

Methodist Church in Rossville. (messenger photo/Josh O'Bryant)

# Rossville residents take aim at crime and blight

By **Josh O'Bryant**

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A group of concerned Rossville residents, who first met in March, met again last week to continue brainstorming ideas on how to improve the city and north Walker County.

Simpson United Methodist Church in Rossville was the meeting place Monday night, April 25, for the passionate crowd, who say they've gone unheard for quite some time.

According to a letter from organizer David Roden, owner of Mountain View Estates mobile home park: "We're the underdog. The forgotten city. .... Driving through the north end of Walker County, you may see abandoned buildings. We see opportunity for new construction. You may see burned homes left too long

standing, we see a chance for new families to move here and start a new life. You see dilapidated industries. We see industrial parks with the closest interstate across the county. You see a town that has slowed. We see a town with access to some of the fastest Internet in the country. We see a beautiful valley in which to live, work and play."

The March 1 meeting at Mission Glen Baptist Church was packed with more than 120 people. The April 25 meeting had about 75 attendees.

The No. 1 topic was crime.

## Crime is THE topic

Since the first meeting, the group's leader, Roden, has been working with Walker County Sheriff

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Steve Wilson and other law enforcement agencies.

Wilson was in attendance and spoke candidly. He said he has met with officials and discussed gangs, thefts and drugs in government-funded housing areas.

"I'm not picking on these Section 8 units because of the low income. I'm picking on them because they tend to be a magnet for our crime in this area and in other areas such as Chattanooga," Wilson said. "We see transient crime. We see transients coming over and spending the night, or a week, in Section 8 housing. ... The landlords do not know they live there and they do their crimes in Chattanooga and they come down here and spend the night and hide and go back."

Wilson said Walker County has been working more frequently with Chattanooga law enforcement on these issues.

Wilson also hopes, as a next step, to target other areas that are privately owned and hold them to lease agreements.

A Neighborhood Watch program is set to begin at Mountain View Estates on Wilson Road, with the first meeting being held on April 26.

Wilson has also studied apps that can be used by the public to notify law enforcement of crimes in the area.

## Targeting crime from several angles

The attendees were divided into four categories: businesses, churches, education, and residents. Each group listed ideas on how to improve Rossville and deter crime.

Some of the ideas the residents provided included establishing a satellite station, placing sidewalks on Maple Drive, enhancing enforcement on codes, building a community center for the youth, and placing street lights on Wilson Road which is poorly lit.

Rossville resident Jim Hill moderated the resident discussion and asked, "What can we do" as residents?

Some of the suggestions included getting to know neighbors, noticing and identifying strangers and reporting suspicious behavior; getting to know officers patrolling the areas, setting up a community directory,

and creating a list of contacts.

The business group suggested attracting a variety of businesses to locate to the area, re-branding Rossville, and enforcing property value codes.

One of the main topics of discussion in each group was improving and maintaining communication within the community.

Roden listed specific requests:

"We ask that all elected officials at the Rossville city as well as the Walker County level attend one of our future meetings to listen to the needs of our residents.

"We respectfully ask that you enforce the nuisance laws for Walker County.

"As it has been brought to our attention that codes enforcement must have a formal complaint before addressing specific issues, we are requesting a meeting with codes enforcement and commissioner to formally present a list of structures that need immediate attention.

"We respectfully request a meeting with the Walker County commissioner to discuss proactive approaches to building a solid foundation for the future in north Walker County.

"Finally, we ask for your input and participation as we the residents, business owners and churches develop a plan of action to address these blighted areas and ultimately strive to improve our community."

Roden said Commissioner Bebe Heiskell has not attended one of their meetings. He said the county has informed the group, through him, that a formal complaint to codes enforcement must be met prior to any action taken. Roden said he wants a meeting with Heiskell and code enforcement to present a list of structures that need attention, as well as to build towards the future.

A lot of pressure was placed at the feet of law enforcement, as well, to address crime in the area.

"This wasn't started just to aim crime at Steve Wilson," Roden said. "That is not the point. It's all of us. So one of the issues now that we've got to address, before we leave here tonight, is how are we going to grow this group."

Wilson reminded residents that they are "eyes and ears" of the community. He said that the two meetings have brought the community together to communi-

cate with each other.

Wilson said there are not enough law enforcement officers in the department and that is something that the county government must work on. The sheriff's department is hiring and looking for deputies to employee, but the income and benefits may sway applicants from the position as well as the stresses that face the job.

"We have had a very difficult time finding the applicants ... When you don't pay very well and your benefits are terrible, you can't attract people and that is something we are going to have to work on. We are going to have to do a better job as a county government," Wilson said.

"We have one officer, one deputy per every 1,000 people out there," Wilson said.

"Folks we can't do it all. We can't begin to do it all. You have got to help us. You have got to be those eyes and ears. You've got to submit tips to us," Wilson said.

Wilson said tips can be submitted at walkerso.com. He encourages residents with Internet access to use it. Tips can also be submitted anonymously.

Wilson reminded residents to call the Walker County 911 "non-emergency" number (706-375-7810) rather than calling 911. The non-emergency number goes straight to Walker County; sometimes calling 911 within the county may send the caller to Catoosa County 911.

A wife of a local police officer said people should stop slamming the officers online and saying they are not doing their job. "That is not helping the community at all," she said. "We have to ban together and we have to support them."

"If they have a problem," Rossville Mayor Teddy Harris said. "I'll be glad to sit down and meet with them anytime. Don't go to social media and just be negative. Come see me and I'll sit down and talk to you about it, if you've got a concern about something in the city."

A number of other city and county officials attended the meeting, including Walker County Fire Chief Randy Camp, Rossville Police Chief Sid Adams, Walker County Schools Superintendent Damon Raines and Walker County Chamber of Commerce President Lacey Wilson. Rossville resident Jim Hill moderated the discussion, along with Roden.

# Today in h

Today (Wednesday, May 4) is 2016 and the 46th day of spring.

**TODAY'S HISTORY:** In 1886, riot in Chicago's Haymarket Sq when a bomb exploded and der rioting.

In 1959, the first Grammy Award  
In 1970, Ohio National Guard students at Kent State Universi war protest.

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher t female prime minister in Britis  
In 1998, "Unabomber" Ted K tenced to four life sentences pl ramento, California.

**TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS:** Hor: 1859), educator; Jane Jacobs (19 tivist; Hosni Mubarak (1928- ), fr Egypt; Audrey Hepburn (1929-1 CEF ambassador; Roberta Pete singer; Dick Dale (1937- ), guitar (1941- ), journalist/author; Rand singer-songwriter; Will Arnett ( Andrews (1978- ), sportscaster; I singer; Rory McIlroy (1989- ), go

**TODAY'S FACT:** About 14.8 i were members of a labor union

**TODAY'S SPORTS:** In 1963, I pitcher Bob Shaw set the major balks in a game, with five balks Chicago Cubs.

**TODAY'S QUOTE:** "Educatio cal safety. Outside of this ark al ace Mann

**TODAY'S NUMBER:** 5 millic magazine sold in two days, who published an excerpt from Ern "The Old Man and the Sea" on ; considered Hemingway's finest awarded the Pulitzer Prize on t

**TODAY'S MOON:** Between 14 (April 29) and new moon (May 6

## Man arrested passing out

By Josh O'Bryant  
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An intoxicated La-Fayette man was arrested for disorderly conduct after he was discovered passed out drunk in a woman's yard.

According to LaFayette Police Department reports, on Wednesday, April 27, around 7:35 p.m., officers were dispatched in the 200 block of Doc Love Avenue due to a man lying in the back yard of the woman's residence.

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