

Reshaping a downtown

By Tara Marion

Eighteen months after having acquired Pharmacia Corp., New York-based **Pfizer Inc.** [NYSE: PFE] announced plans to demolish five unused and outdated buildings and renovate five others in Kalamazoo later in 2005 – a move that will bring a significant change in the look of that city's downtown.

"Five buildings will be retained to meet current and emerging research needs and five buildings will be removed from the site, and the remaining space will be developed as green space," Pfizer spokesman Rick Chambers said.

Money was the driving force behind this decision, company officials explained – Pfizer cannot continue to maintain unused buildings. Identified by number, the five buildings to be razed are 18, 25, 26, 32 and 209.

Building 18 was erected in 1924. The 58,000-square-foot office building is unused, and future demand for occupancy is limited. This 80-year-old building is outdated and would be too expensive to upgrade.

Totalling 218,000 square feet together, buildings 25 and 26 were built in 1935. These office buildings are unused, outdated and are in limited demand for future occupancy. The demolition of these buildings also includes a crosswalk area.

Building 32 is currently in use, but it too is in need of a facelift. The 33,000-square-foot building has been considered for demolition for many years according to Chambers.

The basement of building 209 will be retained for utility space, but the remaining 330,000 square feet of laboratory space will be demolished. Though the newest of these buildings – built in 1975 – the infrastructure needs an upgrade.

Pfizer does not want to lease the building space to others for practical and security reasons, so it too will be demolished.

The five buildings to be renovated are building 214, which is used for utility space; building 267 and 267A, both for laboratory space; building 300, laboratory and office space; and building 331, more utility space.

The fate of buildings 24 and 126 are safe for now but being reviewed. Building 126 houses a state-of-the-art library of 1.2 million compounds that scientists use to develop new products, but the human drug discovery operation is no longer in Kalamazoo. (Discovery research occurs at the earliest stages of a drug compound's life.) "That's not something you can pick up and move tomorrow," Chambers said. "At some point, the understanding is that that (library) probably won't be here ...," which will mean vacancy of another Pfizer building.

Building 24 is a 49,000-square-foot office structure that was erected in 1934 and once used as headquarters for the Upjohn Co. Kalamazoo City Manager Pat DiGiovanni contended that this building is a piece of Kalamazoo's heritage and that the city of Kalamazoo would be happy to work with Pfizer on finding a new use for it.

Pfizer officials are also in preliminary discussions with the city to permanently close off part of Portage Street, north of Lovell, for security purposes.

Now four months after the announcement, architects and building contractors have yet to be named for this massive undertaking.

"We're way too early in the process to be that far," Chambers said. "I think you're going to be well into 2005 before those things start to emerge.