



# The Republican.

## Grand visions boost Holyoke

Sunday, June 28, 2009

By **KEN ROSS**

[kross@repub.com](mailto:kross@repub.com)

HOLYOKE - Revitalizing the city's central business district and rehabilitating or demolishing buildings should be the focus of an urban renewal plan, according to residents polled at the final meeting to develop the long-range plan.

"We want to incorporate as many ideas as we can," Kathleen G. Anderson, the city's director of planning and development, said Thursday.

Anderson expressed her comments at the third and final public meeting to develop the center city vision plan. More than 100 people attended the meeting at the War Memorial Building.

City Council President Joseph M. McGiverin attended. Afterwards, he said he was impressed with many ideas.

"The more you involve people in the community they live and work in, the better chance to succeed," McGiverin said.

Others agreed.

"I think it's been an enlightening process and it's going to be very helpful in the future," City Councilor Elaine A. Pluta said.

"I think it's great to put a plan together for the city," resident and Open Square principal owner John P. Aubin said.

In March, the state Department of Housing and Community Development awarded the city a \$75,000 Urban Renewal Planning Gateway Plus grant to develop the plan.

The state-funded plan focuses on revitalizing four downtown neighborhoods: Churchill, South Holyoke, the Flats and downtown.

Information gathered at all three meetings will be compiled into a final report, Anderson said. According to the terms of the grant, the report must be completed by August. Before then, a public meeting will be held to present the plan.

But the vision plan is only the beginning. Eventually, a detailed urban renewal plan will be created for the four downtown neighborhoods.

"The urban renewal plan will be street by street, block by block," Anderson said.

Based on the first two meetings, residents indicated they want the plan to include six basic elements, according to officials from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., the Watertown-based firm hired to help develop

the vision plan. The six ingredients are:

increasing building density downtown.

creating an active city center with retail and restaurants.

preserving the city's historic character.

increasing housing options.

making downtown walkable and easier for vehicles to navigate.

promoting "green" energy and technology.

Other goals include creating a downtown "arts and innovation" district, expanding open space amenities, transforming the riverfront and restoring urban neighborhoods.

Residents at Thursday's meeting split into three large groups and offered their opinions on these ideas and other suggestions.

Some talked about the need for bike paths downtown. Others emphasized cleaning up alleyways, establishing community gardens, having trolleys downtown or getting downtown residents more personally involved in maintaining their neighborhoods.

Some insisted mixed used development would not work in certain industrialized areas. But most people supported the idea and stressed the importance of maintaining the city's dense urban core as well as expanding its arts district.

"We already have an arts district and it needs to be expanded upon," said Aaron Vega, speaking on behalf of one of the focus groups.

Others also strongly support the idea of promoting the city's environmentally-friendly power produced mainly by dams in the Connecticut River.

And like past meetings, many insisted the city needs to organize more events at night and encourage business downtown to stay open later.

"There really needs to be something going on after 5 p.m.," said Rory P. Casey said, speaking on behalf of another focus group.

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