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Import

Work begins to turn city residents' vision of Petersburg into reality

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PETERSBURG — *More than 200 people came out to the first Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corp. meeting in the city Wednesday night.*

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PETERSBURG — More than 200 people came out to the first Virginia Local Initiatives Support Corp. meeting in the city Wednesday 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.

"We want you to take this opportunity; don't waste it, be creative and dream how you would like to see the city," said Veronica Jemmott, a community development manager with Virginia LISC. "Share what you want to see happen."

Virginia LISC's work in the city is being funded by The Cameron Foundation.

Jemmott said that comments collected from residents at the meeting, as well as other data, would be analyzed over the next several months to determine ways to create or offer opportunities for improvement within the city.

Suggestions and data collected from the meeting at Petersburg High School will be turned over to the primary design consultant for Virginia LISC, Urban Design Associates of Pittsburgh.

Jemmott said that Urban Design Associates would serve as one of the primary community development corporations which will help to bring the plans for the city off paper and into reality.

LISC will have two more meetings to determine which opportunities city residents believe are most possible and fit within the character of Petersburg. The next meeting will be in January 2007, with the final meeting in April.

Jemmott said that by June the plan which is developed as a result of the meetings could go into full implementation.

"The sea of faces I see in front of me shows a diversity from across the entire community," said Mayor Annie Mickens at the beginning of the meeting. "We've been talking with Virginia LISC for two years in preparation for this day."

Mickens said that the city is positively positioned right now with many choices in front of residents, and most of those choices are good ones.

"This is our chance to create the type of city we want to have," Mickens said to the audience. "We're putting the future of the city in your hands."

Rob Robinson with Urban Design Associates asked residents to mark on maps of the city where the best places and worst places are, and where, as residents, they would invest within the city.

Across the PHS cafeteria, residents at more than 22 tables marked on maps indicating where they felt some of the best places and worst places were. Many of the positive places marked were similar between the groups and included the Old Towne area and Lee Park. Areas which were marked as detractors for the city included the Old Towne area and the Halifax Street triangle.

Across the room many of the comments were the same and included that the riverfront area is one of the city's most positive features and that Petersburg enjoys a small-town sense of community.

Some of the negatives included the education system which is not fully accredited, the rate of teen pregnancy and investment in city infrastructure.

Many groups also said that there are not enough activities for youth in the city. "I think that the attendance here tonight really shows how much residents love the city and is a good indication that they want to see the city transformed positively and are willing to work for it," Vice Mayor Horace Webb said. "The turnout has been great."

Bill Talley V said that he was pleased to see diversity among those at the meeting, and such a large turnout.

Mary Beatty-Brooks said that she was glad to participate in the meeting, but she would have liked to have seen more talk about how to take action on the negatives and improve the city.

"I think it's very interesting to see so many people coming together," Talley said.

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