2009 Listening Sessions Summary Report
August 2009

South Carolina Environmental Justice Advisory Committee

Project Background

In 2007, the South Carolina Legislature passed legislation that created the South Carolina Environmental Justice Advisory Committee. Environmental justice, as defined in Act 171, is "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." Environmental justice communities commonly include historically under-represented minority and low-income neighborhoods and areas burdened with multiple environmental challenges, including brownfields, Superfund sites, or waste dumps.

The Advisory Committee consists of 13 state agencies and three academic institutions and is tasked with studying and considering state agencies' responses to environmental justice issues as they relate to economic development and revitalization efforts. The Advisory Committee decided to host a series of community listening sessions across the state in 2009. The purpose of the sessions was to receive input from stakeholders on topics as it relates to environmental justice issues. The listening sessions also ensure that the Advisory Committee has information to incorporate as it relates to those directly impacted in the community. The Advisory Committee must complete its work and report findings and recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor by January 2010.

Figure 1. Spartanburg Listening Session. April 30, 2009.

Four listening sessions were held between January and May 2009. Sessions were held in North Charleston, Spartanburg, Aiken, and Florence. In total, over 150 stakeholders attended. Stakeholders invited to attend included grass-root citizens, neighborhood association presidents, local businesses, local industry, local government, elected officials, and environmental groups. Meeting facilitators and recorders included staff from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4 Office, Clemson University, and A&D Environmental. Food was kindly donated by A&D Environmental.

Listening Sessions Overview

At the start of each listening session, an Advisory Committee representative welcomed participants and led introductions. Meeting introductions were followed by brief remarks from State Representative Harold Mitchell and other state and regional leaders. Representatives from EPA Region 4 then led an introductory discussion with participants on the meaning of environmental justice. A DHEC representative next provided an overview of the World Café conversational process that would guide the listening session discussions. Afterward, participants broke into small, facilitated groups to discuss the session's five major topics.

- Economic Development and Revitalization
- Environmental Justice and Revitalization
- Community Health and Revitalization
- Brownfields and Grayfields
- Revitalized South Carolina Communities – Defining Success

The small groups discussed one topic for 15 minutes; participants then rotated to other tables to discuss the other topics. After all small-group rotations were completed, an Advisory Committee representative reconvened participants for a final discussion to consider session outcomes and thank attendees for their participation.

During the small-group discussions, recorders wrote participants' comments on half-sheets of paper corresponding to each of the five listening session topics. At the conclusion of each session, participants' comments were compiled, organized, transcribed, and included in an independent report developed for each of the four listening sessions. After the four reports were completed, comments from all of the listening sessions were analyzed to identify cross-cutting themes. The results of this analysis are presented in this summary report. The Advisory Committee will review and incorporate this information as part of its final report to the South Carolina Legislature and the Governor by January 1, 2010.

EPA is assisting the work of the Advisory Committee by providing contractor support through E[2] Inc.

Analysis of Listening Session Comments

Comments from the listening session discussions were placed in a computer spreadsheet. The comments were grouped by the listening sessions' five major topics. The comments generated for each of the five major topics were then reviewed and labeled based on the content of the comments. For example, if a comment mentioned the need for greater community involvement in revitalization planning, the comment was labeled as a "community involvement" comment. An in-depth or multi-themed comment could receive multiple labels. After the labeling process was complete, comments were then sorted according to their labels to identify the themes most frequently discussed by participants. These themes are discussed below, by each of the listening sessions' five major topics. Over 3,000 comments were analyzed.

Economic Development and Revitalization

Participants discussed five questions related to the topic of economic development and revitalization. In total, over 700 comments were generated in response to these questions. The 10 most commonly mentioned themes are summarized below.

Increase Opportunities for Community Involvement.

The theme most consistently identified was the importance of community involvement. Participants viewed a lack of community involvement in revitalization-related issues as a problem and suggested that greater community involvement could be one solution to the problem. Participants voiced interest in greater involvement at both the state and local government levels. Beyond a desire for greater involvement, participants expressed a strong desire that their concerns about revitalization-related issues be genuinely heard. The listening sessions were viewed by some participants as an appropriate step toward greater community involvement.

"Stakeholders should not only be included but listened to."

- North Charleston Listening Session, January 13, 2009

Keep Residents Updated Regarding Revitalization-Related Activities.

Participants expressed interest in being kept up-to-date on revitalization-related activities, such as the location of new water lines, and the ways in which they could provide feedback on and inform revitalization outcomes. Participants were also interested in obtaining information on how to access information related to revitalization activities. Participants' suggestions for increasing awareness included having community residents work with local leaders, local organizations, churches, the media, and state agencies.

Address Environmental Issues in Distressed Communities.

Participants voiced concern regarding multiple environmental problems in their communities. Concerns regarding access to high-quality water supplies and wastewater facilities were mentioned most frequently. Concerns over local air quality and brownfields were also mentioned repeatedly. Participants in the North Charleston and Spartanburg Listening Sessions also highlighted Locally Unwanted Land Uses (LULUs) as a priority environmental concern. LULUs mentioned included incinerators, landfills, a wastewater treatment plant, a railroad, and swamps. Participant recommendations for addressing environmental issues include expanding water/sewer services and monitoring/removing contaminants in communities.

Provide Funding/Resources for Revitalization.

Participants expressed concerns about a lack of sufficient funding/resources to undertake revitalization projects in their communities. Similarly, many participants emphasized the importance of making additional funding/resources available to support these efforts in the future. Participants' suggestions for obtaining additional resources included accessing available Superfund monies for redevelopment planning and utilizing grant writers to obtain federal stimulus program funding.

Recognize the Importance of Local Organizations.

Participants commented on the importance of local organizations and volunteer initiatives for supporting distressed areas and assisting with revitalization efforts. Examples of organizations mentioned included: the river protection group "Save our Saluda", Una New Life Center, Christmas in Action, Habitat for Humanity, Boys and Girls Club, and the Florence-Darlington Technical College. Faith-based organizations were viewed by many participants as an important part of these local support efforts. Participants also advocated greater involvement by and support for these organizations in community revitalization activities. One participant explained that organizations such as the Rotary Club would be willing to play a more prominent role in these local support efforts with additional guidance.

"Community organization is vital."

- North Charleston Listening Session, January 13, 2009

Address the Problem of Abandoned Buildings in Distressed Communities.

Participants commented on the challenges posed to communities by abandoned buildings. For example, a North Charleston participant remarked that such buildings often become used for illegal/negative activities. Efforts are underway in some communities to address this problem. For example, a North Charleston participant explained that efforts were underway in the community to reclaim past sites by "transforming them into useable sites such as industries, parks, and community centers."

Identify Community Needs for New Infrastructure and Infrastructure Improvement.

Participants emphasized the importance of infrastructure in distressed communities. In addition to general comments, participants cited issues concerning water/wastewater (discussed above). Street infrastructure was also frequently mentioned. A North Charleston Listening Session participant stated that "resources for infrastructure should target current residents' issues, not future development."

Remember the Importance of Jobs.

Participants stated that a lack of local jobs is a significant problem for distressed South Carolina communities. Although most participants did not specify the types of jobs that should be created, a few participants mentioned that well-paying jobs should be a priority. Another participant mentioned the need for bringing in "good industries." A related sub-theme centered on the need for job-training/workforce development efforts.

Consider the Importance of Equity.

Participants discussed the importance of equity issues. For example, a North Charleston Listening Session participant explained that "unequal treatment breaks down the community." Participants expressed a desire for greater equity within communities and between communities. For instance, a North Charleston participant requested that all communities be treated equally. Participants also desired greater equity in how redevelopment is undertaken and influenced, the provision of community services, including law enforcement and recreational resources, the distribution of grants, and the provision of education services.

Consider the Importance of Youth Support.

Participants discussed the importance of developing programs that support young people, including children and youth up to age 19, as part of efforts to help struggling South Carolina communities. In addition to the importance of establishing nurturing, protective spaces for youth, participants emphasized the need to provide tutoring and mentoring opportunities. Examples of youth-related initiatives underway in South Carolina communities include neighborhood summer youth programs, city-sponsored recreational programs like "Hook a Kid on Golf," and a school program requiring high school students to select majors and complete an internship program.

> *"There is nothing for [young children] to do, no parks or recreation centers."*
>
> *- Spartanburg Listening Session, April 30, 2009*

Environmental Justice and Revitalization

Participants discussed three questions related to the topic of environmental justice and revitalization. In total, over 600 comments were generated in response to these questions. The 10 most commonly mentioned themes are summarized below.

Keep Residents Aware of Environmental Justice, Environmental, and Community Revitalization Issues.

Numerous participants commented on the importance of being kept aware of environmental justice, environmental, and community revitalization-related issues in their communities. Participants stated that they would like to be informed about potential future problems (e.g., the potential impacts of a new business) as well as existing problems in their communities. Similarly, participants stated that they would like to be kept informed regarding the resources that are available to address these problems. Participants also commented on the importance of educating people regarding the constraints that government agencies face in their efforts to assist communities.

Expand Opportunities for Community Involvement.

Participants expressed a desire for greater community involvement opportunities. Possible forums suggested included town hall meetings, community committees, and the listening sessions. Participants voiced interest in opportunities for greater interaction with local law enforcement officials as well as with state officials. Participants also expressed interest in more opportunities for participating in planning processes.

Environmental Justice Issues Generate Negative Psychological Impacts for Individuals and Communities.

Participants commented on the negative psychological impacts of environmental justice issues on individuals and communities. Participants explained that environmental justice issues were demoralizing and fostered resentment, helplessness, disillusionment, and despair. Participants stated that environmental justice issues also made individuals feel mentally sick and reduced their self-esteem. Environmental justice issues, according to participants, also reduced community motivation, expectations, and pride.

"Environmental justice leads to an increasing sense of despair in the long-term."

- Spartanburg Listening Session, April 30, 2009

Consider the Impact of Environmental Issues on Distressed Communities.

Participants touched on environmental issues in their comments regarding environmental justice and revitalization, with the overarching sentiment expressed that environmental issues can both positively and negatively impact communities. Participants commented on various environmental concerns, including: air pollution, water contamination, contaminated sites and methamphetamine labs, asbestos, and mold and mildew. Participants also voiced recommendations for resolving environmental concerns, including performing more inspections during asbestos removals and notifying communities in the case of hazardous spills.

Evaluate and Address Equity Issues.

Participants consistently mentioned equity concerns while discussing environmental justice and revitalization. Participants commented on: inequities in the allocation of resources to different communities and neighborhoods; inequities within communities; inequities in how regulations are applied; inequities in the allocation of infrastructure and other basic community resources; inequities regarding health impacts on distressed communities; and inequities in how companies and individuals are treated.

Environmental Justice Issues Have Negative Impacts on Public Health.

Participants highlighted public health problems as another impact of environmental justice issues on communities. While most comments focused on general impacts to public health (e.g., "[environmental justice] encroaches on health and rights in communities," according to one participant), participants also raised specific concerns about pollution-caused cancer and vermin.

Recognize the Importance of Voice, Representation, and Empowerment.

Participants commented on the importance of being able to have a genuine say in the affairs and issues affecting their communities – either through individual expression or in effective representation by political leaders. Most comments centered on a lack of a voice for residents or communities. One participant, for example, remarked that "because there is no representation, then there is no power." A few participants commented specifically on empowering communities to speak. Two participants commented on the role of voice in environmental justice issues specifically. One of the participants commented that "environmental justice communities don't have power where they need it." The other participant suggested that a means was needed to "have politics support environmental justice."

Recognize the Importance of Communication in Supporting Distressed Communities.

Participants repeatedly touched on the theme of communication. Participants mostly discussed its importance in general terms; a few participants specifically commented on the lack of or poor communication as it relates to environmental justice and community revitalization issues. To improve communication, participants recommended establishing mobile laptop labs, creating call centers within state agencies, and talking with people by mailing and "going door-to-door."

"The entity trying to help address environmental justice needs to keep an open dialogue/open door policy."

- Aiken Listening Session, May 4, 2009

Address Crime and Drugs.

Participants stated that crime and drugs are general problems and that crime and drug levels are too high. Regarding drug issues, participants mentioned the community impacts of methamphetamine production. One participant noted that citizen patrols against drugs are being implemented as one solution.

Additional Themes

Five additional themes were identified that received similar numbers of comments. These include: issues involving trust, transparency, and disclosure; the importance of government involvement; environmental justice generally; the importance of funding and resources to support environmental justice and revitalization; and quality of life issues.

Community Health and Revitalization

Participants discussed four questions related to the topic of community health and revitalization. Nearly 600 comments were generated in response to these questions. The 10 most commonly mentioned themes are summarized below.

Health in South Carolina Communities is Generally "Poor" or "OK."

Participants were asked to describe the overall health of residents in their communities. Of the participants that provided direct responses to the question, a majority indicated that overall health in their communities, or South Carolina communities more generally, was poor. Some participants indicated that community health was "ok." A few rated community health as "good." A few participants also provided mixed assessments, indicating that portions of their communities were in good health while other portions were in poor health. Many participants stated that there are a range of health-related problems in their communities, from indicators of poor health (e.g., obesity) to various types of illnesses and diseases (e.g., cancer). Diabetes was mentioned most frequently. Asthma and respiratory illnesses, high blood pressure, cancer, and heart disease were mentioned repeatedly as well.

Increase Awareness of Community Health Issues.

Participants discussed the importance of raising the awareness of South Carolina residents regarding community health issues. Participants discussed this issue as a barrier that needs to be overcome (e.g., "lack of education about health leads to poor diet and lack of exercise," stated one participant), as a step being actively taken in various South Carolina communities (e.g., "people [are] attending monthly meetings to listen to lectures on diseases," stated another participant), and as a strategy for improving community health (e.g., "provide better information on diet and health," stated another participant).

Community Health Is Negatively Impacted by Lack of Health Care Accessibility.

Participants discussed the problem of health care accessibility. Factors influencing health care accessibility include a lack of health insurance, the high cost of health care/medicine, and transportation (see below). A related concern centered on not being able to access health care when it is needed (e.g., health care center hours are limited, the number of health care centers are insufficient, or doctors will not accept new patients). Related recommendations centered on providing local health care facilities, providing affordable care, and expanding service availability.

> *"Loss of jobs, etc. means a loss of health insurance, which means health care problems for more people."*
>
> *- Aiken Listening Session, May 4, 2009*

Health Care Accessibility Is Also Limited by Lack of Transportation Access.

A related theme centered on the challenge that many South Carolina residents face in accessing health care services using existing transportation options. Participants commented that transportation options are limited, non-existent, or of poor quality. Moreover, some health care or wellness centers are located in difficult-to-reach locations. Participants' recommendations for overcoming this barrier included improving public transit, establishing transit in rural areas, providing buses specifically for transporting sick/disabled to health care centers, and church-led transportation. A few participants also commented that some improvements in public transit were already underway.

Recognize the Importance of Active Lifestyles for Community Health.

Participants commented on the role of active lifestyles for supporting community health in South Carolina. Participants touched on this theme as a problem to be overcome (e.g., lack of or poor sidewalks limit neighborhood exercise opportunities), as an action already being taken in various South Carolina communities (e.g., city-centered programs in Anderson get people outdoors), and as a recommendation for improving the health of South Carolina communities (e.g., "encourage activity-friendly neighborhoods," suggested one participant).

Health Care Screenings, Fairs, and Clinics Are Integral Components for Community Health in Distressed Areas.

Health care screenings, fairs, and clinics were viewed by participants as key components for improving community health. Participants explained that screenings, fairs, and clinics are services already being offered in South Carolina communities. Participants also recommended expanding these services, especially free services, to further support the health care needs of South Carolina communities. Similarly, some participants suggested expanding the use of mobile health units.

Environmental Issues Also Impact Community Health.

Participants voiced concern over a range of environmental issues as they related to community health, including water quality, air quality, and contaminated soil. A few participants commented that the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has been involved in local monitoring efforts, particularly regarding air quality, and that some contaminated site cleanup is underway. Participants' recommendations for addressing environmental issues include conducting further contaminated site cleanup, conducting more air and water quality testing, installing or improving water and sewer systems, and enforcing the child lead law.

Additional Funding/Resources Are Needed for Improving Community Health.

Lack of funding/resources was cited by participants as a central barrier to improving health in South Carolina communities. Several participants also made related recommendations. These recommendations included making more funding/resources directly available as well as clarifying the types of funding/resources that are already available to support community health-related efforts.

Local Organizations Play a Central Role in Supporting Community Health Efforts.

Participants noted that local organizations, especially non-profit and faith-based organizations, play central roles in supporting community health efforts. Examples of organizations cited by participants include the YMCA, the Clemson Extension Service, the Red Cross, and the New Hope Community Improvement Association. Participants also cited examples of specific locally-driven programs that support community health efforts, including the "Meals on Wheels" and "Wellness Walks" programs. Related participant recommendations included utilizing faith-based organizations and community/neighborhood associations to a greater degree in support of community health efforts.

Availability of Fresh Food and Good Eating Habits Are Keys to Community Health.

Participants commented on food-related community health issues. Barriers to healthy eating that were identified include: the high cost of high-quality food, culturally-driven eating habits, the limited availability of high-quality food (e.g., through school lunch programs and restaurants), and insufficient awareness about the importance of healthy eating. Examples of positive steps already underway in various communities that were identified by participants include community gardens, farmers markets, and the use of a local school strength coordinator to teach nutrition. Recommendations for overcoming barriers to healthy eating in South Carolina communities include providing better information on diet and health, incentivizing the production of smart diet foods at lower cost, and making agencies accountable for ensuring healthy eating – especially in terms of the food offered through schools.

> *"Reward those manufacturers who make smart diet foods available at reduced prices."*
>
> *- Florence Listening Session, May 16, 2009*

Brownfields and Grayfields

Participants discussed four questions related to the topic of brownfields and grayfields. In total, nearly 500 comments were generated in response to these questions. A number of themes and recommendations were identified. The 10 most commonly mentioned themes are summarized below.

The Presence of Brownfields/Grayfields May Be A Problem in South Carolina Neighborhoods and Communities.

Participants were asked if brownfields/grayfields were a problem in their neighborhoods or communities. Several participants suggested that brownfields/grayfields were a problem. Some participants indicated that brownfields/grayfields exist in their communities but did not state specifically they were a problem. Three participants indicated that brownfields/grayfields were *not* a problem. Several participants also referenced the presence of abandoned buildings and vacant property in their communities more generally. The most common types of brownfields mentioned were mill sites and abandoned gas stations.

> *"Old textile mills all over the Upstate are eyesores with no one wanting responsibility."*
>
> *- Spartanburg Listening Session, April 30, 2009*

Funding/Resources Are Essential for Supporting Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment.

Participants discussed the importance of obtaining funding/resources to support the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields. Participant recommendations included making additional funding/resources available, further clarifying the availability of existing funds/resources, and assisting communities' efforts to access these funds/resources (e.g., through grant writing support).

Participants Would Like More Information about Brownfields/Grayfields.

Participants commented that they do not have enough information about brownfields/grayfields. Participants requested that additional information on brownfields/grayfields be provided in their communities, including general information about brownfields/grayfields, steps for addressing them, resources for cleanup, and information on contacts at the federal and state levels for assistance.

Government Involvement Is Important in Brownfields/Grayfields Issues.

Participants discussed the importance of government and political involvement and support in efforts to address brownfields/grayfields in South Carolina communities. Participants expressed interest in a greater role by all levels of government, including political leaders, in brownfields redevelopment issues. Participants stated that they would like to see political and government leaders communicating, collaborating, and partnering more with communities and other key parties (e.g., the private sector).

Greater Community Involvement in Brownfields/Grayfields Decision-Making Is Needed.

Participants commented on the importance of community involvement in addressing brownfields/grayfields issues. Many participants viewed a lack of community involvement in brownfields/grayfields decision-making as a problem and several participants recommended greater community involvement in the process. Participants' related recommendations included providing state-led community brownfields trainings and town hall meetings.

"Community involvement is key."

*- Florence Listening Session,
May 16, 2009*

Various Steps Should Be Taken to Reduce/Prevent the Emergence of Brownfields/Grayfields.

Participants expressed interest in preventing the emergence of brownfields/grayfields or abandoned buildings. Suggestions included reporting abandoned buildings to the city and enforcing related building codes. Other participant ideas included developing new laws, regulations, or policies to: require performance bonds for closure/cleanup; allow facility owners to consult with EPA/DHEC and share information about their sites without penalty; and require up-front community involvement with facilities. A participant also suggested that the state should purchase some properties to preserve them.

Brownfields/Grayfields and Abandoned Housing May Have a Variety of Negative Impacts on Communities.

"Developers use brownfields money that ends up becoming gentrification."

*- North Charleston Listening Session,
January 13, 2009*

Participants expressed concern regarding a variety of potential negative impacts from brownfields/grayfields and abandoned housing on South Carolina communities. The potential impacts include: health effects, impacts on neighborhood quality and stability (e.g., "community moving away from these areas", "brownfields become places for trash and vermin", "property is devalued," according to participants), possible school contamination and related impacts

on student learning, and environmental effects (e.g., contaminated water from abandoned sites and polluted stormwater runoff from vacant parking lots).

Provide Incentives for Cleanup and Revitalization.

Participants touched on the need to provide incentives for cleanup and revitalization. Participants explained that incentives for cleaning up/redeveloping these sites are sometimes not available. Other participants described how, in other instances, incentives are being used to support cleanup/revitalization work in their communities. For example, Spartanburg County provides tax credits for the economic development of existing properties. To support brownfields redevelopment in the City of Greer, the City waives tipping disposal fees for demolition materials.

Consider the Negative Effects of Revitalization Projects on Communities and Residents.

Participants expressed concern regarding the negative effects of revitalization projects on their communities generally, as well as on residents living in or nearby new revitalization project areas (e.g., public housing built over a landfill). Specific concerns stemming from the negative impacts of revitalization projects included possible gentrification, health problems, affordability, and impacts on community connectivity. A few participants also emphasized that they would like to see revitalization projects have a positive impact on their communities.

Brownfields/Grayfields Redevelopment Zoning Issues Are Important.

Participants voiced general concern over zoning issues as part of their discussion of brownfields and grayfields. One participant asked, for example, "how are zoning issues going to be solved?" A few participants expressed concern about rezoning industrial properties for other land uses when surrounding areas remain industrial areas. Other concerns mentioned included: zoning inflexibility, a lack of zoning and planning by local government, and favoring of new development (through zoning).

Revitalized South Carolina Communities: Defining Success

Participants discussed five questions related to the topic of "Revitalized South Carolina Communities: Defining Success." In total, approximately 750 comments were generated in response to these questions. Participants identified improvements that they would like to see 10 years from now in distressed neighborhoods and communities which would indicate that community revitalization efforts had been successful. Participants also identified the types of resources and next steps needed to support revitalization efforts in their communities. Participants' visions of success for the future are discussed first below, followed by the 10 most frequently mentioned resources and next steps identified to support successful revitalization outcomes.

Defining Success: Indicators of Successful Revitalization Efforts in Distressed South Carolina Communities

Participants identified several indicators to measure the long-term success of revitalization efforts in distressed South Carolina communities. The most frequently mentioned indicators included: the revitalization of empty building and homes, new jobs, safety (e.g., safe public places and police protection), community beautification, community pride, and improved education (e.g., higher education levels). Other indicators mentioned included: public lighting (e.g., for streets or youth recreation areas), a clean environment, green/clean technology jobs, infrastructure, new mixed-use/income developments, sustainability, and support programs for youth.

"A beautiful neighborhood where my kids and grandkids can come to my house and play in my yard."

- Spartanburg Listening Session, April 30, 2009

Resources and Next Steps That Are Most Needed to Help Achieve Revitalization Success.

Provide Funding/Resources.

Participants expressed interest in obtaining additional funding/resources to support revitalization efforts. Potential funding areas identified included: community and social programs, infrastructure, commerce/industrial/local business recruitment, and job training. A few participants also stated that they would like to see simplified procedures for accessing funding and resources and greater flexibility in how funding can be used.

Support Job Creation and Economic Development.

Participants emphasized the need for job creation and economic development. In addition to general comments, participants also recommended specific types of employment (e.g., manufacturing or high-tech sector jobs) and for high-quality, safe jobs.

Engage Directly with Distressed Communities.

Participants emphasized that state political representatives and agency officials should visit and establish a physical presence in distressed communities across the state.

> *"Push state representatives to visit the distressed areas: seeing is believing."*
>
> *- Aiken Listening Session, May 4, 2009*

Support Community Involvement.

Participants requested that communities be directly involved in issues involving the revitalization of distressed areas.

Promote Improved Education.

Participants emphasized that education is a key means for assisting distressed communities. In addition to general comments, participants commented specifically on the importance of providing education, appropriately funding education, and increasing education opportunities.

Support Infrastructure Development and Improvement.

Participants emphasized the need to provide and improve infrastructure to assist the revitalization of distressed areas. Specific infrastructure focus areas mentioned included streets and roads, water/sewer systems, drainage systems, sidewalks, lighting, and broadband technology.

Promote Partnerships and Collaboration.

Participants stated that greater use of partnerships and collaborative efforts would help support revitalization of distressed areas and communities. Types of partnerships mentioned included city government-community partnerships, state government-community partnerships, and community-company partnerships. A Florence Listening Session participant mentioned the DHEC-Arthritic Foundation and the AME Church Project as examples of successful partnerships that have been established.

Support Strategic Planning and Visioning.

Participants recommended greater use of planning and visioning tools and processes to assist revitalization efforts in distressed areas.

Ensure Accountability, Transparency, and Trust.

Participants expressed interest in ensuring that efforts undertaken to support distressed communities are done in an appropriate manner that emphasizes accountability and transparency and builds trust.

Focus on the Distressed Areas That Are Most in Need.

Participants emphasized the need to prioritize revitalization support efforts in areas that are most in need. Participants stated that a prioritization effort could be initiated by the General Assembly, state agencies, or as part of the Advisory Committee's efforts. One participant recommended that the General Assembly establish a task force to lead a prioritization initiative.

"The General Assembly should set up prioritization of areas that need revitalization."

*- Spartanburg Listening Session,
April 30, 2009*