

Residents share vision at Create Huntington meeting

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HUNTINGTON — If Huntington is going to move forward from a community and economic development standpoint, it must establish a unified vision formulated by its citizens.

That was one of the central messages shared Monday night during a kickoff meeting at the Big Sandy Superstore Arena for “Create Huntington,” an initiative aimed at putting together a long-term plan for city improvements.

About 80 people attended the event, which included an overview of the progress made by the group thus far and what it hopes to accomplish over the next six months.

“Our sole purpose is to change the way people think about their community,” said Ostie Mathisen, vice president of First State Bank and one of the group’s steering committee members. “We’re a group that encourages and creates venue for new ideas and thoughts and funnels those into stakeholder groups to create change.”

Create Huntington, which just gained nonprofit status, wants to take ideas from different segments of the Huntington community — Marshall University, business, government, nonprofits and residents — and create a development plan. It wants to facilitate development, as well as coordinate efforts already under way in the community so the right hand knows what the left is doing.

The initial steps of the plan have been funded with a \$50,000 Benedum Foundation grant that the city received earlier this year. The grant has been matched with a financial contribution from First State Bank and in-kind contributions from Marshall University’s Center for Business and Economic Research and Mountainside Media.

That money has been used by city officials and business leaders to travel to Morgantown and Paducah, Ky., to learn about their community vision processes as well as hire Bruce Decker, a consultant with Collective Impact of Rochester, Pa.

Decker, a Mason County native who lived in Huntington for 15 years, said Create Huntington has to remain apolitical and consist of a group of diverse stakeholders that engages citizens to catalog the city’s strengths and weaknesses.

Some of those in attendance said after the meeting that residents will have to drop their negative image of the city to make an impact.

“A lot of people are hesitant to get involved because they are used to the same old, same old,” said Tim Bailey of Huntington. “If you get people to take pride in Huntington again, a lot of

positives will trickle down to other aspects of the city.”

Create Huntington will conduct four community group meetings at the end of this month. Those meetings will be with city residents, the business community, Marshall University community and nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies.

The next step will be turning the ideas into a concrete plan that should be finished by the end of February, Decker said.

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