quite often. I'm just glad something productive is being done with it." Plainwell resident Cathy Farrence said, "I just hope to see something built that will draw people in. Anything like restaurants, clothing stores, entertainment business. Some of the people I know and work with that live out of town drive all the way to plainwell to go to the M-89 cinema because of it's very low prices compared to other theaters around. And

continued from front page

if we give people more reasons than just M-89 cinema to come to Plainwell ,then just imagine what the effect will be."

Plainwell senior Sophie Hartman said, "I hope they turn it into something that will benefit the community because Plainwell needs something to bring us together." Plainwell senior Aaron Brown said "I think its better than letting it sit and get broken into and being vandalized."

Some ideas for development are a bakery, clothing stores, maybe a brewery/pub, and retail shops. The idea is to add businesses that will not interfere with other businesses in town. The goal is to get 3-4 major developers someone with some real power because it's going to take a lot to accomplish the redevelopment. The time frame for finishing is unknown but are striving for sooner than later of course. But all in all these ideas are not written in stone so it is yet to be seen the true outcome. Only

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