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TOP STORY

Effort underway to restart harbor planning process

By LOUISE WREGE - HP Staff Writer Aug 7, 2018 Updated 36 min ago



The St. Joseph-Benton Harbor inner harbor is shown Monday, as seen while looking east from the M-63 bridge. Revitalizing the harbor has long been a goal of area planners.

Photos by Louise Wrege / HP staff

BENTON HARBOR — Someday the Benton Harbor-St. Joseph harbor could be surrounded by restaurants, museums and other entertainment that increases the economic vitality of the area.

The Twin Cities Harbor Visioning Charrette will hold its first meeting seeking public input at 6 p.m. Sept. 19 at Kinexus, 499 W. Main St., Benton Harbor. A charrette is fast-paced community planning that seeks input from all stakeholders.

Donald Carpenter, the consultant guiding the planned charrette, spoke to Benton Harbor city commissioners Monday.

“The idea is to facilitate long-term sustainable strategies that benefit Michigan’s Great Lakes coastal communities,” he said of the initiative, which is funded through the Michigan Sea Grant, Michigan State University and the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes.

The initiative seeks to continue the work of the Twin Cities Harbor Study, which was completed by the Andrews University Department of Architecture and Southwest Michigan Planning Commission in 2015.

One way to find more information and to stay connected is to visit the charrette’s Facebook page – the Twin Cities Harbor Visioning Charrette.

“We’re going to be doing focus groups ... where we’ll be meeting with business organizations, community groups that have a vested interest in the project,” he said.

Carpenter said one important group the charrette will talk to is youth.

“We really want to make sure that we really capture the voice of the youth,” he said. “They’re obviously the future. We want to make sure that their interests are heard so we can make it a better place for them to live.”

He said the project will end with harbor governance meetings.

“What will be the strategy to actually get the recommendations that come from the community on the books and able to move forward through implementation?” he said.

A team of engagement specialists will come to the area to facilitate the Design Charrette, which will be Oct. 9-11. The meetings will be at 6 p.m. each day at Kinexus.

“We do a series of design exercises,” he said. “We listen to the community. We hear about what the strengths of the harbor are for them. What does it mean for them to have this waterfront community? What can make it a better place in the future?”

He said they gather the information and put together three possible strategies for the future.

Carpenter said the community is invited to a final presentation, where the three strategies are voted on. The date for the final presentation has not yet been set.

Mayor Marcus Muhammad said the charrette gives the city an opportunity to jump-start economic development.

“Our harbor, our river front, is very underutilized,” he said. “However, I think that the process of engagement and involving the community is absolutely necessary prior to the investment of economic development. I look forward to the opportunity to explore the possibilities and potential of our river front, which is one of our most precious resources.”

City Commissioner Duane Seats said he wants to make certain that any development benefits the city’s residents.

“It’s all right to have a dream, but if it’s not going to positively affect the inner city of Benton Harbor, then it’s just going to become a picture,” he said.

More information can also be found on the website

www.miseagrant.umich.edu/smallharborsustainability/communities/st-joseph-benton-harbor.

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