

Rossville residents take aim at crime

Josh O'Bryant, reporter | Posted: Wednesday, April 27, 2016 11:18 am

A group of concerned Rossville residents, who first met in March, met again this 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.

Crime is the topic

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



Roden addresses Rossville residents

David Roden speaks Monday evening, April 25, at a community meeting of Rossville residents at Simpson United Methodist Church. (Messenger photo/Josh O'Bryant)

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 meeting. He said she 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 communicate 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.