

Consultants want your village vision ideas

By Michaela Kennedy

"Jamestown Vision: Planning for the Future of our Village," is the theme of a series of town workshops that began last week, focusing on downtown development. A cross-section of community representatives was invited to the first meeting on Sept. 12 to discuss mobilizing Jamestown residents for involvement in the planning process.

Architect Donald Powers and his team of urban designers talked with 30 or so guests about the "power of network." Connectors, or "stakeholders," are asked to share the buzz about the information and opinion gathering process and what it will produce for the future of Jamestown, Powers noted.

"We believe that our public places, neighborhoods, and individual structures are the stage on which the life of the community is expressed and that the design of these places can have a strong effect on the community," flashed across a screen at the opening of a slide show at the workshop. Powers emphasized that his 11-person firm was dedicated to making a community, repairing a community, "or in this case, preserving a

community."

Powers referred to cities, towns and neighborhoods that were built pre-war (referring to the World Wars), and have been threatened because of zoning laws. "We understand how to put the zoning and the coding in place to make it work," he said.

The architectural company has helped create new communities, with Reynolds Farm, a development in North Kingstown, as an example. The company also built a whole town on Cape Cod from scratch. "Planning is the architecture," Powers said.

Powers explained that the team was trying to elicit from the town what patterns, textures and images are valuable to residents. He mentioned a good way to preserve farmland was through cluster development. He also mentioned affordable housing. "A good design eliminates the stigma of affordable housing," he said.

Powers noted that some people see development as a bad thing. "Development, when conceived properly, can add to the quality of everyday life," he suggested. "It's difficult to convince someone who

has been burned by 40 years of development."

Residents are specifically encouraged to:

- Explore the Web site, www.jamestownvision.org.
- Complete the online survey, which is open to all residents until the charrette ends.
- Participate in the Jamestown Vision Workshop on Sept. 27.
- Express their views in the public parts of sessions during the 5-day charrette, Oct 15 to 19.

The team proposed to set up a studio for an intense design session, punctuated by stakeholder meetings. Workshop facilitator Robert Leaver explained the gatherings as more intimate where people can say what's on their minds, "more so than a large public meeting."

Participants introduced themselves and shared their interests in the process.

Nick Robertson, a former town councilman, asked the team to address costs that will accompany a new ordinance. "Everything you do ends up costing the businessman somewhere down the line," he said.

Fred Pease, another former councilman, addressed costs as well. "It's a shame that a kid who grows up here doesn't have a prayer of living here. If you can fix that, then you are worth the money we pay you," he said.

Attorney John Murphy stood up to say Jamestown has been a victim of zoning and planning. He pointed out Shoreby Hill, a beautiful example of architecture developed by a private builder. "We have had a modern zoning ordinance since 1964, and some horrible things have been built," he added.

Randall Tyson, of Seaside, spoke of the need to get people involved from the far reaches of the island. "Find out what the makeup of the (municipal) boards are, and see if you're getting a fair representation," he suggested.

Town councilman William Kelly said he hoped to get a clear understanding of affordable housing for the community. "A large faction of the community has a misconception about what affordable housing is," he noted. Kelly suggested reaching out to high school and college students for a younger generation's point of view.

Other business people, town officials, and candidates for office offered opinions about preservation and the direction of development. At times comments became heated. Library board member Jane Bentley stood up to explain that, because of some recent controver-

sial town issues, the consultants might be headed into a "hornet's nest." They responded with smiles and joked that the town should not think they were "not going into this petrified." Bentley put out a plea to the audience that everyone should work together and "leave their personal agendas at the door."

The consultants encouraged all to go out and invite all residents to the visioning meeting on Sept. 27, to be held at the community center. At least 200 or more are expected to attend, Powers said. "We hope it's a donnybrook," he said.

Powers wrapped up by saying the comprehensive community plan was statement of intent. "Our job is to create the tools to make the intent," he said.

Four products the planning process will produce are:

- Design guidelines for development.
- A form-based zoning code that will guide developers to align with and evolve local character.
- A pattern book of examples of buildings that conform to the code.
- A planning process that can be used in the future.

Adoption info night set

The Department of Children, Youth and Families is hosting a Foster Care and Adoption Information Night on Wednesday, Sept. 26, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the DCYF office at 650 Ten Rod Rd., North Kingstown.

DCYF staff, foster, and adoptive parents will be available to explain the program and answer questions. The information night is open to anyone interested in exploring becoming a foster or adoptive parent for children in DCYF care. Learn

how to make a difference in the life of a child. For additional information, call Robin Perez, DCYF foster parent recruiter, at 528-3700 or the DCYF North Kingstown office at 294-5300.



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