

Coalition takes first step toward defining goals

Thursday, February 7, 2008

By JENNIFER NESBITT

ThisWeek Staff Writer

More than 50 people gathered last week at the Columbus Community Coalition's first meeting, aimed at determining what form the new group will take and what issues it will address.

"That's the challenge ahead of us: to decide what the structure should be and what the agenda should be, if we decide to have an agenda," said Northland Community Council president Dave Paul, who is involved in organizing the group.

The Columbus Community Coalition came out of a work group comprising civic association and area commission leaders that was formed by the city to assess how Columbus and such groups work together.

The work group produced 18 recommendations and decided to form a coalition of neighborhood leaders to help neighborhoods pool resources and communicate with one another more frequently.

Last week's meeting allowed those who had participated in the work group to talk about that experience and gave people interested in the coalition a chance to talk about what issues the group should tackle.

"This is just a worthwhile effort to get neighborhoods talking," said Paul, who participated in the city's work group.

Those who attended identified issues they thought the coalition should address. The long list included safety, failing infrastructure, zoning laws, graffiti and vacant houses.

No formal leadership was chosen. The coalition may aim to be a free-flowing structure, said Clintonville Area Commission chairman Chris Gawronski, another organizer.

"We are not looking at a really formalized structure," Gawronski said. "We're not looking at creating more bureaucracy."

Rather, he said, the coalition is looking at creating subgroups devoted to a variety of neighborhood and city issues. Members can work on those issues and report their progress to and seek the support of the entire coalition, he said.

"It's really being able to address what they're passionate about," Gawronski said. "That's how things happen."

Not establishing a formal structure for the coalition also will help it to change as the needs of the neighborhoods and members change.

"I see this as very fluid and changing as it needs changed," he said.

To keep the coalition moving forward, those at last week's meeting did form an ad hoc steering committee that will aim to meet this month to discuss structure and key issues for the coalition, said Northwest Civic Association secretary Jennifer Adair, who is helping to lead the committee.

"What we hope is that the committee will decide the who, what, when, where, why and how," Adair said. "This is starting from scratch, so everything has to be decided."

Once the steering committee meets, she said organizers would like to schedule another coalition meeting in March or April, during which the coalition would present its ideas.

"We have a lot of energy right now," Adair said. "We need to be more than a group that just sits around and discusses things; we need to be doers."

To get people motivated, the coalition needs to continue to capitalize on that energy, she said.

"We need to be timely," Adair said. "We want to keep people active and going."

Organizers agreed that it will take effort to form a new coalition out of nothing but said it would be worth the effort.

"Things are a little messy at this point, as they always are when you start something brand new," Paul said. "Fellowship of our community organizations was something we all saw value in."

jnesbitt@thisweeknews.com

Reprinted with the permission of and Copyright © 2008, ThisWeek Community Newspapers.
Content may not be republished without permission.
<http://www.thisweeknews.com/>