

Columbia Vision Commission: RE-Vision Dialogue
May 20, 2015 – Activity and Recreation Center, 1701 W. Ash St.
Columbia, Missouri

Commission Chair Maurice Harris welcomed guests to the RE-Visioning dialogue at 6 p.m. Other Commissioners attending included Vice-Chair Alvin Cobbins, Jeremy Milarsky and Kevin Reape. Chair Harris summarized the Vision process and the five-year review process, noted the location of the next meeting and observed that the Vision should reflect changes that have occurred in the community over the past few years.

Health, Social Services and Affordable Housing

Chair Harris summarized the vision statement and goals for health, social services and affordable housing, as noted in the Community Vision document, and asked for comments from those attending. Vision: Columbia is a supportive, compassionate, health community with high-quality social services, a first-rate health care system and safe, quality affordable housing that are accessible to all.

Goals (numbering corresponds to Community Vision document)

- 11.1 Social Services – Columbia will support quality points of entry to access information for high-quality and affordable social services to support children, adults, seniors, persons with disabilities and people with cultural barriers. All social services will be sufficiently funded to work toward the elimination of poverty.
- 11.2 Affordable Housing – A diversity of housing choices will be dispersed throughout the community to achieve an adequate supply of affordable, energy-efficient and accessible housing.
- 11.3 Health – Columbia will be a health community. All residents will have timely access to appropriate health care. Effective prevention initiatives will contribute to a healthy community.

What progress have you seen since the Community Vision was created?

Darin Preis, Executive Director, Central Missouri Community Action: Doesn't know how much to attribute to Vision, but County-City funding processes are streamlined and improved and the two governments work well together to make it a simple process.

Stephanie Browning, Director, Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services: Even before the process was streamlined, had good agency collaboration. The sales tax for children's services is a big improvement in the last couple of years. Have completed a large community health assessment and five-year community health improvement plan.

Michelle Shikles, Public Health Promotion Supervisor, Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services: City now has energy efficiency and sustainability plans.

Scott Clardy, Deputy Director, Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services: When it comes to social services, and how the City and County work together on housing, we're all using the same management system. There's a lot of coordination around who is and is not being funded. The sales tax for children's services freed up social services funds for other types of uses.

Stephanie Browning: We don't see a lot of duplication among agencies. There are some similarities, but they complement each other. There is so much need and not enough resources. We all tend to see similar people and can fill in gaps.

Darin Preis: Overlapping services is a common misperception. There is demand, and the nonprofits in the community work exceptionally well together. We might have similar or different approaches, and people should have choices about who they want to work with. The recession hit, poverty went up, unemployment stayed low, but wages are stagnant or declining. The vision works for most of us. Even with different missions, we share the same general goals.

Phil Steinhaus, CEO, Columbia Housing Authority: Previously provided an update for the vision report. Provides and promotes affordable housing through the Community Housing Trust, federal Housing and Urban Development programs and leveraging money through tax credits to renovate housing stock. We're rehabbing 357 units more than 50 years old, will apply for funds to rehab Oak Towers and have been approved for veterans housing. The key is that health and human services go together. Agrees there are good working relationships in Columbia. If we can't build enough housing, a good way to help is through work programs so that people don't need financial assistance. We help people work toward self-sufficiency, include through youth programs and work with seniors.

Becky Markdt, Columbia Housing Authority Director of Resident Services & Youth Community Coalition Coordinator: Has seen great growth in collaboration in the last few years. Agencies are working together to align outcomes through Cradle-to-Career, a mapping project and the United Way.

What else has happened since then?

Amy Camp, Boone County Community Services Advisory Commission: Cites disparities in the community. As agencies have come together, there has been progress. Working on that has potential to have a huge scope in how it affects the community.

Darin Preis: Growth has been a significant theme over the last ten years. It's good but creates a lot of stress. Half of Columbia Public Schools' 17,000 students are struggling. Even if crime is not increasing, there's more coverage and more awareness. Race is on people's minds; racism is still institutional in some ways.

Commissioner Cobbins: Several years ago a criminal element hit downtown. Somewhere down the line, with additional student housing and a couple shootings downtown within three or four months, that brought it way up to the front. It is on everybody's minds now. This is not a bad thing; but we need to do something about that issue

Phil Steinhaus: We're seeing housing disparities, too. There is more housing, but not much that's affordable. We don't want to segregate by race. Grew up here and does not remember this level of crime and shootings. When you concentrate the poorest of poor in certain areas, they can be victimized by others in those areas.

What should the community do, going forward?

Darin Preis: The City of Columbia deserves credit for considering poverty in its strategic plan. It's an astounding approach. Phil's leadership on the housing trust fund is important to continue. The fund sets up a land bank that stays in trust so it can remain affordable, and I hope the City can support it. The trend toward tiny homes and secondary or auxiliary homes creates a different kind of opportunity that should be pursued. We need to expect more from federal and state legislators. It's not just about money; get rid of punitive policies.

Stephanie Browning: Expand Medicaid coverage.

Phil Steinhaus: Practice inclusionary zoning. As we see residential areas developing, build incentives for creating a percentage of affordable homes in that subdivision. There is some nice diversity in the Nifong and Providence area. Can create pockets near grocery stores, and other amenities. Don't create big blocks of certain types of housing. Every time we build a school, try to set aside land for affordable housing. Wealthier kids get to live close, poor kids farther away. Consider reducing development fees in return for more affordable housing.

Darin Preis, speaking as Columbia Public Schools Board Member: We should be looking at opportunities around schools, and the community must insist that schools come with neighborhoods. We need an open conversation about how that land is used, and the community must want it.

Phil Steinhaus: We must have workforce housing to have a vibrant community and economy.

Stephanie Browning: The Health Department's MAPP process has eight focus group looking at the most important health issues across the county and in the City wards: public safety; violence and unsafe driving; substance abuse; vulnerable populations; and the economy. Optimum health requires community engagement, strong neighborhoods; and living wage jobs.

Michelle Shikles: We can do this with existing neighborhoods, too, by building sidewalks, which can draw higher-income people.

Chair Harris: Why did the Community Vision pick diabetes as a major concern?

Scott Clardy: The Missouri Department of Health identified diabetes as an issue at that time. Columbia's vision needs to concentrate on what community is saying.

Stephanie Browning: City departments weren't allowed to contribute. We could have dispelled that notion and talked about other issues.

Amy Cap: Diabetes is still there, and health disparities play a role.

Community Pride and Human Relations

Chair Harris summarized the vision statement and goals for community pride and human relations, as noted in the Community Vision document, and asked for comments from those attending.

Vision: Our vision of Columbia's future is one where we all embrace and help create a welcoming, just, responsive, proactive, understanding and respectful environment for residents and visitors alike – celebrating rather than denigrating our collective diversity.

Goals (numbering corresponds to Community Vision document)

- 4.1 Youth – Columbia will develop and promote a central resource (and possibly place), creating environments that will cultivate responsible citizenship among young people.

- 4.2 Diversity/Inclusion – Columbia will be an inclusive community where people from all walks of life hear, appreciate, understand, respect and trust each other, and where positive relationships are fostered and human rights are advanced.
- 4.3 Sense of Community – Connections between families, neighborhoods and the community at-large will be actively promoted through events, through broad, effective and inclusive communication and through interactive and fun community challenges.

What progress have you seen since the Community Vision was created?

Becky Markdt: The Youth Community Coalition has continued to grow and is looking for funding. The Coalition brings partners together and works to align outcomes and allocate resources. The City Council created Youth Advisory Council. That was our organization's issue, and we continue to be a voice for youth. Partners include the Health Department and County. All of this grew out of the Community Vision.

Darin Preis: The number of parks and athletic activities in Columbia is pretty staggering. There are many good opportunities in most areas, but there's not necessarily diversity in the parks. Trying to involve kids regardless of income.

What else has happened since then?

Darin Preis: Not everyone is into parks and athletics. Many youth don't have anything to do. The Mall doesn't want them, and that's where trouble can start.

Chair Harris: We heard this last month...that there is no community center.

Phil Steinhaus: There is disparity in treatment by police (perceived or actual), ability to get jobs. Can lead to racial unrest, and it's getting worse. There's an attitude of, it's ok to fight to solve problems. People feel they don't have same advantages.

Becky Markdt: Was new here on 2005 and appreciated the downtown activities. They created connections; the community at-large coming together. They stopped having those events because there were too many youth downtown, and that was upsetting. Out of fear, we don't seem to want to get large groups of youth together. Should re-establish the downtown activities.

Phil Steinhaus: The other issue is lack of planning by event organizers for the orderly dispersal of people after an event is over. That's what happened w/ midnight hoops at the Armory. They turned the lights out but had no plan for sending people home. Conflicts start, and then there's no control. A good example is how police direct traffic after an MU football games

Chair Harris: The city has more than 100,000 people. When a city is this size, it's hard to say, "Let's all meet downtown." May have to have more neighborhood events.

What should the community do, going forward?

Stephanie Browning: In neighborhoods, you could figure out how to have more events. It's important to have a network around you.

Michelle Shikles: Continue to invest in youth involvement opportunities. Activity buses are important. It's a sensitive time between when you get out of school and when your parents get home. You could have activities at school and transit back home.

Becky Markdt: Use school buildings as activity centers. People see a relationship lacking with the schools.

Commissioner Cobbins: At our second meeting we heard about a few issues with schools providing that service. You're clearly driving home the need for another ARC, with staff. Not all people can afford to use it, and you need more activities than sports.

Becky Markdt: Omaha, NE has community agencies that use school buildings.

Phil Steinhaus: The Housing Authority is working with a consultant to see how we can connect with women- and minority-owned businesses for rehab work and to encourage more inclusive contracting processes with the City, University of Missouri and others. It's not a simple process to get registered and certified and to be involved in a formal bid process. We're trying to educate those businesses and others.

Becky Markdt: Is concerned about diversity on the police force. Does it represent the people it serves? Do we need better recruitment? Wants to avoid problems we see in other communities.

Arts and Culture

Chair Harris summarized the vision statement and goals for arts and culture, as noted in the Community Vision document, and asked for comments from those attending.

Vision: Arts and culture resources, artists and institutions are accessible to all, are supported by the community and provide a rich network of creative opportunities.

Goals (numbering corresponds to Community Vision document)

- 1.1 Means – Columbia will both sustain and creatively expand its foundation for arts and culture in our community.
- 1.2 Realize the Ends – Arts and culture will be central to daily life and accessible to all equally in Columbia.

What progress have you seen since the community vision was created?

Chair Harris: Note more public art, the recently created arts district, film festivals, Percent for Art for City buildings and traffic box art

Stephanie Browning: There are more events, and there is art at stormwater drains.

Becky Markdt: The Sunday farmers market includes the arts, and there are jazz and blues in schools

Scott Clardy: Artrageous Fridays.

What else has happened since then?

Commissioner Milarsky: There is an argument from the Missouri Association of Community Arts Agencies that revenue from the state's visiting entertainer tax is being diverted away from the arts, and this hurts economic development.

Chair Harris: Would be nice to have more art museums in Columbia to draw people in.

Amy Camp: University of Missouri museums have moved to Mizzou North facility.

Andrea Waner, Public Information Specialist, Columbia/Boone County Department of Health and Human Services: Museums may not be in accessible locations, and they're not adequately funded.

What should the community do, going forward?

Chair Harris: Could make bus shelters more attractive with art.

Michelle Shikles: The City is working on a bus shelter near Hickman High School and is talking about incorporating art. A lot of art goes on in schools, but you don't see it unless you're involved in it. Some communities fund apprenticeships to make public art.

Stephanie Browning: Some events are pricey. Community should continue to make them more affordable.

Scott Dean, Columbia Human Rights Commission: Would like to see a public space for graffiti artists, which might divert "tags" from private property.

Andrea Waner: The Roots 'n' Blues Festival is not as accessible or affordable now as it was in its downtown location, in the center of the community.

Michelle Shikles: Kids want to be involved in dance, but lessons are expensive, even with scholarships.

Open Period

Chair Harris: Invited comments on all topics. There were no further comments.

Chair Harris thanked participants, said that other comments could be posted online and announced next meeting on Wednesday, June 24, 2015 in the Rock Bridge High School cafeteria, 4303 Providence Road, from 6 – 8 p.m. Topics will include environment, development and governance.

Commissioner Cobbins: The Vision Commission is a great voluntary opportunity. In Columbia, there are ways for people to be heard, which is not true in every other community.

Meeting adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Toni Messina, Civic Relations Officer and staff liaison