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### **Coalition tries to make buildings efficient**

**Mayor says project a good fit for city**

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**BY KHALIL E. HACHEM**

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A nonprofit organization wants to help save Ypsilanti businesses money and make them more energy efficient at the same time.

The Clean Energy Coalition has launched a project called Rebuild Ypsilanti to help business owners in the city make their buildings more energy efficient. The coalition will provide a free energy audit, technical guides, publications and financial strategies for energy projects. It also will provide grant-writing assistance for a small fee, said Greg Vendena, project manager.

The coalition, which is federally funded, already is working with several business owners in the city, Vendena said. Coalition representatives are scheduled to discuss the project in a public meeting Jan. 9. The coalition is located at 124 Pearl St.

"There are a lot of opportunities for revitalizing in Ypsilanti," Vendena said. "We're excited about the program."

Mayor Paul Schreiber said the project is a good fit in the city because Ypsilanti includes older buildings that could use the energy upgrade. "It's a perfect use for the city," he said.

Barry LaRue, facility chairman at the Riverside Arts Center, said he is working with the coalition to improve energy efficiency at the downtown facility. Currently, the center pays about \$10,000 for natural gas and electricity a year, and any money saved on energy could go to programs and staffing, he said. The center hosts art classes, live performances and art displays.

"I'm anxious to hear their audit," LaRue said.

Vendena said demand on natural gas is projected to increase this year by 8.1 percent from 2007, and natural gas prices for the commercial sector increased by 30 percent in the first six months of 2008. The city includes 997 businesses, and savings from energy improvements will help businesses offset the increase in energy cost, he said.

For example, the average commercial building can save up to 40 percent on their lighting cost by switching to T8 fluorescent lights. Business owners can also save about 16 percent on natural gas by installing a programmable thermostat to automatically set back during unoccupied hours, he said.

The energy program is part of the Rebuild Michigan program, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy and administered by the State of Michigan Energy Office, which promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy development and use with Michigan residents, businesses and public institutions.

The coalition is hosting a public meeting to discuss the project Jan. 9 at 10 a.m. at the Ypsilanti District Library at 5577 Whittaker Road in Ypsilanti Township. Details: 888-818-0987.

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