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today's **DEALS**

A good start with forums: Now, let's build on that

Banner Editorial

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Saturday March 17, 2012

Bennington residents turned out in impressive numbers Thursday afternoon and evening for nine community forums to offer suggestions and comments on broad topics for possible initiatives that would benefit the town.

Those residents and others, and the observers brought to town by the Vermont Council on Rural Development as part of this community-building program, displayed a high level of enthusiasm and willingness to work together on specific goals. Those proposals will be further defined after a report from the council on the forums and a town meeting style session in mid-April.

After that, it will be up to teams of volunteers and those state officials and others lined up by the council to bring projects and proposals to fruition.

This is a proven process that numerous other Vermont towns have gone through with positive and lasting results -- including Pownal and Rutland. The same should hold true in Bennington, especially if enthusiasm remains strong.

General ideas were floated during the nine sessions, which included proposals to address the future of the downtown and economic development in the Bennington area; arts and recreational options for youth and adults; educational issues and problems; poverty and its effects; Bennington's self-image and its image throughout the region; work force options and development; and communications.

Of course, all of these issues or challenges could address more than one category.

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A more clearly etched and better promoted image of Bennington as a destination and attractive place to live also affects the economy -- and ultimately the schools and the poverty rate, while boosting the arts and the odds new recreational facilities will become feasible.

It should also be obvious that just the fact so many people are tossing in their suggestions for improvements -- many not normally in the limelight or involved in local government or organizations -- is a plus. Anyone can come up with an idea or approach that could have a lasting positive effect -- that is, if they come to the meetings and express those ideas and are willing to help implement the best of the suggestions.

For those who might now be inspired to become involved in this process, it isn't too late. Just show up for that April meeting and roll up your sleeves.

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