



# The Progress-Index

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## LISC returns to hear more ideas on city improvement

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STAFF WRITER

**PETERSBURG —** The Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corp. was back in town Thursday night at J.E.B. Stuart Elementary School where leaders with the community development corporation asked for ideas on how to improve neighborhoods throughout the city.

About 50 city residents came out and participated in the meeting Thursday night.

Virginia LISC is a community development organization which aims to improve neighborhoods by supporting the development of childcare centers, playgrounds, health clinics, schools, shopping centers and new businesses, as well as apartments and homes in low- to moderate-income communities.

“The success of these plans really depends on you and your input,” said Veronica Jemmott, a community development manager with Virginia LISC.

City-Wide PTA President John Hart asked Jemmott how she and the Virginia LISC organization planned to keep the plan going and ensure that any results developed from the plan remain a success.

“This is not new to us,” Jemmott said. “This is a proven strategy, and it isn’t magic. We’ve found that if people participate in the designing of the plan, then they’re less likely to take any crap and neighborhood organizations get stronger and ensure the success of the plan.”

Earlier in the meeting Jemmott detailed some of the successes Virginia LISC, formerly Richmond LISC, has had including revitalizing the Oregon Hill, Blackwell, Church Hill and Carver neighborhoods in Richmond. She said that in these neighborhoods LISC has been active in a total of 400 new units have been completed and crime has dropped 20 percent.

Additionally, Jemmott shared the success of the Winchester Greens neighborhood in Chesterfield which she said has been transformed from a failed Section 8 private development into a 40-acre mixed-use community.

One of the residents who came to the meeting said that the difference in the Winchester Greens neighborhood is stunning.

“We believe that we can have the same success here,” Jemmott said, adding that Virginia LISC’s primary focus has become Petersburg.

The group first came to Petersburg residents at an Oct. 25, 2006, meeting. More than 200 residents came to the meeting held at Petersburg High School to say what areas of the city they liked, what areas they didn’t like and where they would like to see improvement start.

Some of those areas which were identified in October and discussed Thursday night were the Blandford and Halifax Street triangle areas.

Residents said Thursday night that in those two neighborhoods they would like to see more places for youth and upgraded housing.

“But how realistic is it that this plan will be completed?” asked resident Albert Smithers.

Jemmott reinforced that the success of the plan depends on the public’s input and support. She added that Virginia LISC is independently funded and in the case of Petersburg, is being paid for by the Cameron Foundation.

“They’re paying for the consultants to come in and even a part of my salary,” Jemmott said. “We don’t take money from local governments so that we remain independent.”

Resident Willie Noise asked when LISC would stop collecting data and start working on a plan.

Jemmott said LISC will be back later this month to finish gathering data, first from 4 to 6 p.m. Jan. 23 and 24 to seek more input from the community and provide it directly to architects to design projects. Then from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Jan. 25 the community is being asked to come out and vote on some of those projects. All three meetings will be held at Tabernacle Baptist Church on Halifax Street.

She said that by April 26 the plans should be complete and will be presented at Union Train Station.

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“Hopefully by June the plan can start to be implemented,” Jemmott said.

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