

The fabric of a community is built on many levels—social, structural, familial, economic, and spiritual. A redevelopment agency is structured to act directly on some and indirectly on others, with strong and coordinated partnerships with other specialized groups essential to the ultimate success of redevelopment. One common thread can blend all of these elements: fellowship. Empathy, good intentions, open communication and common concern strengthen the process and move us toward a successful outcome.

Last week, Waterfronts Partnership hosted a regional meeting. The energy level was high, and the fellowship was palpable. Congratulations to Jim Garth and Carol McLeod for putting together a wonderful program. Thanks to GAC and Andrew Rowell for their generous contribution and thanks to Ray Golz for his masterful tour of the city. Mayor Pate and Lee Vincent provided gracious remarks, and I heard many of the guests state how they would look forward to returning to “your city” as tourists. Had the fellowship and cooperation and mutual care been lacking, I doubt many would anticipate a second visit.

Last Sunday by invitation of NAACP Branch President Amy Rogers, we had the opportunity to visit the Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church where the North Port St. Joe Ministerial Alliance monthly worship service was hosted. We heard a moving and inspirational message (which included, not incidentally, the faith that judgment cannot be made from outward appearances such as the color of one’s skin) from Pastor Mills and the New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church family. We were surrounded by kindness and acceptance (and absolutely wonderful music). The spirit of fellowship extended to us made our hearts truly glad, and we fully intend to return.

Port St. Joe has participated in an abundance of visioning; we now have the opportunity to make some “brick and mortar” choices. The next steps toward real change is challenging; let’s do it together. Let’s do it through fellowship and grace and care for our community. The redevelopment area includes only a portion of our city; however, a successful outcome will be a tremendous benefit to the entire county.

The PSJRA currently has four exciting proposals for consulting services to create the detailed master plan for the redevelopment area. I’d like to share, with everyone interested, these proposals, the executive summary and comparison matrices that I will ultimately create for our board and the city for their consideration. The PSJRA board and the city will make decisions based on qualifications, scope, and budget and—very importantly—public input. If it were left to me, I’d figure out a way to use them all to the best of their particular expertise—they each would add significant value to a master plan with real promise for sustainable progress. However, that is only my recommendation. Your preferences need to be heard to frame the choices ultimately made by the city. Such is the importance of your voice in moving forward and not back.

Fellowship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of hidden personal agendas and dysfunctional compartmentalization of efforts. True openness and fellowship cannot be legislated; sunshine laws can only ensure that the process is open. The direct participation of the people can encourage and reinforce the openness and honesty that

lead to trust and a successful outcome (of the brick and mortar type). The fellowship of the people within a community can only strengthen the social fabric of a community toward trust and a successful outcome.

This week I take particular pleasure in offering special thanks to Tim Croft and the STAR for allowing us this column space and their continued, genuine interest in our community.