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Forum editorial: Downtown developer steps up

The latest development news for downtown Fargo could mean a project that will be transformational.

By: **Forum Editorial Board**, INFORUM

The latest development news for downtown Fargo could mean a project that will be transformational. U.S. Bank and the Kilbourne Group have reached an agreement whereby the group will purchase the bank's parking lot and plaza, a 48,000 square foot tract bounded by Broadway and Second and Third avenues. It's in the heart of downtown. It holds the potential to change for the better the look and ambiance of the city's center.

Doug Burgum, chairman and founder of the Kilbourne Group, has become a major player in the rejuvenation of downtown. The former Microsoft executive has committed his energy and resources to the renaissance of downtown. The results, even without the potential of the U.S. Bank deal, are impressive.

Downtown, from the first unit of North Dakota's State University's downtown campus to the condo/retail/theater building on Broadway, is a livelier, more economically viable district in part because of the Kilbourne Group's investments. Taken with other significant projects by investors and developers, downtown really is the vibrant heart of the city.

The bank plaza project could further enhance the vibrancy. It's a big space in an ideal location. It's been an open, concrete-covered, tarmac-like bank entrance and parking lot for years. It's served well for various community functions, including the street fair, farmers markets and as a location for pedestrians to stop and have lunch when weather permitted.

Retail and commercial development will be necessary so that Kilbourne's investment can pay off. But a quick perusal of downtown reveals the one thing lacking is a large, user-friendly green space. The closest such spaces are at the foot of Broadway at Island Park or at the city's civic plaza. Downtown would be an even more attractive place if part of the bank plaza's concrete was replaced with grass, walkways and trees. Done right, such a space could be a gathering place – a green island in the urban center.

But whatever the final look of the redeveloped block, U.S. Bank and the Kilbourne Group are to be commended for coming up with an agreement that likely will continue the rejuvenation of Fargo's downtown.