



MIKE MURPHY

The Sibley Building, at 228 East Main St., once home to the department store of the same name, will be undergoing changes again in 2014. The building itself is undergoing renovation, even as a plan to move the Monroe Community College Damon City campus to State Street continues.

Brooks, Warren agree: MCC, city schools key to economic growth

By **MIKE MURPHY**

Daily Record Staff

Education will play a key role in improving the regional economic development potential in the immediate future and for many years down the road.

Monroe Community College will play a key role in economic growth, beginning as soon as next week, according to Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks.

But while working to better downtown and surrounding neighborhoods is important, improving the quality of city schools is the number-one economic issue facing the region that if neglected will drag the entire region into an abyss, said Rochester Mayor-elect Lovely A. Warren.

That only 5 percent of students are graduating with the necessary skills for meaningful employment or to advance to higher education is a "point of deep community shame," Warren said.

"This is the issue of our time upon which history will judge all of us," Warren said. "And God help us all if we fail to act right now."

Brooks was the keynote speaker Tuesday at the Rochester Downtown Development Corp. and Rochester Rotary Club's annual Vision-Futures luncheon. Warren, who was out of town attending a program for new mayors at Harvard University, provided her speech via a video message.

Charter schools will help to reverse course by offering parents options, Warren said.

"Education reform is a key piece of our economic development strategy," Warren said. "We need to have better performing city schools, high performing charter schools and affordable private schools in order to succeed."

A new downtown MCC campus can help to make a difference sooner, Brooks said.

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City schools, MCC key to growth

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Earlier this year, the County Legislature approved the purchase of State Street property from Eastman Kodak Co. paving the way for the controversial move of the Damon City campus from the Sibley Building, which is undergoing an extensive renovation.

Legislators on Dec. 10 will be asked to vote on bonding for the second and final rounds of funding needed to take the project, which, when completed by spring 2017, will enable the college to expand in both space and programming, from “the dreams of many to the reality of the community,” Brooks said.

It’s not easy to quantify the impact of a downtown campus on students, but studies do show the average student income increases \$8.20 for every dollar invested in the campus, Brooks said.

The campus also shows a \$110 million annual impact on the local economy. That the downtown campus is eligible for Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s new Start-Up NY program, a state program that creates tax-free zones for businesses that agree to locate near the state’s college campuses, is “an extra bonus,” Brooks said.

“I truly think that MCC will continue to have a major impact on what we do in

downtown Rochester and beyond,” Brooks said.

That’s not to downplay projects large and small that are recently completed or underway.

Redeveloping the Eastman Business Park will continue to be a focus in the years ahead, through the efforts of governments and Finger Lakes Regional Economic Development Council, Brooks said.

Brooks also highlighted rehabilitation projects of once vacant buildings that have provided for more opportunities for city living, in particular the Academy Building project across the street from the county office building.

Investment in downtown is important and will continue, Warren said, but it’s important that investment also helps the neighborhoods surrounding downtown.

One of her priorities will be the creation of a small business advisory council to generate ideas and programs to kick down the obstacles keeping the city from growing, Warren said.

“I am not going to build downtown and forget about our neighborhoods,” Warren said.

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