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Franklin community collaborates on improvements

Choose Franklin invited the service community to organize the new Community Collaboration Project on Thursday afternoon.

The project is being developed with the intention of initiating small tasks to beautify the downtown area before Franklin Community Day on May 9.

The meeting had a large turnout of more than 20 area service members representing the residential community and the chamber of commerce as well as Franklin Savings Bank, city employees and many other area service groups.

Denise Sharlow and Colleen Ives, both from Choose Franklin, organized and spearheaded the meeting. Sharlow said their intention was to bring together locals who are passionate about revitalizing the downtown to brainstorm ideas. Indeed, that is what the large group did.

At the beginning of the meeting, Sharlow already was impressed by the turnout. "I look around the room and there is so much talent here," she said to the group.

The two women said they already had brainstormed for ideas and suggested that local residents or students paint the fire hydrants on Central Street with artwork and fill the flower boxes that hang in storefronts.

"There is a focus on downtown because it's so visible," said Ives.

Sharlow said she wanted to get everyone together because, "You all have fresh eyes."

Ives said Choose Franklin had obtained a grant for the purpose but it was a small amount of money, \$5,000. She said she did not think it would be enough to do everything they wanted to do.

Brian Sullivan, the municipal services director, told the group what the city already is doing to help. He said he hopes the City Council will support funding the downtown streetlight project. The city is repairing the sidewalks on Central Street and is working at removing graffiti from public buildings.

Ives divided the large group into four smaller groups to brainstorm and come up with their top two ideas for the community to complete for a small amount of money and small amount of effort.

A lot of ideas came from the crowd but Ives and Sharlow reminded everyone at the meeting that they can only take on two to three small projects. "There's a lot to do," said Ives.

One improvement that every group and seemingly every person in the room agreed about was addressing the empty storefronts downtown.

Some innovative suggestions to improve or beautify the empty storefronts included painting murals on them, displaying historical photographs or having local artisans work in them or even displaying student artwork. That idea was combined with the suggestion to put curtains on the second-story windows to create the group's number one priority.

The second priority combined the painting of fire hydrants and a general scrubdown of streets, sidewalks, and curbs.

The final priority was bringing back the American flags that used to fly in front of all the storefronts in downtown Franklin.

At the end of the meeting, individuals within the group volunteered to contact other organizations they thought might be of some help with the project, such as the fire department, Rotary Club, VFW, and Boy Scouts.

The next meeting of the Franklin Community Collaboration Project will be to discuss the next step of how to initiate these projects and to establish subcommittees to move forward on each. Those interested in getting involved with the project may attend the meeting which will take place at the Franklin High School Library on Wednesday, Feb. 18, at 3 p.m.
