

# Momence plan draws praise as model for entire county

Go forward  
by preserving best  
of the past

**By Thomas Kapusta**

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The city of Momence recently unveiled a master plan for future enhancements; one that documents the vision of the city, working with its local partner Main Street Momence, and with The Lakota Group, an excellent planning firm out of Chicago. Now, weeks later, we should be able to still hear the applause around Momence and the entire county, celebrating this bold step. This is because quality of life enhancements in Momence could



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The plan celebrates the best sustainable assets of our region: our natural resource in the Kankakee River; the historic main street, the landmark buildings with potential for quaint shops and public gathering spaces; streets providing easy vehicular access to neighboring towns, the universities, and Chicago; open land for parks, recreation and bike paths; and much, much more.

So what are the next steps for implementing this plan so it becomes more than just a forgotten book of beautiful renderings sitting on a bookshelf for years to come? Well, this plan sets a vision for at least the next 20 years, and there are a few steps that could take place immediately.

First, the property owners need to stand up and declare unanimous support for this vision. By listening to some of the building owners on Main Street, I've heard some speak passionately about celebrating the city's history by maintaining and restoring its charming old build-

ings. At the same time, it is common for owners of older buildings to feel that the wrecking ball is the first step to progress by starting over. I believe that this vision for a positive future based on retaining the best of the past, needs to be unified, and the property owners need to realize that they are in possession of more than 100 years of memories and historic events that shaped the city into a charming place, with beautiful potential visible today, or lying hidden behind cheap modernizations of the last 30 years.

Second, the city needs to encourage the building owners by entering into public dialogue with these investors who may have creative ideas for building a positive future by celebrating the past. Zoning laws and building codes may need to be changed to encourage a healthy, walkable city with new creative uses in spaces that previously housed outdated businesses or illegal apartments. I've seen this approach work for rebuilding vibrant neighborhoods in Chicago with early artist lofts at Printer's Row and Bucktown. We've seen the start of similar success in downtown Kankakee with the renovation of the Blankenberg Photography building, and the Majestic Theatre. Momence could be an energetic hub for creative building users, artists and businesses.

Third, the local stakeholders such as banks and foundations should make dollars available to develop quality standards that will guide investors and demand quality professionals on their team who can think outside the box and offer market driven, creative alternatives that keep the momentum going. They should fund the creation of quality standards and ordinances, and demand quality improvements.

So, bravo to Momence for taking the first historic step! Let's hope that progress continues, and spreads across the entire county.

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