

Wanted: Downtown property owners

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MARTINSVILLE

Organizers of a meeting next Tuesday regarding revitalizing downtown Martinsville hope a vision will take shape of what the district could look like with a little teamwork.

Martinsville was awarded a \$50,000 grant in December from the state Office of Community and Rural Affairs to help the city develop plans to revitalize its downtown. The meeting at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 2 at the Art Sanctuary, 190 N. Sycamore St., is part of that process.

A steering committee and elected officials met earlier this month to start the work. Now the organizers want property owners to get involved. Letters were sent to downtown property owners regarding next week's meeting.

The city, working with Rediscover Historic Martinsville, was the conduit for the \$50,000 grant to study how revitalize downtown.

Sharyn Kersey, grant administrator and an assistant to Mayor Phil Deckard, said she hopes people will come to the meeting with their "visioning glasses and people will put aside their vested interests."

People want to see on paper, what downtown Martinsville could be like in the best of all possible worlds, she said.

Architect Benjamin Rawlins of Odle McGuire Shook Corp. will be working with the group to develop plans. Master gardeners also will be involved in the process.

"Until you see it in front of you, you don't know what the possibilities are," Kersey said.

Ron Stanhouse, who owns several downtown Martinsville properties including the Art Sanctuary, along with Rediscover Historic Martinsville President Del Chafey and Greater Martinsville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Jamie Thompson attended a meeting Monday in Crawfordsville that served as a networking opportunity for communities such as Martinsville.

The meeting in Crawfordsville is an example of how a few people working together can attract business, he said.

"These guys put this one-day conference together to discuss the needs of cities like Martinsville and to network," Stanhouse said during a lunch break on Monday. "They got 80 people to come to Crawfordsville and now there are 80 people in downtown Crawfordsville businesses."

Stanhouse said next week's meeting will be an opportunity for people to "become aware of ideas of what the buildings could be turned into."

Investments by property owners in facade improvements and the possibilities of grants and other financing to pay for renovations of downtown will be a focus of the meeting, he said.

"I expect a plan to pull together," Stanhouse said. "We need cooperation and to show the benefits of it."

Stanhouse said convincing property owners to “open their checkbooks” to invest in the improvements is a challenge, but by working together there can be tangible results.

Chafey said it would be in the best interest of property owners to learn what funding and other resources could become available in the future to help with renovations.

Property owners who participate will be able to receive state development funds later if the city receives that funding. That could include as much as a 90 percent state contribution as part of a larger pool of money as large as \$500,000.

A letter sent to property owners states they “stand to reap financial benefits by collaborating with a structural engineer, architect, and other team members during the planning process. There is no cost to you. You simply agree to work with the professional consultants to develop a suitable facade improvement plan for your building.”

A rendering showing recommended facade improvements will be prepared for every building in the nine square block area identified by a city ordinance as the historic downtown district.

In addition, four buildings whose owners consent to participate in an in-depth study will receive a structural condition assessment, pro-forma analysis, facade improvement plan, and cost estimates.

For more information, call Sharyn Kersey in Martinsville Mayor Phil Deckard’s office at 765-349-4928.

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