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## Community calls forth vision

Laura Bond, *Reporter*

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Public transportation, curbside recycling and zoning upgrades were a few of dozens of suggestions thrown around Tuesday during Community Visioning Day at the Ruston Civic Center.

Approximately 400 residents gathered at two sessions designed to explore ideas for Ruston 21, which is intended to be a community roadmap for the city's future.

After hearing from speakers including a former Texas mayor and a Blueprint Louisiana executive board member, groups of eight sat at each table containing road signs of local streets to brainstorm responses to three questions posed to them.

Muriel Butler, a resident of Ruston's south side who sat at the Adams Street table, chatted with nearby residents about education and transportation.

"I was highly motivated to come see what this was all about," Butler said of Community Visioning Day. "I want to see new ideas and change coming from the meeting."

Community participant Brandon Watkins, a student at Louisiana Tech University, is originally from New Orleans and said Ruston has strengths and weaknesses compared to his hometown.

"It's a little more laid back here, but I feel they could bring more businesses here to attract more people," Watkins said.

The three questions asked of the hundreds of residents included:

- What do you find special about the character of Ruston? Some responses included a good business climate, small-town atmosphere, diversity, close proximity to large cities, strong public library and cleanliness.



- What changes should city leaders consider to improve the community? Some suggestions were the addition of a bus terminal, more childcare facilities, bridging the socioeconomic divide, more opportunities for university graduates, elimination of two-hour parking limitations downtown, incentives to draw businesses to the south side and additional green spaces.
- What would you like Ruston to be known for in the future? Answers listed included a city committed to technology and innovation, a modern “Mayberry,” an outdoor living and arts community and a city that aggressively attracts businesses.

Reflecting on the enthusiasm of residents at Community Visioning Day, Ruston 21 team leader Ken Tipton noted, “If you listen to people in the room, they really care about the community.”

The data collected at Tuesday’s meeting will be used as a building block for other community meetings that will be held in each city council district. After gathering a mass of community input, the city will move forward with plans that could impact future land use, economic development, capital outlay projects and quality of life.

Ruston Mayor Dan Hollingsworth said Ruston 21 is scheduled to be released in 2010.

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