



South side residents and community partners gather at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church to present their "Rebuilding Southside" plan March 26. Keisha Gray speaks during the presentation. PHOTOS BY TIM KIMZEY/SPARTANBURG HERALD-JOURNAL

South side residents present plans for community, economy, housing after 20 months of work

Eva Wen Spartanburg Herald-Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

In the span of 20 months, Spartanburg's south side residents developed a comprehensive overview of their wants and needs in their community. • The comprehensive vision, "Rebuilding Southside," is developed in the hopes that it will guide the city, county, and state governments in directing resources in the community.

"The south side is a very unique community," said Keisha Gray, who is leading the effort in this community engagement. "It's not a community that is disparate by any means. It's a community that has been traditionally under-resourced, but that has never changed its ability to work hard for what they want to be able to define themselves."

This process follows the effort by the north side and Highland residents to develop comprehensive guidelines for any changes and developments that take place in their communities.

In a meeting held in March at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church, committee leaders on the south side showed government officials and the public what they found



South side residents and community partners gather at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church to present their "Rebuilding Southside" plan. The process follows efforts by the north side and Highland residents to develop comprehensive guidelines for development.

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Vision

through talking to different neighbors.

Creating more economic mobility in Spartanburg

"We have a lot of vacant land on the south side," said economic mobility committee leader Evelyn Blakley. "The purpose of the economic action plan is to drive the twin goals of growing the south side economy and reducing inequality."

Some top priorities include:

- Business investments;
- Fair and accessible work opportunities;
- Innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities;
- Affordable housing.

For accessible work opportunities, Blakley hopes to see more learning and training opportunities in and outside of the workplace.

This includes internships and apprenticeships for white- and blue-collar work, skill training for stay-at-home mothers looking for job opportunities, as well as continued training opportunities for advancement in the workplace.

For work opportunities to be more accessible to residents on the south side, methods of transportation, affordable daycare systems, and fair work compensation can become crucial factors.

In a previous report, the Herald-Journal found work opportunities are inaccessible to some residents, especially those with transportation and childcare needs, despite an overall increase in job-seekers.

City officials said in a consumer market study on households near the incoming Piggly Wiggly on the south side, 17.3% of residents within a 10-minute-drive have a household income below \$10,000.

Single mothers with childcare needs are by far the largest group living below the poverty level on the south side. Within a 20-minute-drive radius, there are 2,422 single female householders, with children, living below the poverty level.

The number is five times the number of male householders living below the poverty level and four times the number of husband-wife families below the pov-



Dr. Sheila Snoddy speaks during the presentation on the "Rebuilding Southside" plan at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church on March 26.

PHOTOS BY TIM KIMZEY/SPARTANBURG HERALD-JOURNAL

erty level within the same radius.

For affordable housing, Blakley emphasized the importance of sustained homeownership by introducing affordable refurbishment programs so that residents on the south side can maintain their homes.

"One of the things that is also very important is that people are able to stay in their homes," Blakley said. "A lot of times you don't have the money to do some refurbishment that you need so that you can stay there."

Improved childcare, educational experiences among priorities

Randy Edwards, incoming principal of Carver Middle School, stressed the importance of continued support and resources for those seeking education.

"We want to create culturally enhanced student support services," Edwards said. "We know that children of color and children in these communities get marginalized not just in the school

system, textbooks, testing materials. They need to see people that look like them and sound like them, people that have achieved things in life that they feel represented in."

Some top priorities Edwards outlined are:

- Affordable daycare;
- Quality curriculum;
- Culturally and trauma-informed enhanced student support;
- Out-of-school youth services;
- Parental engagement and advocacy;
- Lifelong learning opportunities.

"We want affordable daycare and quality curriculum," Edwards said. "And we want those resources available right here on the south side."

In highlighting the importance of prenatal and early care for young children, Edwards shared that a lot of human brain development happens from age 0 to 5 years old. He hopes the resources including daycare and other support systems become more readily



Randy Edwards, Carver Middle School principal, speaks about education during the presentation.



Resident Ruth Littlejohn speaks during the presentation.

available to residents on the south side.

"A lot of times it just means for us you're dealing with parents who are working different hours, different times, over the evening on third shifts," Edwards said. "What does it mean to support a family and get your child to where those places are? Those resources need to be distributed to this community."

For Edwards, accessibility also applies to after-school programs.

"We trust the schools to take care of the kids from 7:30 to 3:30, but what happens after 3:30? If we can enhance and communicate the extracurriculars, there will be a decreased chance of kids not graduating, not going to college, or not earning a livable wage," Edwards said.

Closing the gaps on youth services

For Monique Watson and Fred Stoll,

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who lead the youth services committee together, youth services are out-of-school continuations of high-quality educational opportunities.

“Out-of-school enrichment programs are essential for mitigating the effects of poverty. They are also essential for the prospects of young people on the south side to lead rewarding lives and prepare themselves for success and adulthood,” Watson said.

Top priorities include:

- High-quality education;
- Out-of-school enrichment programs and trust-building opportunities;
- Communication and monitoring of available opportunities.

During their presentation, Stoll and Watson gave examples of programs including My Brother’s Keepers, Youth Sports Bureau and Parks and Recreation. Yet lack of transportation becomes a hindrance to access to these resources.

“Despite all these resources, there’s obviously a lot of gaps,” Stoll said. “Coordination and connection are what is needed from my viewpoint.”

Making health and wellness a priority

For Willa Reeder, health and wellness come down to creating a comprehensive network to connect south side residents to health care resources and healthy lifestyles.

“For every one of us, we understand that communities without affordable health care or wellness plan will not be healthy,” Reeder said.

Reeder outlined some priorities including:

- Health care education;
- Health care navigator;
- Healthy living environment.

Reeder hopes to see a group of health navigators in the community. These navigators, according to Reeder, will conduct community health needs assessment, health risks, and health outcomes related to south side residents.

Reeder applauds the recent efforts to bring in health care resources on the south side including community-based health care company ReGenesis and Oak Street Health, which primarily focuses on older adults with Medicare.

Yet despite the existence of ReGenesis and Oak Street Health, Spartanburg’s south side still has a disproportionately



Spartanburg City Manager Chris Story speaks during the presentation on the “Rebuilding Southside” plan. PHOTOS BY TIM KIMZEY/SPARTANBURG HERALD-JOURNAL



Spartanburg Mayor Jerome Rice, right, chats with Dr. Benjamin Snoddy, left, during the presentation.

small number of health care facilities and pharmacies.

Reeder hopes to see the health navigators connect more residents to available medical resources on the south

side, beyond the south side, and in telehealth services as well.

In the meantime, Reeder looks forward to the development of a healthier living environment that promotes being

active and exercising.

PAL (Play, Advocate, Live Well) has recommended a 50-mile pedestrian and bicycle trail system to be developed in Spartanburg. Parts of it are currently under construction in downtown Spartanburg.

South side residents seek increased safety and security

Committee leader James Jones believes a more secure living environment will enhance other aspects of residents’ lives in education and economic opportunities.

Top safety priorities include:

- Environmental safety;
- Communication of law enforcement processes;
- Enhanced incident communication system;
- Programming to clean and enhance the south side environment.

For community members at large and Jones, many of the concerns with safety come down to environmental designs and lighting in the community. Jones recommended more lighting, cameras and traffic control devices in the community.

In the meantime, Jones hopes to see more opportunities for the community to learn from Black law enforcement professionals about where the community is and what the community could do in order to create a more secure living environment.

“This was a very thorough and disciplined effort at deciphering what the issues are on the south side and how to deal with it in a very systematic way,” said County Council Member Monier Abusaft.

The community advocates’ effort doesn’t stop on the south side. As community-based research and planning become more visible to government officials, some community leaders are trying to reach a wider population in Spartanburg.

Currently, some leaders are reaching outside of the city and getting in touch with Una, Saxon, Arcadia and Fairforest to work alongside residents to create comprehensive visions for their own communities.

“I’m so happy to hear some of the accomplishments that have been made here on the south side and the amount of resources that have been put into the south side,” said Mayor Jerome Rice. “But there’s still work to be done.”