

## OUR VIEW

# DOWNTOWN REVIVAL IS A MODEL

Government has been taking it on the chin a lot lately.

We think it's time to step back and look at it from another perspective.

Thanks to a public-private partnership and a long-range vision development by the community, a "revival" of sorts is happening in the City Center of Mankato-North Mankato, which has long been considered the heart of the cities. We are seeing not only a much-needed facelift but a massive investment from the private sector for what was formerly called "downtown."

It started with Envision 2020, a multi-faceted look from a cross-section of community members on how to advance in a number of quality of life aspects in our valley. One target was to bring our downtown, which was suffering from a number of setbacks from earlier attempts, back to life. Mankato city government consolidated city offices in Mankato Place and took over operation of the civic center. Meanwhile, the private sector created the City Center Partnership, a subsidiary of Greater Mankato Growth, focusing on awareness for the downtown area as a destination point.

From these seeds other development sprung up, including renovations of the Graif and the Landkamer buildings, the Emy Frentz Arts Center, construction of the Hilton Garden Inn and now the renovation of the HECO building for offices housing I&S group that will include condominiums on top.

Across the river, North Mankato has shown steady improvement and investments too, including the new Marigold office and residential building, Burton Architects' construction of a new office on a small lot across the street and the former Dollar Store conversion to a mix of commercial and residential. The city also added parking spaces and other street work to assist in the investment. I&S group was commissioned by North Mankato to provide some 3-D blueprints of what the Belgrade Avenue area could aspire to.

Meanwhile, Mankato City Manager Pat Hentges points to changes in the downtown streets as one key and pointing specifically to the Second Street extension over the Veterans Memorial Bridge. While taking some criticism for "lavish spending" on flowers and street lamps, the infrastructure work apparently helped spur more private development, such as the MinnStar Bank and a number of storefront rehabilitations in Old Town area.

And now the Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato has announced it would like to move into a remodeled Northwestern Office Building to make room at its hospital site. And with it comes about 100 jobs locating in the City Center, helping make that area more vibrant and appealing.

While we would expect public officials to invest in the city, it is exceptional when the private sector has so much belief in the city it is willing to risk its capital to make something happen.

This is a prime example of what good can come from compromise and partnership between public and private sectors. Public investment spurs private investment for a healthier community all around.