



CITY OF KENNER

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kenner 2030 Plan Moves Forward with Community Involvement and Input at First Listening Session

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South Kenner resident Earl Smith, retired from a career in the insurance business, came to Kenner's First Community Listening Session, held Tuesday night, with his three grandchildren in mind. "What if they decide they want to stay in Kenner," he asked. "What are their prospects as far as employment and just life in general?"

Tuesday night's relaxed session between residents and many of Kenner's elected officials was recommended in the Kenner 2030 Plan for a Prosperous Future. The document, put together by citizens, public officials and business people, was created to come up with ways to enhance Kenner's future as a place to live, work and play. One of the recommendations in the report is that citizens have more access to their elected leaders.

Mayor Michael Yenni created a 41-member economic development committee shortly after his election in 2010 to make recommendations on the best ways for city leaders to take the necessary steps to build on the city's strengths, improve the weaknesses, take advantages of any opportunities to shine and always keep in mind the threats to success - or SWOT.

Smith said he is genuinely excited about the 2030 plan, and the Listening Sessions that are designed to help the plan become successful, because it appears to be an honest effort to look ahead to the city's long-term future. "If you don't know where you're going, how in the world are you going to be able to get there," he asked.

Tuesday's session was moderated by Dominick Impastato III, a member of the Economic Development Committee. Impastato joked that he was chosen as the moderator of the initial session "because I had the name with the most vowels."

Impastato started the meeting by explaining the basics of the Kenner 2030 plan and pointing out that residents can go to the city's website, www.kenner.la.us, and read the entire plan and offer feedback that could help to alter or amend the plan.

The plan identifies strengths and weaknesses of the city, with the airport, recreation and public safety ranking high among the strengths while aesthetics of city streets, quality of the schools and job scarcity were listed as some of Kenner's weaknesses, Impastato said.

Opportunities for Kenner in the plan included both the Rivertown and Laketown areas, The Esplanade mall and the possibility of transforming Kenner into a boutique city with its own unique flavor and feel. Threats to Kenner listed in the plan included negative perceptions of the city and an inability to attract a new generation of middle income households.

Before beginning the first Listening Session, which was originally designed to cover the topic of the city's political climate, Impastato emphasized the importance of citizen participation. "Community involvement is absolutely the most important component of the plan," he said. "Is there something missing? Is there something lacking - are we missing the boat in some area? The goal is not to put elected officials on the spot. We envision this as an opportunity to hear the concerns of the public and then put the pressure on the administration (to come up with good responses in a reasonable time frame)."

Comments touched on a variety of topics, ranging from frustration with the Code Enforcement Department because due process often delays progress on high grass, junked cars and other complaints to beautifying the Williams Boulevard corridor and improving the schools available in the city.

A majority of residents who attended the meeting offered a comment. And while the political climate in Kenner didn't seem to be a concern for the crowd at the meeting, Mayor Yenni said he was pleased with the initial Listening Session. "My impression is the people who attended were at ease in talking to their elected officials about whatever was important to them. It's their government. I think that's a good sign and bodes well for future meetings" he said.

Terri Timmcke, a 25-year Kenner resident who lives in Chateau Estates, said an open dialogue with city leaders is crucial and can only help the city. "I'm tired of politicians talking. They need to listen," she said.

Sitting next to her, Connie Zimmerman, a Kenner resident since 1977, admitted she is still a bit skeptical about the Listening Sessions. The value of the sessions may not be determined until additional gatherings are held.

Natalie Newton, deputy chief administrative officer for Kenner, said that's exactly what is being planned. Additional meetings will likely be held at the district level, while city officials will also continue to seek input from citizens through surveys, feedback available on the city's website and calls and emails.

While the Kenner 2030 committee identified perceived tensions between the City Council and the administration as a potential threat to Kenner's growth, Mayor Yenni and council members Kent Denapolis, Keith Reynaud, Joe Stagni and Maria DeFrancesch all agreed that future listening sessions can help Kenner reach the goals outlined in the study.

"One of the best things we can do is listen to our stakeholders - our citizens," said Stagni. "I think we should do that in multiple venues." Denapolis, who is a member of the 41-member 2030 committee, agreed. "The more (Listening) sessions that you have the better," he said. "You have to bring the public into the fold. They want to know what we are doing." Reynaud said he is bullish about Kenner's future because he believes Kenner has enough positives, as well as "the right climate to make the changes needed to attract a younger generation."

DeFrancesch, meanwhile, summed up the thoughts of many as she described the benefits of the Listening Sessions and the 2030 Plan in general. "We're sending the message that this city doesn't belong to elected officials," she said. "It belongs to the people who live here."

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