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LTU students breathe life into center city

BY PAT MURPHY
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As Southfield explored the idea of developing a city center, the city turned to a local resource: architecture students at Lawrence Technological University.

The results were fresh and eye-opening, planning director Nicholas Banda advised the city council.

Fourteen junior students at LTU came up with a variety of ideas that could be incorporated into the city's revised master plan, he said at Monday's council meeting.

As the main assignment of the fall semester, the students were asked to look at the quarter-mile-square area at the northwest corner of Evergreen and Civic Center Drive.

They were asked to plan a development that would attract people, explained Joongsub Kim, the assistant architect professor who oversaw the project. "(It is) something that could be incorporated into the city's master plan," he said.

For student Alex Banchero, the target area was familiar.

"I knew the site like the back of my hand," said Banchero, a former Lathrup Village resident who attended McIntyre Elementary and Birney Middle School before graduating from Birmingham Groves High School in 2003. "I used to skateboard in that area."

Banchero teamed up with fellow students Irsida Bejo of Royal Oak and Raymond Schaver of Warren to produce one of several plans for what might be considered as a downtown. Those plans were on display Friday afternoon in the Parks and Recreation Building.

"But it had to be different than the downtowns in Birmingham or Royal Oak," Banchero said. "It (Southfield's central area) would be in competition with other cities," he said, so it had to be different.

"It needs an identity," teammate Bejo said.

Roy Bell, a former city councilman and a new member of the Southfield Planning Commission, said the students' efforts will be put to good use.

"We've had projects in the past when LTU students were involved in isolated (city) projects," he said. "But these plans will be helpful as Southfield updates our master plan."

Equally important, Bell said, "I hope we continue using LTU as an important resource."
