

Clock ticking on seeking federal grant for Triangle Noir development

By Linda A. Moore

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Choosing a new name, finding a more focused direction and meeting a looming deadline for federal grant money were the objectives of a public meeting on Monday to present ideas for the Triangle Noir Redevelopment Project.

The project area is bound by Riverside Drive on the west, Crump Boulevard on the south, East Street on the east and Washington Avenue to the north. It includes significant African-American historical and cultural sites from Robert R. Church Park, Beale Street, the National Civil Rights Museum, the Universal Life Insurance building and Clayborn Temple.

More than 100 people were at the session at BRIDGES, hosted by the city's Division of Housing and Community Development, Self +Tucker Architects and the Carter Malone Group.

They were thanked by Memphis Mayor A C Wharton for their willingness to "help shape the destiny of our city."

"What we're talking about is not in Birmingham, it's not in Atlanta, it is not in San Francisco," Wharton said. "It is unique to one place, Memphis, Tennessee."

Attendees shared ideas that included making the district a cultural destination, keeping the authenticity of the area with development overlays, having a strong tourism presence at Memphis International Airport, historic markers, making it a walkable neighborhood, developing artists housing and redeveloping Clayborn Temple for some communitywide use.

They also tested new names to better identify the area and link it to Memphis.

"I'm thrilled, but we've just scratched the surface with what we've done tonight," said Joan Nelson, owner of Heritage Tours, which is on Hernando and in the district.

The city will use the ideas generated from the meeting to finalize a federal Choice Neighborhoods grant request that could bring the city \$20 million to \$30 million, said Robert Lipscomb, housing division director.

Memphis received a \$500,000 Choice Neighborhoods planning grant in 2010 and Lipscomb thought there would be more time to formulate ideas for the area.

However, there is now an April deadline for the development grant and Lipscomb didn't want to risk missing out on the money by not applying.

"I think we've got one chance to do this and I thought we should go for it," he said. "The greater risk is that the funding may not be there. So do we go for it and not quite be ready or we do all this planning and there's no grant out there? I think we need to opt for going forward."

Organizers, including Jimmie Tucker with Self+Tucker, left the meeting optimistic.

"We put a lot of good ideas out there that people can get excited about," Tucker said.



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