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CFP TROY

TROY | Looking down the road at Maple business

Lawrence Tech students run study

January 19, 2006

BY CECILIA OLECK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

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As the demand for certain businesses changes, Maple Road in Troy needs to change, too, so members of the Troy business community are turning to the experts to tell them how to do that.

In this case, the experts are students at Lawrence Technological University, based in Southfield.

Starting this week, undergraduate students at the school will take a close look at the stretch of Maple Road that runs through Troy.

They'll talk with people who own businesses there. They'll analyze city policies and how the businesses there will be affected by the changing economy. And they'll draw and build models of what they envision happening there.

It's the focus of a course taught by LTU professor Joongsub Kim.

But it's also a partnership among City of Troy officials, members of Troy's business community and the school that is meant to benefit all three -- as well as Troy residents.

"We tried to achieve a good win-win," said Michele Hodges, president of the Troy Chamber of Commerce, which represents businesses in the city. One of the changes facing businesses along the corridor is how to find new uses for old buildings, such as offices in technology parks that aren't needed any longer for that purpose, Hodges said.

The city's rules don't allow for something like a dance studio to move in there, yet that might be a good way to use such sites, she said.

The students will gain business experience and class credits from conducting the study. The business community and city will get an idea about how to best use the Maple corridor.

Troy businesses are paying for the Maple Road corridor study, Hodges said. The estimate is about \$2,500.

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The effort with LTU comes as the city is beginning a different study to look at possible redevelopment along the Big Beaver corridor, and is starting a visioning process called "Troy Futures," which has residents, businesspeople and city officials coming together to plan what they would like the city to become.

The city's Downtown Development Authority is paying for the Big Beaver corridor study, which is budgeted for \$137,000.

LTU students participated in a similar project last year with the City of Southfield. They studied its City Centre.

The students responsible for the Maple Road corridor study will come up with a master plan for the area. They will look primarily at two scenarios: what will happen to the tax base along Maple Road if nothing is done there to spur and promote redevelopment, and what will happen if something is done, Hodges said.

But the city won't be required to incorporate the students' suggestions when making decisions, said Glen LeRoy, dean of the College of Architecture and Design at LTU.

It's meant to give members of the community a jumping-off point for possibilities along Maple Road, LeRoy said.

The Maple Road corridor study is expected to be completed by May and will be on display then. The Big Beaver study is expected to be completed sometime in the spring.

Contact **CECILIA OLECK** at 248-351-3692 or oleck@freepress.com.

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