



By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Efforts to develop a new Comprehensive Plan for Imperial began Tuesday night, March 19.

Thirteen residents, including citizens, planning commission members, council members and city representatives, provided the initial input to start the 12-18 month process.

The city hired Miller & Associates as its consultant in the process. They are also working closely with the planning commission on the update.

Brenda Jensen, a community planner with Miller & Associates, led Tuesday's meeting. She was joined by Eric Hellriegel, a grant administrator for the firm.

Jensen explained the planning process provides an analysis of where the community is today in terms of existing facilities and services, etc., and where the community wants to go in the future.

She said they look at population trends, housing stock, the local economy, recreation facilities, transportation, land use, community services, energy and the environment.

That analysis will help provide the road map for the future of Imperial by setting goals and the development of strategies to reach those goals.

An updated plan is also an important piece whenever the city is seeking government grants for new projects.

The plan is also a useful tool for city leaders and local organizations.

For the planning process to be successful, she emphasized it requires input from a wide range of local citizens.

"We don't want it to be our plan or Miller & Associates plan. We want it to be Imperial's plan," she said. That's why it's important for local input.

The last Comprehensive Plan for the community was completed in 2000. A housing study was completed in 2008.

Strengths, weaknesses

One of the first steps in the process centers on identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the community.

Jensen led discussion on all of those topics.

Strengths included a progressive attitude, friendly community, community pride and appearance, safe environment, strong business community, good school and local healthcare availability.

Housing issues topped the weaknesses voiced during the meeting. Jensen noted that was a problem in 2000 when the plan was last updated.

Hellriegel said every community they work with from Kansas to South Dakota faces housing issues.

Jensen said the 2008 housing study will be a helpful tool in the process.

Another concern pointed to the appearance of the gateway highway entrances into Imperial.

With a progressive attitude, participants voiced that opportunities exist to fill certain needs in the community, such as clothing and work wear, physical training and youth dance instruction.

With the local communications infrastructure, tele-commuting to a job is quite feasible here. Maintaining a strong economy will help reduce overall threats to community, participants said. However, other issues such as health care under Obama-Care and providing more services and facilities for elderly care could pose a threat to the future of the community.

More input sought

Jensen said they will hold four to six more meetings to get input from the public.

She encouraged members of the Imperial community to play an active role in those meetings to get the most benefit from the planning process.

A tentative time frame of mid- to late May has been set for the next community input session.