

# Bardstown Revitalization Plan delivered

Largest crowd ever at meeting series

Friday, April 28, 2006

*The Kentucky Standard*

Brian Walker

As Rick Hill began his nearly two-hour presentation of his vision for a new Bardstown Wednesday night, more than 130 people sat silent at Kreso's Restaurant. Residents chatted amongst themselves and many elected leaders were on hand to hear the results of months of work by Hill's company.

"Bardstown is the quintessential Kentucky city ... it is an American icon ... an American treasure," Hill said early in his discussion of the plan.

He touched on themes heard many times during the plan's development. The need for the cooperation of the county's elected leaders, lending institutions, residents, business owners and visitors.

In the 126 pages of full-color reports, Hill showed area maps and artist's conceptions of how Bardstown could have more than 100 new sites for people to live, work and play in a 16-block-square area.

Hill's firm was hired late last year and paid \$94,000 by the city, county and some local corporations. He has worked on similar projects in St. Paul, Minn., and Miami.



BRIAN WALKER/The Kentucky Standard - Rick Hill, owner of Village Solutions, stands before an artist's conception of how a portion of Bardstown might look under his plan to revitalize downtown. More than 130 people attended the Wednesday night meeting at Kreso's Restaurant in Bardstown where Hill presented the ideas contained in his 126-page report. He was hired last fall to provide the study and paid \$94,000 by the city, county and various local groups for the program.

In the project Hill enlisted the public by literally asking them at public meetings to draw, write, design and explain their wishes and dreams for the future.

"This is a call to action," he said. "We have to break down the barriers that stand in the way of change."

At Wednesday's presentation, Hill cited nine steps to succeed in using his plan to reinvigorate Bardstown and in turn, Nelson County.

- Fill the voids in the urban fabric of Bardstown by constructing appropriate buildings in vacant or underused areas of the city.
- Keep newer structures from trying to mimic historic properties too closely.
- Organize parking in the downtown area and use the available space more wisely.
- Pass enabling legislation to encourage, not restrict

development.

- Attempt to keep civic operations in the downtown when space and usage allows.
- Keep green spaces and small parks in mind when building.
- Rethink and re-use the rear of buildings and alleyways that are often the location of wasted space that could become valuable retail spots.
- Protect single-family homes in the downtown. There are 200 less residents in the study area than 10 years ago.
- Have integration of services and less separation. Try mixed-use of hotels, retail, residential in some areas where space allows.

Although not contractually bound to do so, Hill's full report gives plans to improve the grounds in the areas of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Spalding Hall and the site of the current city administrative offices. Suggestions include building a small cemetery on the

church property, tearing down the city office buildings, straightening the roads in that area to make them more square like the rest of downtown and making an actual manicured lawn or garden in front of Spalding Hall.

After opening the floor to comments, Bardstown Mayor Dixie Hibbs took issue with a few points of Hill's plan such as the likelihood of providing adequate fire protection to alley areas of the city. Overall, Hibbs spoke highly of the plan and said she was ready to assist in seeing it come to life.

Nelson County Judge Executive Dean Watts said he enjoyed the plan and saw the potential for great things in the near future.

Other attendees called for a cooperative effort among the county's lending institutions to make low interest loans to those willing to work on the project's ideas.

Rick McCubbin, who owns a home in the plan area that is also nestled in the historic district of the city, said what Hill delivered excited him.

"This could really be a wake-up call to Bardstown," McCubbin said. "I think if people get behind this it will change the city for the good."