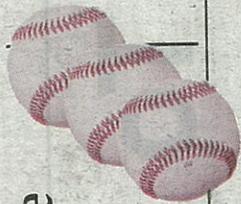


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East Texas: 2006 Cattle Barons'
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Sunday, June 11, 2006

\$1.50

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Tyler, Texas

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Preserving Tyler The Priority

By **JACQUE HILBURN**
Staff Writer

About 200 people showed up bright and early Saturday to help build the Tyler 21 Comprehensive Plan, and by day's end a single unifying message among participants was clear: preserve Tyler's character.

Early arrivals began showing up at Robert R. Muntz Library on The University of Texas at Tyler campus around 9 a.m., expressing hope the day would be productive toward building a workable plan to address future needs.

Officials were visibly pleased at the turnout and level of input. "I am in awe," said Mayor Joey Seeber. "We have a moment in time, a window of opportunity to plan for our future — this is a great day for our city."

By day's end, several key items were identified as things that should be preserved: trees, historic integrity, downtown, quality of life, arts and culture and neighborhood identity.

Some positives included the quality of its public education system, trend-setting health care community and strong support offered by church and nonprofit organizations.

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— Staff Photo By Herb Nygren Jr.

INPUT: A roomfull of concerned Tylerites met on the 4th floor of the Robert R. Muntz Library at UT Tyler on Saturday to help build the Tyler 21 Comprehensive Plan.

**More Tyler
21 Inside**

Traffic congestion is such a concern for Tylerites that about 82 percent rank it as the most important issue facing the city on the Tyler 21 citizen survey. Read some of the other top responses given on survey inside.

—5A

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Participants voiced a desire for more parks, north end development, affordable housing, family activities, entertainment options and development standards — some groups voiced a willingness to increase taxes for improved quality of life.

Items cited for change included tighter controls of traffic congestion, lax zoning standards and unbalanced development, even if it means raising taxes to do it, some said.

"Some things I've been struck with is the passion people have for the natural beauty, character and sense of community you have here in Tyler," said Mary Means, founder of national Main Street revitalization group. "You want Tyler to be rooted in a place in time, you're unwilling to throw out what got it all started."

At the same time, participants voiced a desire to change, to incorporate more things that will bring quality to their lives and the lives of future generations,

Ms. Means noted.

The day kicked off with remarks from the city's consultants, Larissa Brown from Boston-based Goody Clancy firm, and former Fort Worth City Manager Bob Herchert, now chairman of the Feese and Nichols firm hired to help alleviate traffic congestion.

"I hope you understand how really rare it is for a city to go to this much effort," Herchert said. "This shows enormous leadership from your mayor, city council and city staff, and you should feel fortunate to live in a city with this type of government."

Mark Priestner of Planning Concepts offered a statistical view of where Tyler sits today, including several key points:

□ The city's population grew an average rate of about 1.8 percent from 1970 and 2000, a number that increased 4 percent between 2000 and 2005, when it topped 101,000.

□ Tyler's total population is somewhat older than the rest of the state. It

has fewer children and more people aged 65 and older, officials reported.

□ While most Tyler households are composed of families, only one in five are a traditional married couple with children. Almost one-third of the households are single individuals.

□ Tyler's Hispanic population almost doubled between 1990 and 2000, but that number is still lower than state average.

□ The city proportionately has more African-Americans in its population than the state as a whole.

□ Almost one-quarter of children in Tyler were living in poverty as of the 2000 census.

□ Nearly one-half of Tyler's households do not make enough income to afford a median-priced single-family home — in 2005, it was \$123,408.

To stimulate discussions, consultants offered a series of scenarios for the future, depicting various ways in which the city can grow and prosper, using its

location to promote it as a regional hub.

Among them: enticing development to move toward the west, east and north, and incorporating mixed use development as a redevelopment tool.

About 800,000 people live within 50 miles of Tyler, Priestner said.

After hearing from the consultants, participants met in smaller groups to pinpoint both assets and detriments of Tyler's progress.

Jeff Hill, who moved to Tyler from Houston about two years ago, said the city should immediately address its traffic issues.

"I've seen what happens when there is no planning," he said. "I'm here today to help with that task. If we don't get on our traffic issues quickly, the future won't be so bright in Tyler."

To help control downtown parking issues and congestion, Peter Eng suggested using off-site parking and a public shuttle service for workers. He also suggested transforming Erwin and

Front streets into one-way streets.

Seeber said input received from Saturday's gathering will be submitted to the Tyler 21 steering committee for condensing, followed by submission to the Tyler City Council in the form of goals.

Once adopted, the goals will be included in the final plan. Components of the plan will be broken down into short, middle and long-range development plans.

The City Council will be responsible for implementing the plan, the mayor said.

The primary purpose behind the city's new \$615,000 planning effort is to guide orderly growth, provide predictability for development and avoid unnecessary spending, city leaders said.

Officials predict the city's new comprehensive plan will take between 18 and 24 months to build, including implementation of a new set of zoning laws.