



## Ruston 21 moves ahead

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A springtime Saturday field trip to rejoice in the opening of the Farmers' Market in Ruston yielded other pleasant surprises.

We had read about the Ruston 21 master plan, the city's blueprint for its future growth and development. But unlike so many other master plans and visioning processes we've seen and participated in, the master plan isn't sitting on a shelf in Mayor Dan Hollingsworth's bookcase.

It's literally a work in progress.

Drive through downtown Ruston, and the overhead power lines are gone. Wide sidewalks are lined with benches and planters, and the area is lighted by attractive street lamps. Parking is free, and the eclectic collection of shops, galleries and restaurants beckons the casual shopper who can park and browse from store to store without breaking a sweat.

The visual improvements to the downtown Vienna Street and East Park Avenue area, about 85 percent complete, represent the first two phases of a nine-phase downtown revitalization effort that could last around five years. The improvements were 90 percent funded by state Department of Transportation and Development grants, with the city funding the rest of the \$1.3-million project.

"It's really generated some excitement," said Hollingsworth, who first floated the idea of a new master plan in his 1999 campaign. "You'll see a visual connection when the work is complete."

Work on Ruston's Trenton Street is expected to begin soon. But these improvements are just part of the bigger Ruston vision. The master plan encompasses all aspects of economic development, beautification and residential development.

On the beautification end, the city identified 200 substandard housing structures that should be demolished or improved. At least 50 percent of the structures have been demolished or brought up to code. The city also has made significant progress on removing junk vehicles scattered around the city. Further growth will be "smart growth," development that fits within the community's vision for its residential and business areas.

A few years from now, we fully expect to visit Ruston and recall when a sleepy Southern city woke up and aspired to become a model community for business, education and residents. Its master plan will fully join town and gown in the creation of a wonderful place to live, work and play.

So often, tax dollars are spent to prepare the vision, but the momentum and funding sources to execute that plan are lacking. Not so with Ruston. The community and its leadership are to be applauded for showing the rest of us how it can be done.

Hollingsworth said Ruston 21 will take time, but he's confident it eventually will transform the city.

"This is going to take some years," he said. "But we're laying the groundwork for a better future."

The editorials in this column represent the opinions of The News-Star's editorial board, composed of President and Publisher David B. Petty, Executive Editor Kathy Spurlock, Managing Editor Ken Stickney and community representatives Don Coker, Laura



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