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PLAN UNVEILED FOR POOR SECTIONS OF CITY

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BRADENTON --- Praise, yet skepticism, greeted a consultant's plan to bring vitality back to some of the poorest neighborhoods in the city's central and east sides.

Longtime residents in east and central Bradenton said they have seen such plans before to restore crumbling infrastructure or improve the livability of their neighborhoods. Yet the results have been minimal, and that's why they find it difficult to buy into another one. "When people don't see results, they just write you off," resident **Cynthia Newell** said.

Consultant Bob Gray, chairman and chief executive officer of Strategic Planning Group Inc., said the creation of neighborhood groups and participation at monthly meetings of the Bradenton Central Community Redevelopment Agency are ways residents can make sure the plan is implemented to their liking.

The Central CRA meets at 5 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month at Bradenton City Centre, 101 Old Main St. Decisions that affect the central and east neighborhoods occur there, but the meetings usually draw a sparse crowd.

Stephen Thompson, Central CRA chairman, said he understands the frustration. But he pointed out that this is the city's first redevelopment agency for east and central Bradenton.

The agency collects tax money from portions of the area that would normally go to the city, then pumps it back into the neighborhoods with the state-mandated goal of eliminating slum and blight.

He pointed to a sign of progress: A year ago the agency bought land for the construction of an east Bradenton library and cultural center --- identified by residents as their top priority when the city created the Central CRA in 2001.

Gray's presentation Thursday night marked the culmination of months of gathering public input and creating a plan to revitalize the Central CRA neighborhoods. With more input now in hand, consultants plan to touch up the plan before it goes to the Central CRA board in July for adoption.

The proposed master plan centers on three major priorities:

* The redevelopment of Ninth Avenue/Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue from First Street to Ninth Street East. The plan calls for extensive landscaping on both sides of the streets, including center medians, and safety devices at major intersections.

Also, the plan wants aesthetic improvements resembling those installed along downtown streets, like brick crosswalks and historic lamp posts. The ultimate goal, consultants and city officials said, is to create a safe, attractive street that will attract commercial development.

* Maximizing the use of Norma LLOYD Park in east Bradenton with the 13th Avenue Community Recreation Center as the anchor. Not only would a move from 201 13th Ave. W. open the potential for new and modern buildings and a gym, but it would make available the center's current site off U.S. 41/301

for a commercial development.

Gray's report indicated a lack of vacant lots in that area available for commercial development.

* Creation of the east Bradenton library/cultural center.

Patrick Carnegie, director of the recreation center, said city leaders need to commit to improving neighborhoods and residents need to channel their voice through the Central CRA.

"And the CCRA has to be strong and say to the city, 'Hey, we need your investment,' " Carnegie said. "But I don't think they'll go that far unless we're there. There has to be a mobilization of people getting involved to demand things happen."

PHOTO/ALEX DIAZ/The Herald

Bradenton resident **Cynthia Newell** expresses a concern during Thursday's presentation of a redevelopment plan at Rogers United Methodist Church.