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Address
3805 Edwards Road
Suite 549
Cincinnati, OH 45209-1948
(p) 513-458-6736
(f) 513-458-6610
(e) ccrinn@juno.com
citizenscivicrenewal.org

CCR Holds First Citizens Connect Forum

On Tuesday July 22, 2008 at Grammer's Bar & Restaurant, Citizens for Civic Renewal rolled out our enhanced community forum model, Citizens Connect. Complete with entertainment, food and even beer, the event highlighted CCR's dedication to convening diverse groups of citizens to talk about the pressing issues of the day with a positive regional lens. Citizens Connect aims to em-

Citizens Connect

educate. empower. engage.



power citizens to get involved, educate citizens through a thoughtful and compelling content expert and engage citizens by fostering interesting connections in a small group setting.

Agenda 360 Phase I Summary

Since the fall of 2007, CCR captured input from over 1,300 residents of Southwest Ohio in the citizen engagement process of Agenda 360. Geographic and demographic meetings were hosted throughout Cincinnati and in every corner of the four counties and harnessed perspectives of Appalachian residents, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce members, and Urban League Job Training participants, among many others. These participants all weighed into the early stages of this ambitious action plan, which seeks to transform the region by the year 2020.

The theme for the inaugural Citizens Connect was creating strong, diverse neighborhoods in our region. Steve Smith, President of the Model Group gave an impressive presentation on how his firm is working in Over-the-Rhine and other neighborhoods to create housing opportunities for a variety of income groups. Those that were present were able to connect with one another and engage in small group dialogue and really gain insight as to what others had to say about this complex issue.

Citizens for Civic Renewal would like to thank the many co-sponsors that supported the event and everyone who attended and gave input. The first Citizens Connect forum was a great first step in CCR's re-dedication to its roots of creating a safe space for citizens of all kinds to gather and find the connections necessary to move the community forwards. Look for your invitation to the next Citizens Connect in the upcoming months.

When asked how to make this region a better place to live, work, and play, participants resoundingly called for improved transportation and education. People want effective public transportation, such as light rail, which would connect the airport to the region, the neighborhoods to downtown, and people to jobs. The strongest themes of education were better funded, state of the art public and primary schools in the region, as well as affordable secondary education. Many saw education as a foundation for the future as well as the link to successful workforce and economic development, improved crime and safety and stronger neighborhoods.

Continued on next page

Agenda 360 Phase 1

(Continued from page 1)

Participants championed ideas that were influenced by the built environment, place making, and parochialism. Urban participants envisioned safe, revitalized neighborhoods with mixed and affordable housing options, rehabilitated structures, and bustling business districts. Participants of all demographics and geographies specified their want for a fully developed, vibrant, and livable downtown that offers entertainment for all in the region, as well as a variety of stores that serve the daily needs of the urban residents. An undercurrent of much conversation was the tension between the strong parochialism among the diverse communities of the region and the need for collaboration among jurisdictions, in order to achieve success on many of these cross-cutting issues.

There was a swell of support for successes in the region that can't be built or held. Participants pointed to the rate of poverty, unemployment, and the impending recession.

Lovely R.I.T.A

When looking at the issue of local government efficiency and ways local jurisdictions can consolidate and begin saving money, tax administration becomes an important area of potential savings. In Hamilton County, 29 jurisdictions administer their own tax collection, while five have already consolidated using Regional Income Tax Agency (R.I.T.A.). If the other jurisdictions were to consolidate as well, the potential savings could be extraordinary, potentially exceeding \$1.5 million a year in Hamilton County alone.

R.I.T.A. is the Regional Income Tax Agency in the State of Ohio that provides services to collect income tax for 142 municipalities in the State. Founded in 1971, their mission is "to provide member communities with high quality, cost effective municipal services. We strive to service members with integrity and their taxpayers in a professional, courteous, and responsive manner" (The Regional Income Tax Agency).

In 1971, a Regional Council of Governments was formed between 38 municipalities in Ohio in order to

They called for economic development that embraced new high tech and green technologies, attracting young professionals and others to the newly created jobs. Another common perspective started with the people of the region: by having better connected support services for the region's disadvantaged, we can achieve a healthier community that is able to contribute to their family, job, and the greater community.

CCR has armed the Action Teams and Leadership of Agenda 360 with the visions and priorities of the people of the region. Their charge is to weigh this input, along with the Action Teams' and Leaderships' efforts and expertise, in order to prioritize the conceptual plans of Agenda 360. The result will be a short list of transformational initiatives to move the region forward. Success will be action items that are internalized and embraced by both the leaders and community. Perhaps the reward of this effort will come through their committed execution and implementation of these items because they can each see their vision and fingerprints on the plan.

enforce and administer tax collection in cities and villages. The Regional Council of Governments decided their first act would be to create R.I.T.A. Of the 142 current member municipalities, one delegate is appointed to the Regional Council of Governments (selected by each municipality). Each delegate has one vote on each item that is presented before them, regardless of the population or tax collections, giving equal opportunities for each member municipality to have a say in the operations of R.I.T.A.

The Regional Income Tax Agency currently is serving 44 counties in Ohio. In Hamilton County, the member municipalities include Addyston, Arlington Heights, Lockland, Newtown, and Silverton. In neighboring Clermont County, Milford is the only member municipality. Many municipalities in Cuyahoga County use R.I.T.A. as means for tax collection, including Broadview Heights, Cuyahoga Heights, and East Cleveland. Major cities, such as Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland do not use the Regional Income Tax Agency.

Between the years of 1996 and 2006, the Regional Income Tax Agency collected \$267 million (1996) increasing each year for a total of \$621 million (2006).

**Care about the future of the Region?
Take the Agenda 360 Community Survey!
Go to www.citizenscivicrenewal.org**

Agenda 
A Regional Action Plan

Director's Corner - Steve Johns, CCR Director

A Perfect Storm in the Motor Pool

In the three years that CCR's Building Economic Strength Together (BEST) has been focused on local government collaboration, we have looked at a variety of ways to jurisdictions can work together. We have looked at the prospect of small governments working together on things like joint fire districts and joint economic development districts (JEDDs). We have served on the Government Cooperation and Efficiency Project (GCEP) to encourage the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County to work together and market their services to smaller jurisdictions. We have even promoted the provision of regional services like Greater Cincinnati Water Works and an expansion of Metro transit to the other Ohio counties in our region. All of these collaborations require jurisdictions to reach out beyond their borders—so you would think the one place where CCR is pushing for collaboration within a jurisdictional box would be where some of the quickest efficiency gains would take place—think again.

For the past two years, I have been sitting in on the Hamilton County Competition and Efficiency Committee. This group is charged with finding savings for the County through service consolidations and managed competition (outsourcing). Over the course of two years the committee has looked at a variety of county functions including printing, fleet services and facility maintenance. The “business care” for fleet services has revealed the most about how much work there is to be done inside our local governments—and why some say it is only by fundamental changing the structure of our governments that we can create the efficiencies we are after.



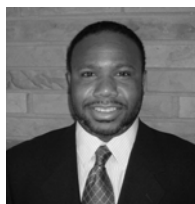
The “business care” on fleet services noted that the current approach to fleet services is fragmented with no entity in charge of overall management of the county's vehicles. The lack of overall management has resulted in an absence of performance standards for fleet operations, inadequate fleet management software, no overall policy for vehicle replacement and no evaluation of a lease model. These findings may seem shocking to outside experts who would assume that an entity with 905 vehicles in its fleet would have some sort of centralized management system. But to those who know our county government, the fragmented nature should come as no surprise.

The 19th century form of county government that the state of Ohio is saddled with allows a list of independently elected officials to establish fiefdoms with little incentive to cooperate with other office holders. The common misperception is that the three member Board of County Commissioners runs the show, but on closer inspection we see how little power they really have. In the case of fleet services, two independently elected officials, the Sheriff and the Engineer, have control of the majority of vehicles in the county fleet (437 and 211 respectively). For all the talk of efficiency from these two elected officials, the lack of accountability doesn't translate these sentiments to action. The political reality is that the Sheriff and Engineer answer to no one – neither to the Board of County Commissioners or the voters (the Sheriff and Engineer have run unopposed in the primary and general election for over 3 election cycles) and therefore have no incentive to lead on the issue of fleet services or government efficiency.

It is amazing to me that as the county currently asks for blood from a stone by implementing 6% across the board cuts, the issue of improving fleet maintenance hasn't gained some traction. Although the potential savings are not huge, breaking down the walls that separate independently elected officials could go a long way to developing the economies of scale that entice other jurisdictions to want to contract their fleet services with the county.

Meet Todd Ward

Last year Todd Ward moved from the CCR Advisory Board to our Board of Trustees. Todd is the President of Forward Consulting, LLC. Forward Consulting specializes in government relations strategy, policy development & assessment, and community outreach initiatives. Forward Consulting has long relations with TriHealth, Northlich, and other area corporations. In ad-



dition to Forward Consulting, LLC, Todd has been a community volunteer and advocate by serving on numerous boards of non-profit organizations that include Citizens for Civic Renewal, Cincinnati Recreation Foundation, Hamilton County Hospital Commission, Kidney Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, and Friends for Special Treatment Center at Cincinnati Children's Medical Center.

Beyond his passion for making Cincinnati a better place to live, work, and play, Todd is an avid golfer and runner. Todd gains his greatest pleasure in life spending time with his wife, Julia, and 3 year old son Harris.



Rookwood Tower, Ste. 549
3805 Edwards Road
Cincinnati, OH 45209-1948

Cincinnati Preservation Association Fall Forum



Mark your calendars now for CPA's Fall Forum lecture on urban issues, at 12:00 noon on Friday, October 10th at the Hall of Mirrors in the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel. CPA's speaker will be Mayor Joseph Riley of Charleston, South Carolina, who will speak on "Preserving and Restoring the American City—Every Citizen's Responsibility." He will talk about Charleston's efforts to preserve its historic district and revitalize its downtown, and what Cincinnati can learn from Charleston's success.

For tickets contact the Cincinnati Preservation Association at (513) 721-4506 or info@cincinnati-preservation.org.

Citizens for Civic Renewal Membership Form

Join CCR Today! Your membership will keep you informed; CCR newsletters and forums featuring national experts are just two of the ways in which CCR members enhance their awareness of issues of regional importance. Aggregate your voice—As a member of CCR, you join hundreds of others so that when we get the ear of public officials, your voice is heard. Support our efforts; your membership dues augment our work and match the support of local foundations and funders.

_____ Individual \$25 _____ Household \$50 _____ Student \$5

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