

Town of Mineral Downtown Revitalization Project

Public Forum Summary

Wednesday – June 30, 2010

Mineral's CDBG

Application

The Town of Mineral and the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) are working on an exciting new project, "Town of Mineral Business District Revitalization." To help achieve its vision, the Town applied for and received Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) planning funds for Business District Revitalization. The Planning Grant activities position the Town to apply for a full CDBG Community Improvement Grant.

CDBG

CDBG is a federally-funded grant administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Up to \$700,000 - \$1,000,000 is available for individual projects.

Need for Revitalization

Mineral has experienced declines in population, commerce, and in the condition of its buildings. This project is designed to reverse this trend through economic development and improvements to commercial and residential buildings.

Public Forum



Introduction

As part of its application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, the Town of Mineral is required to hold five public forums, which it is conducting in partnership with the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC). On June 30th, staff held one of these required meetings at the Mineral Baptist Church, from 6 – 8 pm. This forum was held with residents, business and property-owners and local officials to review the Draft Economic Restructuring Plan, per the Town Vision. This review of the Plan included a presentation to educate and engage local residents and businesses in the process of "fleshing out", detailing and personalizing the Restructuring Plan for the "Town to Be."

There were ten community members at this event, along with staff from the Town of Mineral and the Planning District Commission. The forum began with a PowerPoint presentation, which updated attendees on the Mineral Downtown Revitalization Project. The presentation reviewed the findings and comments from the May public forum and discussed the "Town to Be", which is Mineral's vision for the future. Finally, staff presented an implementation program that included the various recommendations intended to bring that vision into reality.

After the presentation, Planning District staff divided participants into two groups. Both groups had a worksheet that included questions and a table, which listed all of the project recommendations for the downtown study area. Each group had a facilitator from the TJPDC, who helped scribe comments, answer questions and guide participants through the exercise. Once the allowed time expired, all three groups reconvened and reported on their discussions. Those public comments are recorded in this document.

"Town to Be" and Concepts

A major component of the staff presentation was the "Town to Be" vision statement. Staff based this vision on the public comments from previous forums, discussions with local stakeholders, responses from surveys and findings from various reports. Staff presented the "Town to Be", along with projects and programs that would support that vision. As part of the public exercise, participants were asked to critic this presentation.

The "Town to Be" states that the Town of Mineral wishes to become a thriving community that maintains its historic appearance, while fostering business and residential growth. The Town wishes to create an attractive, engaging downtown that is safe, accessible and an integral part of the surrounding region. The Town wishes to be a destination and place where people live, work and visit.

To make this vision a reality, staff illustrated several physical improvements to Mineral and Louisa Avenue. These are public investments that include road and

streetscape improvements. The main emphasis is to create a unique place or destination with Mineral's Downtown. This would help draw people and investments into the Town, helping it compete with other commercial and activity centers in the region. In terms of downtown's private properties, staff discussed blight removal techniques and a Façade Improvement Program.

Questions and Worksheets

After the presentation, staff facilitated two separate groups that were asked to answer a series of questions. The questions focused on the "Town to Be", to gauge if it really captured the Town's vision for the future. Staff asked participants: what do you like best about the "Town to Be" concepts; how would you improve these concepts; and what is missing. The next question focused on the individual projects and programs that the Town could implement. On the worksheets, there was a table that listed each of these recommendations. Participants were asked to prioritize those items and add anything that was missing. The final two questions were included to provide additional input on the Marketing and Branding Plan. Staff asked the groups: what images come to mind when you think of Mineral; and what words come to mind when you think of Mineral.

Group 1 Summary

There were four participants in Group 1. This included Dallas Ventre, Joyce Ventre, Bill Thomas (Mineral Town Council) and Mathew Byrd. Will Cockrell is a planner with the Planning District and acted as the facilitator for this group, along with Sarah Eissler who also serves as a planning with the TJPDC.

What do you like best about the "Town to Be" concepts?

Group 1 had four main comments with this question. The participants liked the proposed signage improvements throughout downtown. This included recommendations to both private (commercial) and public (street) signs. They also liked the idea of having directory signs along Mineral Avenue, which list the various businesses and destinations downtown. The second main comment involved plantings. Group 1 liked the concept of adding street trees, bushes, flowers and other plants to the streetscape. Third, participants wanted to maintain a consistent building setback, so there was an engaging "street wall" along the downtown. Fourth, the group liked the idea of reusing the Mineral School Building as the new home of the farmer's market.

How would you improve these concepts?

This group thought of three ways to improve the "Town to Be" concepts and overall statement. They wanted to address the aging water and sewer lines throughout the Town. The participants felt that these services are fundamental and must be improved. Given the number of street improvements, they also thought that underground infrastructure should be considered, in terms of sequencing. It would make more sense to address the water and sewer lines before many of the street projects are installed, to avoid having to tear out any new sidewalks or road improvements. The second main comment dealt with priorities. In the presentation and worksheets, staff identified three subareas in the downtown. These included Mineral Avenue (between 2nd and 3rd Streets), Louisa Avenue (along Luck Field and the Mineral School), and the Post Office area (on Mineral Avenue). Instead of focusing on these three areas, the group wanted to set priorities that could benefit the entire downtown. For example, the first priority could be new lighting or signage for the whole CDBG study area. The final comment dealt with auto circulation. The group felt there needed to be an additional turn lane at the intersection of Mineral Avenue and First Street. The main issue with this concept is space. Adding another lane would require demolition of one or more structures.

What is missing?

Staff asked the participants what was missing from the “Town to Be” presentation. Group 1 listed four items. They wanted more emphasis on creating a business friendly environment. They thought there should be additional opportunities for downtown recreation. The group thought that the Old School House, currently on the southern end of town, could be relocated to the town yard site and serve as an information center. Finally, the participants thought the “Town to Be” should include a more complete view of the community. That final point was referencing their concern about identifying the three focus areas. Instead, they wanted the focus to be on projects that would benefit the entire downtown.

Does the priority table reflect your group's priorities?

Both groups had a table, which included all of the recommendations that were discussed in the presentation. Staff asked the participants to prioritize those projects. In terms of blight removal, group 1 said that priority should go towards a carefully designed ordinance, which mandates certain property conditions. In terms of the streetscape improvements, they gave higher priorities to: lighting/parking, crosswalks, trash cans, and traffic calming. With the Façade Improvements Program, the group listed Design Assistance as their top priority.

What images come to mind when you think of Mineral?

Staff asked the group if there were any buildings, landmarks or places that capture the spirit of Mineral. The participants listed four buildings. These included: Mineral School, the Train Depot, the house at Mineral Avenue/Third Street and the old school house.



What words come to mind when you think of Mineral?

Participants came up with five words that describe the Town. These included: quiet, safe, potential, walkable and boring. Four of these describe their perception of the Town, as it is now. The other focuses on the future and what it could become.

Group 1: Main Topics of Discussion

The following is a summary of the comments in Group 1.

What do you like best about the “Town to Be” concepts?

- The improved appearance of signs and the addition of a directory sign that communicates what business are downtown
- Plantings along the street
- An even building setback
- The reuse of the Mineral School as the permanent home of the farmer’s market

How would you improve these concepts?

- Water infrastructure should be addressed, such as water and sewer lines
- Instead of having specific areas as priorities, there should be elements across the entire study area that are prioritized
- There should be another proposal for Mineral Avenue and First Street, in terms of auto circulation, where there is an additional turn lane.

What is missing?

- There should be more emphasis on making a business friendly environment
- The vision should include more recreational spaces
- The old school house should serve as an information or visitors center for the Town
- There should be a more complete view of the Town

Does the priority table reflect your group’s priorities?

- Blight removal strategies – a carefully designed ordinance
- Streetscape Improvements – lighting/parking, crosswalks, trash cans, and traffic calming
- Façade Improvement Program – Design Assistance

What images come to mind when you think of Mineral?

- Mineral School
- Train Depot
- 331 Mineral Avenue
- The old school house

What words come to mind when you think of Mineral?

- Quiet
- Safe
- Potential
- Walkable
- Boring

Group 2 Summary

There were five participants in Group 2: Jeremy Camp (Louisa County Community Development Director and Management Team member), Pam Harlowe (Mayor), Bernice Kube (Mineral Town Council), Howard Loudin (Management Team member), and Roy Lee Payne (Mineral Town Council). Bill Wanner, Planner with the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC), facilitated.

What do you like best about the “Town to Be” concepts?

Much of the discussion focused on the “Town to Be” streetscape improvements, specifically sidewalks, crosswalks and medians. The group felt streetscape improvements increase the likelihood of vehicles traveling through Mineral to stop and explore the town.

How would you improve these concepts?

TJPDC staff identified three draft priority target areas within the downtown study area: Mineral Avenue (between 2nd and 3rd Streets); Louisa Avenue (along Luck Field and the Mineral School); and the Post Office area (on Mineral Avenue). Group 2 participants felt streetscape improvements should not be limited to these priority areas. Rather, streetscape improvements should be made throughout the Mineral Avenue corridor. Regarding the first priority area, it should be extended to include the 1st Street/Mineral Avenue intersection and the railroad depot.

It was noted that the town has problems with trucks tearing the present banners and hitting utility poles.

What is missing?

Better access to the Post Office: Ingress and egress on 4th Street.

Does the priority table reflect your group’s priorities?

Both groups had a table, which included all of the recommendations that were discussed in the presentation. Staff asked the participants to prioritize those projects. The group’s order included crosswalks and sidewalks, improvements to the Rte 22/522 intersection, and inclusion and participation of as many businesses as possible in the first priority area.

What images come to mind when you think of Mineral?

The group mentioned three buildings. This included the beautiful churches, Mineral School (in its heyday), and the Train Depot.

What words come to mind when you think of Mineral?

The group focused on Mineral as “The All-American Town” or “Small Town America”. Mineral is a baseball town with great fans. There is a sense of community. They described the Town’s strengths as: a place for families; the wealth of churches; small local businesses; no chain stores; Mineral is the center of Louisa County; trains run through town; a mining town; and Mineral is the gateway to Lake Anna.

Group 2: Main Topics of Discussion

The following is a summary of the comments in Group 2.

What do you like best about the “Town to Be” concepts?

- Sidewalks
- Crosswalks
- Medians

How would you improve these concepts?

- Streetscape improvements should be made throughout the Mineral Avenue corridor
- First priority area should include the 1st Street/Mineral Avenue intersection and the train depot
- Banners and utility poles should be placed so as to avoid damage by trucks

What is missing?

- Ingress and egress at Post Office should be to 4th Street

Does the priority table reflect your group’s priorities?

- Crosswalks and sidewalks
- Improvements to Routes 22/522 intersection
- Inclusion and participation of as many businesses as possible in the first priority area

What images come to mind when you think of Mineral?

- Mineral School
- Train Depot
- The beautiful churches

What words come to mind when you think of Mineral?

- Baseball town with great fans,
- A sense of community belonging
- A place for families
- The wealth of churches
- Small local businesses
- No chain store
- Mineral is the center of Louisa County
- Trains run through town
- A mining town
- Mineral is the gateway to Lake Anna

Next Steps

This was the fifth Public Forum, out of the five that were required for this process. The Town will hold two public hearings on this project, in either late 2010 or early 2011. Staff may also schedule another public forum, to provide additional opportunities for the public to review the reports and materials that will be submitted to the Department of Housing and Community Development. The CDBG application will be submitted in March 2011. In the following months, the Town will learn if it was awarded the \$700,000 to \$1,000,000 Construction Grant.