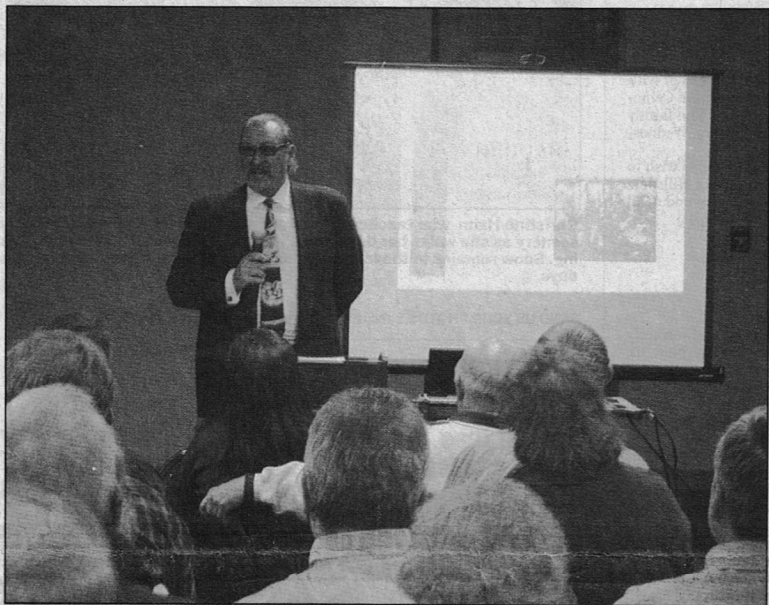


# IT'S UP TO US



Doyle Hyett of HyettPalma speaks to a packed house at the Hillsdale Community Library Monday night as he presented the Blueprint report. The report is intended to serve as a strategic plan for downtown revitalization. Below audience members listen intently to Hyett.

DAILY NEWS / THOMAS MARCETTI

## Residents must rally together to make plan work

By ERICA HOBBS  
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Hillsdale may have the Blueprint for growth for its downtown business district, but the key to success is collaboration.

Doyle Hyett, from consulting firm HyettPalma, stressed teamwork during his presentation of the downtown Hillsdale Blueprint plan Monday night.

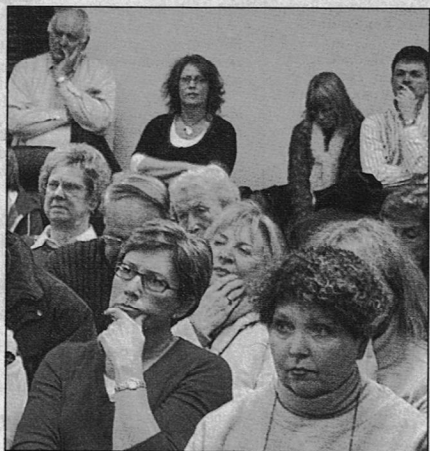
"If you can work together, there's nobody that can touch you," he said. "Showing unity is more important than anything else."

The 90-minute report was broken into four parts: Vision, the city's ideal dream; Market Analysis, the economic realities and sustainability of the dream; Course of Action, a five-year strategic plan and Management, determining who and how would implement the program.

The project was presented to more than 125 residents at the Hillsdale Community Library.

Hyett said 55 percent of the local population does most of its shopping at Wal-Mart and said the downtown must improve customer

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## BLUEPRINT

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service and atmosphere in order to compete.

"You've got to create a lot more than a place to get stuff," Hyett said. "You've got to create an aura."

A significant part of that aura is returning the town to its historical heritage by removing modern facades and creating a local historical district with guidelines to maintain the downtown's late-1800s style.

"History's your theme," Hyett said.

The plan called for making downtown safer and more accessible for both pedestrians and bikers and suggested "art racks," bike racks designed as pieces of art, to make biking easier and spruce up the town.

More art and entertainment in general were outlined as ways to improve the atmosphere.

The plan suggested having artwork and live musicians in restaurants and adding foliage, fountains or a clock tower outside to decorate the city's streets.

"(When it comes to flowers), the bang you get for your buck is a very significant bang," Hyett said.

One of the plan's most aggressive components was developing a strong connection between downtown and Hillsdale College.

## Parking and traffic suggestions:

- Increase parking fines from \$10 to \$20-\$25 to reduce violations
- Add more angled parking to make parking more convenient and slow traffic
- Create affordable residential parking permits for downtown residents
- Add ramps or decks to existing parking lots if additional downtown parking is needed; do not tear down existing buildings
- Create pedestrian crossings with signs that say "Yield to Pedestrians."

"It's critical we get a stronger link to that college and you," Hyett said.

The plan called for several student-friendly additions, including a late-night restaurant and a "Downtown/College Link," a pedestrian or bike walkway that would connect the two and make commuting safer and easier.

The plan also suggested a collaboration between the Police Department and the security at Hillsdale College to keep the path safe.

Safer streets in general was also a strong component of the plan.

Hyett said pedestrian safety in downtown is a serious issue and called for more pedestrian crosswalks, designated bike paths and "Yield to Pedestrian" signs to

## Business and Development

- Specialty retail stores
- Expanded business hours until at least 6:30-7 p.m.
- Outdoor dining and sidewalk vibrancy
- Compactors instead of dumpsters
- Succession plans for retiring business owners
- Maintaining first-floor retail and not allowing offices to break up retail clusters
- "One stop shop" at City Hall with information about city and business regulations
- Family and holiday events
- Community events
- More pronounced Web site separate from city

make the streets safer.

When it came to parking, Hyett said downtown parking was often taken by employees, instead of patrons, which made it more difficult to attract business.

The plan called for stronger parking enforcement, affordable parking permits for downtown residents and more angled parking spaces.

"It's not only convenient for you, but you're going to make a lot of people very happy," Hyett said.

City officials and residents alike were excited about the program.

City Manager Mike Mitchell said the plan was exactly what the

## Top list for downtown businesses

- Ethnic restaurants
- Casual apparel for men and women and children
- New and used bookstores
- Art gallery
- Bakery
- Downtown college restaurant/place open late hours

community needed to hear. "Some of it's a nudge, some of it is a kick in the pants," he said.

Mayor Michael Sessions said he was most interested in the market data.

"It was very informative," he said. "I hope it's a catalyst for growth in our downtown."

Hillsdale resident Jon Beckwith was most interested in the historical aspect of the project.

"If we bring Hillsdale back the way it was, it will give it (old-fashioned) charm," he said. "Bringing it back to the 1880s would be perfect."

Steve Vear, who also lives in Hillsdale, was also pleased with the plan, but said now we have to use it.

"I think it's a good place to start," he said. "So now we have to take action."

The full report will be available online at the city's Web site at <http://www.ci.hillsdale.mi.us/>.