



December 11, 2009

Mini college town

Leaders must cooperate on MCC downtown campus.

Of all the downtown development projects touted at a community luncheon this week, arguably the most promising is the new campus for Monroe Community College.

It offers the potential to turn part of downtown into a mini college town, with its related retail and housing.

That's why it's important that as the college moves forward with selecting a site, public bodies and businesses work with it. There can't be the divisiveness that brought down the Renaissance Square project.

After all, a *Democrat and Chronicle* poll showed citizens strongly support a new campus, and MCC is a vital economic engine in the region, with its total enrollment growing 40 percent since 2000. There currently are about 3,300 students at its Damon campus housed in the Sibley Building on East Main. That building is poorly suited for the high-tech and social needs of students today.

When plans for a new campus went down with RenSquare's demise, MCC President Anne Kress quickly mobilized a staff committee to come up with site selection guidelines. Those guidelines, approved by trustees this week, reinforce the college's desire for a visible three- to four-acre location that would include green space and access to parking and public transportation, a necessity for many students.

Now it's time for transit director Mark Aesch to update the community on plans for a new bus terminal downtown. Arguments over the size of the terminal on the Main and Clinton parcel led to RenSquare's collapse. Aesch has repeatedly refused the Editorial Board's request for comment. As a public official, Aesch should be more open.

As plans move forward, Kress is right in saying, "We want a college campus, not just a high-rise building." Fortunately, there's still \$72 million in public money pledged for the project. MCC students need local leaders to follow through this time.