

Add your voice to the area's 10-year vision plan

Two opportunities for community members to offer ideas for the future of the Siuslaw Region are planned this month, as the work of a dedicated group of volunteers enters the home stretch in the creation of a 10-year vision for the community.

The gatherings will be held to engage residents and share what has been learned in a year's worth of investigation, meetings and conversations.

The first meeting is set for Thursday, Jan. 21, at Mapleton High School. The second meeting will be held Thursday, Jan. 28, at the Florence Events Center.

Both meetings will be held from 5 to 8 p.m., with an open house format from 5 to 6 p.m. and 7 to 8 p.m.

From 6 to 7 p.m., there will be a formal presentation of the findings.

"We are structuring the meetings this way so that more people can attend," said Becky Goehring, a community member and Fellow with The Ford Family Foundation.

Those who would rather come early to see the informal presentation will be able to do that and still be home by 7:15 p.m.

Those who are working or have late afternoon commitments, can arrive for the formal presentation and tour afterwards.

"This is an opportunity for anyone who would like to share their vision for the future of our region to participate," Goehring said. "This is really about community working together as we move forward in the next 10 years. Come to whichever meeting works best for your schedule so you can add your ideas. We look forward to seeing residents from upriver communities, Florence

and Dunes City at whichever date works best."

Light refreshments will be provided.

The final outcome of the process is to create a vision document that can be used by groups, organizations and governmental entities.

"With so much community input, there is some real dynamic information and priorities that will have been identified," Goehring said. "We know this document will be useful over the next 10 years as our community moves forward. But it will also be adaptable and updated, as needs and priorities change in our region."

The Siuslaw Region Community Visioning Project grew out of Pathways, a program offered to the community by The Ford Family Foundation at its Alumni Celebration held in April, 2014. More than 90 people who attended leadership programs sponsored by the Foundation, came together to choose a path forward.

Eighteen people signed up to work to develop a 10-year vision and defined the focus area as The Siuslaw Region, to include the upriver communities from Deadwood to Mapleton, and down through Florence and Dunes City, essentially the boundaries of the Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts.

The visioning work done by the team is supported by the City of Florence, Florence Rotary, The Siuslaw Public Library and The Ford Family Foundation.

"I became involved in the process because I saw the real need for more focus in our communities," said Oregon Pacific Bank vice president of commercial relationships

Mike Webb. "It seemed like everyone was pulling, but not in the same direction. Through the visioning program, there seemed to be a very timely opportunity to find the direction(s) the community most wanted to strive toward."

"If we can define that vision, maybe our community can make it a reality."

The Visioning team spent its first months together researching the variety of vision statements, finally settling on a three-tiered format. It begins with an overarching statement or sentence that captures the essence of the Siuslaw Region, continues with a short paragraph describing the area and, finally, ends with bullet point statements that highlight the key strengths and attributes identified by the community.

Community connections were made initially through an online and paper survey, conducted in the fall of 2014.

More than 650 residents of the Siuslaw Region, responded to the survey, which examined areas of community vitality.

The next step was to choose 10 areas of interest and hold focus group meetings with key representatives of each focus area. Those areas included both elements of community vitality and demographic considerations.

Those meetings provided a wealth of information, ideas and connections, according to Goehring.

"We began to see common threads, concerns and "ah-ha" moments," she said. "The chance to just sit with 15 or so people and have a conversation was engaging and made us all realize what potential exists in our communities."

Some of the common ideas or concerns included transportation issues, health care,

affordable workforce housing, affordable and reliable high speed internet, jobs creation, a community center with indoor play space for young children, redevelopment of abandoned mill sites and intergenerational connections.

Finding those common threads and ideas was important to Meg Spencer, director of the Siuslaw Public Library District and a member of the visioning team.

"I became involved with the Siuslaw visioning process to uncover information about what is needed and wanted by local residents," said Spencer. "The Library is also engaged in a strategic planning process and I believe the broader Siuslaw regional vision can help lead that process. We are all pieces of the bigger picture and planning for our shared future will benefit us all."

"The team has done a great job reaching out to various members of the greater Florence area to participate in the focus groups," said Joshua Greene, who is a member of the Visioning team. "When you read the results they are honest and express challenges and desires which will become the basis for the vision."

The community meetings will offer anyone who has an interest in the future of the region, to share ideas, comment on the current input and sign up to become more involved in moving the vision forward, Goehring said.

"There is often talk on some of the social media sites that target Florence and Mapleton about what is wrong with our area," she said. "Instead of just complaining, this is an opportunity to come out and share ideas. When we come together as a community, so much can be accomplished."

Community Chorus registration Jan. 25

On Monday, Jan. 25, at 6:30 p.m., registration for the Community Chorus' spring program will take place at Cross Road Church at 10th and Maple streets.

The first rehearsal will follow immediately afterwards until 8:30 p.m. All singers from high school age and older are welcome.

There is a registration fee of \$60 to cover the cost of music and other expenses. Several scholarships are available and may be discussed at registration. The chorus regularly rehearses on Monday evenings from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the Cross Road Church.

The May 1 concert will take place 2 p.m. at the Florence Events Center. Dr. Paul Guthmuller will direct the chorus.

The chorus is also seeking volunteers for a number of nonsinging roles, such as fund raising, bookkeeping, computer graphics, secretarial and other administrative chores.

For more information, call 970-618-6307 or visit the Community Chorus online at www.communitychorusflorence.org.

Registration forms for returning members and new members will be found on the website, printed and brought to registration night.

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