

The Fayetteville Observer

Public asked to help Fayetteville move forward

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About eight years ago, business leaders and politicians were fed up with the lack of economic growth and Fayetteville's bad reputation as "Fayettenam."

A change in direction was needed, they decided. So in late 2000, they announced Greater Fayetteville Futures — an initiative to study the local economy and identify a path to improvement. Hundreds of volunteers helped, and so did a state grant.

By many accounts, that effort was successful at unifying job-creating efforts, leveraging more economic opportunities from Fort Bragg and stepping up work to improve the city's image.

Many of the people, organizations and institutions that sponsored that initial drive are back again with a similar goal — and a similar name: Greater Fayetteville Futures II.

Organizers know the city is on the cusp of more change as a result of the base realignment and closure process that will bring thousands more people to Fort Bragg by 2011.

Organizers want the public's input and help in embracing that growth. They encourage anyone with an interest in improving the community's quality of life to attend Saturday's kickoff meeting from 9 a.m. to noon at the Crown Coliseum ballroom. More than \$60,000, mostly from in-kind contributions such as free advertising, has been raised for Saturday's event.

A video presentation will start things off, followed by 45-minute sessions expounding on each of the effort's 10 broad goals, such as embracing environmentally friendly building policies, improving public safety, and expanding cultural and recreational opportunities.

People will be asked to attend two of the sessions, which will have experts familiar with each goal's issues.

Project teams will seek to draft and implement several initiatives in the coming months. Residents will be encouraged to sign up for one of the project teams before they leave.

Concluding the event will be another video produced by Fayetteville Technical Community College that will show 3-D renderings of planned changes on Murchison Road.

Many of the initiatives to be unveiled Saturday will follow recommendations by a BRAC regional task force and a separate report called Pathways to Possibilities on the community's assets and

barriers to economic development. The report was commissioned by the Fayetteville-Cumberland County Chamber of Commerce.

“Greater Fayetteville Futures already has a great legacy,” said George Breece, an organizer who was involved with the original effort. “Saturday’s community meeting is the beginning of a continuing process of good planning and great results as we prepare for BRAC and beyond.”

From the first Greater Fayetteville Futures, three organizations with similar functions merged into what until last year had been known as the Cumberland County Business Center. That name has since been changed to the Fayetteville-Cumberland County Chamber of Commerce, but the merged organization is still at work.

Other results from that initial effort include the military business park under construction off Santa Fe Drive; the city slogan of “History, Heroes and a Hometown Feeling”; and a now-defunct Good News Bureau to write positive news releases.

Dan Dederick, the chamber’s current chairman, said the changes from that initial effort have been positive and worthwhile. Local elected and chamber officials have a unified voice before the congressional delegation. He was past chairman of the former Fayetteville Area Economic Development Corp. when it merged into the chamber in 2003.

Mayor Tony Chavonne, chairman of the former Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce in 2000 before the merger, helped lead the first Greater Fayetteville Futures. He and Wilson Lacy, chairman of the Public Works Commission, are co-chairmen of Round 2.

The mayor said the first effort brought a lot of success that he hopes the community will begin to build on after Saturday.

The group also wants to set benchmarks to show the public any progress made over the next few years.

“We define success, and we are measuring success, so we are accountable and have a quantifiable way to move forward,” said Kirk deViere, the strategic planner for Greater Fayetteville Futures II.

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