

South Hartsville residents organize to 'Shape Their Destiny'

South Hartsville residents

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city officials and community leaders gathered together on Monday, Mar. 12, to address ways to strengthen what was once a vibrant neighborhood, and develop strategies to encourage residents of that area to take ownership and increase participation in the planning and development process. According to Hartsville's new Planning and Development Director, Rodney Tucker, people need "to get mad."

He's seen it before. "If people truly want to be effective and see change in their community, they have to organize and develop a plan to move the process forward," he said. Tucker has seen grassroots community groups organize and take charge with specific plans to turn things around and have a hand in "shaping their own destiny." He knows it works, and he credits Hartsville's Adelina Graham for being the driving force behind getting the ball rolling in this case. However, "We'll need a lot more to get involved with the commitment to see change through," he said.

South Hartsville, once a fairly vibrant neighborhood has, over the years, become blighted with an increase in apathy, drugs, crime and a declining



Hartsville Planning and Development Director Rodney Tucker addresses South Hartsville residents about organizing and participating in the community development process. The meeting was held last week at Centenary United Methodist Church.

housing stock. Tucker confirms that the city will definitely be a player in the process, but he highlights the importance and the need of community organization. "The city can address many issues, like roads, streetlights, etc; law enforcement can address crime issues; but both will need the participation of the community's citizens to identify issues and be part of the solution-forming process."

Tucker has reached out to the faith community, as well, encouraging them to be leaders and resources to the area's residents. "We want to seed the garden, so to speak. They can be a valuable support network, and they can encourage their members to attend these meetings and participate in the process," he said. Last week's meeting was held at Centenary United

Methodist Church on South Sixth Street.

When asked about people and organizations that already are established as leaders in the Southside community, Tucker

acknowledged there were both benefits and dangers in putting the ball solely into the hands of already established organizations. "What you don't want is to hand everything over to someone else and expect someone else to get the job done," he cautions. "The key component here will be the citizens and their personal involvement in the process."

According to Tucker, his experience tells him that people must feel a personal stake of ownership in addressing community issues, followed by action to help shape the solutions and in carrying them out.

Tucker feels that the Southside residents are taking an important step forward in partnering with the city and developing creative solutions. "My

hope is that the energy from this meeting will be contagious, and attract additional neighbors to get involved. Hopefully, it will encourage other neighborhoods to form neighborhood associations, as well."

He further noted that organization and the formation of stronger community bonds will go a long way toward reducing issues such as crime or drugs, and pave the way for opportunities for economic development,

home ownership and the return of working families to the area.

Tucker added that everyone needs to recognize that it is a process that will take time and effort on the part of many people and organizations.