

## BH, Niles get help with parks ideas

By LOUISE WREGG - HP Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, February 4, 2015 5:00 am

Benton Harbor and Niles are among the seven cities chosen statewide to receive technical assistance through PlacePlans, an effort between the Michigan Municipal League and Michigan State University to help cities attract and retain residents and businesses.

Benton Harbor's project will be on how to best develop Dwight Pete Mitchell City Center Park on Main Street.

"What that entails is a partnership with a professor and students from Michigan State University to help us develop a civic engagement strategy as well as programming and design for City Center Park," said Benton Harbor Assistant City Manager Marja Winters at Monday's City Commission meeting.

In the fall of 2013, then-Emergency Manager Tony Saunders II announced that a farmer's market with a pavilion similar to Shadowland Pavilion at Silver Beach in St. Joseph would be built at City Center Park with help from a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant.

But not everyone thinks City Center Park is the right place for a farmer's market, Winters said.

"Basically, what we learned from stakeholder meetings we had last year about the farmer's market is that there are a lot of different opinions about what should happen at City Center Park - what it should look like, its functionality, its design, etc," she said.

After the meeting, she said the city will provide an \$8,000 match to receive \$36,000 in services from PlacePlans. She said some of the matching money will come from the Benton Harbor Parks and Recreation Conservancy and other sources.

The city applied for a \$99,999 grant from the USDA for the pavilion and received \$60,000 in the fall of 2014. The USDA was interested in setting up a farmer's market because Benton Harbor is considered a food desert.



### BH, Niles get help with parks ideas

City Center Park in downtown Benton Harbor is pictured Tuesday. The city is getting a grant to help plot park improvements.

Winters said finding the right location for the farmer's market is critical.

"We don't want to spend all this money to build a farmer's market and pavilion (at City Center Park) and two years down the road, everybody's like, 'This is not the right place for it and that's money wasted,'" Winters said.

The PlacePlans team is expected to meet with Benton Harbor officials later in the week.

The Niles' project will look at how to develop several parcels along the St. Joseph River.

The river has been the city's primary recreational destination since its east bank was developed as Riverfront Park in the 1990s, according to a press release from the Michigan Municipal League. The city wants to enhance key sites and link them with existing waterfront amenities.

The other cities chosen to receive help through PlacePlans are Boyne City, Lathrup Village, Monroe, Saginaw and Traverse City.

Now that the cities and projects have been identified, key stakeholders will be identified and multiple public meetings will be scheduled in each city.

Regular updates will be posted at <http://place.making.mml.org/place-plans/>.

This is the third year PlacePlans has helped communities.

Contact: [lwrege@TheHP.com](mailto:lwrege@TheHP.com), 932-0361, Twitter: [@HPWrege](https://twitter.com/HPWrege)