

Holyoke Lowe's: Jobs for region

by The Republican

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The construction of a Lowe's home improvement store on Whiting Farms Road in Holyoke will create up to 145 new jobs and boost the city's annual revenues by about \$350,000.

With unemployment rates rising and tax revenues falling, it's a gift few communities should turn down. But Lowe's plan to develop the 18.2-acre site - not far from the Holyoke Mall at Ingleside - isn't a sure thing.

A zone change sought by Lowe's, the nation's second-largest home improvement retailer - from an industrial to a commercial zone - has raised objections from some residents who fear increased traffic; they also argue the city should hold out for a manufacturing business.

The arguments are similar to the type many communities make when development opportunities come knocking. In some instances, opponents have legitimate arguments, but not in this case. Lowe's has offered to make improvements to ease and control traffic in the area and manufacturers have shown no interest in the site.

More than half of the jobs Lowe's proposes will be full-time positions with competitive salaries and benefit packages that include tuition reimbursement. The chain has also made a commitment to hire from the city's Latino population.

The project has the support of Mayor Michael J. Sullivan, the Office of Planning and Community Development, the Holyoke Chamber of Commerce and the recently formed group called Grow Holyoke, which was formed to promote responsible development in the city.

Planning Board members have already approved the zone change, citing the economic benefits.

Lowe's zoning request is scheduled for a vote Tuesday night by the City Council's Ordinance Subcommittee before it goes to the full council. We hope the subcommittee gives the proposal its unanimous approval and that the council will follow suit.

The region's economy cannot afford to lose an opportunity for increased revenue and new jobs.

As one Holyoke resident commented, "we need every penny we can get."