

**GO FORWARD PINE BLUFF  
Quality of Life Committee**

**Pine Bluff Convention Center**

**April 20, 2016**

Mr. Warwick Sabin, State Representative and executive director of The Innovation Hub, discussed The Innovation Hub in the opening session. The Innovation Hub, a nonprofit organization, is the largest facility of its kind in this country. The twenty thousand square feet building, located in North Little Rock, with three areas (maker's space, designer's space, co-work space) has been dubbed the "center of innovation". The purpose of the facility is to develop students and workers in the STEAM areas. The project drives entrepreneurship, innovation, and training. It also provides summer camps, coding workshops, meetings for business and industry and continuous activities for children and adults. After a question and answer period, the Go Forward Pine Bluff Committees reconvened in their meeting room.

**Quality of Life Committee**

The agenda was handed out and discussed with those in attendance.

**SPEAKERS-** Mayor Debe Hollingsworth, Ms. Joy Blankenship, Mr. Mitch Rose, Ms. Lori Walker, Mr. Steve Doolittle and Monica Bilak from the City of Paducah.

**Streetscape Pine Bluff**

Joy Blankenship, Pine Bluff Development Director and QOL Committee Member, and Mitch Rose, Vice President of McClellan Consulting Engineers provided a presentation on Streetscape Downtown Pine Bluff. A history of downtown Pine Bluff was given. They spoke on how downtown was and hopefully will return to being the Gateway to Pine Bluff. The solution would be a project that would include widening streets, better lighting, pocket parks (mural areas), two-lane traffic in merchants' area and water gardens. The Streetscape project was recently adopted by Mayor Hollingsworth and the Pine Bluff City Council. This is a \$4 million construction project. The city awarded \$500T grant towards this project. There's been a collaboration between McClelland Consulting Engineers Ritchie Smith Associates, Landscape Architecture, Inc., and the Reed Architecture Firm for Pine Bluff to develop a Downtown Main Street Master Plan and Downtown Design Guidelines. It will take 9 months to complete the project.

A similar plan has been completed in several cities in Arkansas, including Little Rock and Fort Smith. There was a discussion about "Pop-ups". The concept is about creating a façade (a store front for a barber shop, restaurant) to allow prospective business owners to see how successful the business would fair in that area.

## Overview of Quality of Place

Lori Walker, gave an overview of the Quality of Place. She spoke about the fact that everyday Pine Bluff had 12,000 people migrate into the city. She felt that this was an indicator that Pine Bluff didn't meet their quality of life standards.

She also spoke about the Economic Developments agenda. Their agenda items were to: establish a strategic direction (SGI), an aligning system with the strategic direction, focus on the retention (business) and expansion, focus on the quality of place by offering a community that appeals to all, and developing and growing our workplace and attracting businesses.

Some infrastructure project includes: widening University Drive, underground utilities on University Drive, Splash Park next to Saracen Landing, a walking trail, and Town Center on University Drive.

Walker also familiarized the committee with the seven Arts and Cultural Institutes in Pine Bluff: the Railroad Museum, Arkansas Hall of Fame, the Arts and Science Center of Southeast Arkansas, the UAPB Hathaway Art Museum, the Jefferson County Museum, the University of Arkansas Cultural Museum and the \_\_\_\_\_.

## Aquatic Center

Mayor Debe Hollingsworth provided a history behind the proposed erection of an Aquatic Center in Downtown Pine Bluff. The Stephens Group assisted in forecasting the cost of the Center. A bond was issued in 2010 and 2013. It was determined that a recreation center and aquatic center would cost \$42 million to build. However, after the proposed rendering and the actual rendering the cost increased from 11 million to over 15 million. In reviewing Phase I and Phase II, the Aquatic Center was noted as the most needed for the community. Proposed programs to offer in facility –competitive swimming for children can we expand that program, therapeutic swimming classes for the elderly, birthday parties and swimming lessons. The Aquatic Center will be located next the Wells Fargo and behind Salvation Army.

Mayor Hollingsworth informed the committee concerning downtown that all buildings from the courthouse to Blake Street have been inventoried and owners can expect tougher code enforcements. The codes would also be enforced in the historic district near downtown.

## Paducah, Kentucky

Steve Doolittle and Monica Bilak from Paducah, Kentucky spoke to the committee about the revitalization of their town, particularly their downtown area and the Lower Town district. The town transformed from dilapidated buildings, drug and crime ridden areas to a progressive city. They explained the “changed” occurred twenty-five years ago, because of a meeting between a local artist who had relocated to the area and wanted to start a business in the area. After speaking with the City Planning department, he was given an “incentive” that would allow him to stay rent free upstairs from his art gallery. The city and several key individuals saw the potential of the revitalization plan and were able to provide similar packages to coffee shop owners, restaurant owners, etc. The city also strengthened their zoning and coding laws.

## Gardens/Lafayette Gardens

Mike Collins wrote and distributed copies of two written reports related to the community garden and focusing on the North Little Rock Fit2 Live community project. His handouts included a task list to clarify the gardening process and a Pine Bluff Garden Summary.

He also shared a video about the Lafayette Gardens. The Lafayette Gardens were established in downtown Detroit, Michigan in 2011. The Garden consist of raised beds on a three-quarter of an acre plot of land. The committee members were encouraged to view the other YouTube videos about the Detroit, Michigan Lafayette Gardens.

## Choose 901

Kaleybra Morehead shared the Choose 901 in Memphis. The purpose of the project is to engage, retain, and increase the cohort of 20-30-year-olds to relocate to Memphis. Memphis is accomplishing this through social media. The committee was shown the website. The website for Choose 901 includes job openings, events (festivals, live music, and shows) and tidbits to make the transition to Memphis i.e., steps to turn on electricity, where to find housing, etc. She felt it was an innovative concept and name (the city’s area code is 901).

## **SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

### Marketing Subcommittee Report

Their assignment was to develop a SWOT Analysis for Marketing Pine Bluff. They decided on the following SWOT: Strengths- City Guides (Land of Legends, Harbour News, etc.), Pine Bluffians Weaknesses- Lack of Collaboration (several slogans, outdated logos/website and inconsistency with the brand), negativity among the citizens, lack of website and Internet presence. (The QOL Committee members were asked to put Pine Bluff in the search engine on their cellphone. Pine Bluff was also pulled up using the meeting room’s Internet. The Committee was also asked to compare Paducah and Pine Bluff when placed in a search engine. There was a discussion about

changing the top landing sites. This change may occur with the hiring a Website Designer). Weaknesses continue-Multiple small events, lack of funding and resources and people have lost their hope. Opportunities- To work together, hire a Website Designer or Marketing Company to build the website and maintain the website, economic development and growth, and local higher education institutions. Threats- Local media (print and Little Rock TV Stations), crime, image perception, city government, K-12 Schools and lack of workforce.

### **Safety Subcommittee Report**

Safety Subcommittee discussed the use of marketing and public relations to promote positives about Pine Bluff. Committee suggested that a Public Relations Specialist be hired to work with the Pine Bluff Police Department and the City of Pine Bluff to provide a “positive spin” when analyzing crime statistics.

### **“Things to Do” Subcommittee Report**

The Things to Do Subcommittee made the following recommendation: Using the vacant Southeast Junior High School to implement a program similar to the STARS Complex in Fort Myers, Florida.

Committee of volunteers to serve underneath Greg Gustek and the PB Convention and Visitors Bureau as a Central Board for Events. The board will serve as a resource for events that are given permits by the city and help with marketing and connecting with other events. We also recommend that this Board include a knowledgeable and competent webmaster that will primarily be responsible for maintaining a website dedicated to upcoming events current and past events.

An event that was brought to our attention since the meeting was the Kansas City Corporate Challenge. This is another event that could potentially be a very fun and culture building event for the community. During this event companies register teams/employees that can compete in any of the 30+ events that happen over a 9-month time span. Company’s pay and entry fee to register their teams and the event also would depend on different companies to sponsor individual events as well. There would be a \$100 entry fee for each company to donate to the charity of choice each year. That charity is also promoted throughout that year’s event series. We would like to do a little more research and follow up on this event to see if this is a feasible event that we could do in Pine Bluff. This does not have to be a Pine Bluff only deal. We could reach out to Jefferson County and surrounding areas to come in and be a part of the event.

<http://www.kccorporatechallenge.com/>

We talked about the implementation of an annual event in connection with one of the Bass Fishing Tournaments that could help as a branding event for Pine Bluff. Fresh Water Fish Festival- Featuring delicacies that come from fresh waters. Live music, vendors, and contest opportunity. This event could be the one big event that launches a series of other small events

throughout the year either quarterly or monthly that will promote continuity and pride in our community.

The subcommittee saw a definite need for a Social Media campaign.... #positivelypinebluff #pinebluffproud. Whenever something positive is said on social media, it should be followed with #positivelypinebluff and #pinebluffproud.

**Next Meeting-** May 18, 2016, at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff