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City of Plainwell boosting its economy

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When an industrial plant shuts down in a small community, jobs are lost and the company either moves its operations elsewhere or simply goes out of business. The effect on the town can be devastating, and sometimes there's little hope that the private sector will come up with a quick remedy.

Such was the situation in Plainwell, which has taken the initiative to help attract jobs once provided by Plainwell Paper Inc. The company declared bankruptcy nearly six years ago and left an idle mill that had employed some 300 workers.

Thursday in Grand Rapids the city closed a deal to take ownership of the plant, which sits on a 35-acre site. On Aug. 7, a bankruptcy court ruled that the city could buy the property by paying approximately \$500,000 in taxes, which the company didn't pay from 2000 to this year. Allegan County did its part by waiving about \$273,000 in fees and penalties related to the unpaid taxes.

Now Allegan County residents have a sizable investment in an abandoned paper mill. Plainwell officials are extremely upbeat about the deal.

"It is really cool," declared Mayor Rick Brooks. "That mill now belongs to the city and to the people of this town. This will change what the face of Plainwell looks like."

We share Brooks' enthusiasm. It could take several years, but the plan for the property is exciting. Engineers will soon gather samples necessary to determine what environmental clean-up steps are required. The city plans to develop the property for commercial and residential use. We hope the private sector will determine that the site has long-term possibilities.

Instead of wringing their hands, as have other communities when a major industrial plant shuts its doors and puts many people out of work, Plainwell's leaders are doing something about it. The use of public funds for economic development is hardly a new concept. On a much larger scale, remember the federal government's bailouts of Chrysler Corp. and the city of New York? Both are still in business.

We admire the aggressive action of Plainwell and Allegan County, and we wish them success in this bold venture.

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