

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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This is how it should be done

Dear Editor:

The big news is the city's University Park East neighborhood is going to get some major improvements. The bigger news is the improvements are recommended by the residents of the area. This is great because generally it is the municipality telling a neighborhood this is what we think you need and what you will get, like it or not. This time though, it was the residents who developed the improvement suggestions and successfully pursued a \$500,000 Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant, with the city's assistance. To my way of thinking, this is how neighborhoods and neighborhood improvements should work.

Residents of a neighborhood know far better the pluses and minuses of their area than developers or city planners. So, it only makes sense to seek

and follow their input. It also seems like the residents did an exceptional job in terms of cooperating. Too many times in instances such as this there is a lot of division - lifelong residents discounting the input of newcomers, families with children vs those without, and we wind up with more dissent than anything. The University Village groups, eight of

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Editor-Publisher

Dorothy R. Leavell

Advertising Director

J.L. Smith

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219-885-4357

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them, appear to have collaborated and set priorities for what they would like to see done. The other really cool aspect of this is city officials have said this process will be a prototype for improving other parts of the city. Personally, that kind of thinking will really transform the city and excite people. Folks will feel they have ownership in whatever improvements come about. We know when people own things they tend to take better care of those things.

Everyone involved seems to understand that the talked about improvements will take time, and they are OK with that. The people at City Hall are showing a lot of vision as they are giving us information about potential future projects. What they are talking about, removing blight, new street lights, better drainage, are all doable and not some pie-in-the-sky type promises. They also are attempting to work with the school district to market vacant schools in the area. As long as I have been in Gary, I can't recall this sort of cooperation between the district and City Hall. There is no doubt it is long overdue.

With all this good news there is still the worry that once the president-elect takes office if he will allow federal dollars, especially from HUD to continue to flow to Gary as they have in the past several years.

Mark Plate

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