



- Kim Lamb/LVN photo

Community assessment seeks residents' opinions

BY CHRISTY LATTIN
LVN CORRESPONDENT,

Churchill County residents will have more than a dozen opportunities this week to share their opinions about the community, its challenges and assets and future projects they would like to see.

A Community Needs Assessment consists of about 17 "listening sessions" held around Fallon Monday through Thursday. Each listening session will pose the same three questions to residents:

- What are the biggest challenges in our community?
- What are the greatest assets in our community?
- What accomplishments or projects would you like to see in Churchill County, short-term and long-term?

Eleanor Lockwood, Churchill County planning director, said the purpose of the community needs assessment is to identify central themes brought forth by residents, solicit community volunteers for different projects and to identify and promote people who could be leaders in the community.

She said the information gleaned from the assessment will be beneficial in updating the county's Master Plan.

The Nevada Rural Development Council is working with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension to select member of the resource team — the people who will conduct the listening sessions. Carl Dahlen with UNR Cooperative Extension will be the team leader and said additional team members will come from the Nevada Association of Counties, Nevada Rural Housing Authority, UNCE educators from Douglas and White Pine counties, and representatives from the Mineral County Economic Development Authority and Western Nevada Development District.

Dahlen said it's important the needs assessment is conducted by professionals from outside the community to ensure an objective view.

"They don't bring anything with them to the table. They will have no set idea of what should come out of the assessment," Dahlen said, adding the team members all live and work in rural Nevada and bring a broader perspective of issues when viewing a snapshot of Churchill County. Team members begin their assessment of Churchill County Monday afternoon with a bus tour of the area, led by Eric Grimes, executive director of the Churchill Economic Development Authority.

Listening sessions last approximately one hour and are open to the public, with the exception of sessions at Naval Air Station Fallon and the high school. While opinions from all county residents are sought, most listening sessions are targeted to different community sectors including high school students, NAS Fallon active duty and civilian workers, persons with disabilities, educators, agricultural, business, senior citizens, the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe and the faith-based community. Several general listening sessions are also scheduled.

"The more people who participate, the more validity there will be in what we report," Dahlen said. "We're not looking for the 'usual suspects' (i.e. strictly public officials). We want to hear from as many people as we can."

During the listening sessions, each person will be asked a question one at a time. Individual responses will be recorded in phrase form by a recording secretary. Participants are asked to keep answers brief – it's not necessary to provide background and/or historical information, just the facts. Residents are also asked to provide just one answer to each question to ensure that all member of the listening session have an opportunity to weigh in with their opinions.

Dahlen said each person in a listening session will be asked to actively participate and can only “pass” on answering a question once. He said people can also agree with or reaffirm someone else's answer, which creates more emphasis for specific issues in the community. Most often, participants will be given more than one opportunity to offer an answer.

During the week, the resource team will debrief each evening to see if certain issues are mentioned repeatedly which may lead to “themes.” The resource team will share its preliminary report of the listening sessions on Thursday at 6 p.m. at the Fallon Convention Center in a town hall meeting. This first report summarizes what the team saw and heard while in the area and identifies major themes coming from the listening sessions.

From there, two or three resource team members are assigned to a theme for a more in-depth analysis and to provide recommendations and resources. The entire team will return in eight weeks to again present its final report in the town hall meeting setting.

Dahlen said after the team provides its themes and resources, it will ask residents of which themes they can help on an individual level. He said the big idea behind the community assessment is to pull residents together to work on issues in their community and to provide them with an action plan.

“It's asking residents ‘Who will do what by when,’” Dahlen said. “Often times, people don't participate in solving local issues because no one is asked.”

The final report will also be presented to the Churchill County Commissioners and the Fallon City Council to see if those bodies can address specific themes or issues.

“We're trying to provide the decision makers in the community good information for a strategic plan,” Dahlen said.

Similar assessments have been conducted in Douglas and Pershing counties and the city of Wells, and two more are planned for Silver Springs and Mineral County this spring. The model for this project was taken from the Wyoming Rural Council, and Dahlen said more than 100 assessment have been done there with mixed results – better results are realized when residents embrace the process and become actively involved.

“It's all about what are people willing to step up and do,” Dahlen said.

All residents of Churchill County are encouraged to attend a listening session, but other avenues to offer opinions are available. The county has posted a short online questionnaire – with the same three questions – at the top of its homepage at www.churchillcounty.org.

Residents can also download a two-page brochure which provides room for written responses which can then be mailed into the Churchill County Planning Department.

For information about the community assessment, attend a listening session or contact Eleanor Lockwood or Terri Pereira in the planning department at 423-7627.

Sessions

Monday, Feb. 8 Listening Session Location

*3-4 pm. NAS Fallon: active duty only NAS Fallon

*4:15-5:15 p.m. NAS Fallon: Civilians including contractors NAS Fallon

5:45-6:45 p.m. WNC class Western Nevada College

Tuesday, Feb. 9 Listening Session Location

*9-10:15 a.m. High School students only High School

11 a.m.-noon Persons with disabilities Multipurpose Bldg.,

(MPB) Fairgrounds

1:30-3:30 p.m. Open session (MPB) Fairgrounds

3:45-4:45 p.m. Educators (MPB) Fairgrounds

5-6 p.m. Ag — Community Extension Office, 111 Sheckler Rd.

7-8 p.m. Businesses — Extension Office, 111 Sheckler Rd.

Wednesday, Feb. 10 Listening Session Location

7:30-8:30 a.m. Businesses (MPB) Fairgrounds

10-11:30 a.m. Senior citizens Churchill Co. Senior Center, 310 E. Court St.

1-2 p.m. Faith-based community (MPB) Fairgrounds

3:15-6 p.m. Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe Tribal council offices

7-8 p.m. Open session Extension Office, 111 Sheckler Rd.

Thursday, Feb. 11 Listening Session Location

7-8 a.m. Health sector Convention Center

8:30-9:30 a.m. Veterans Convention Center

6-8 p.m. Town Meeting Convention Center

Resource Team will present overview of listening sessions

<http://www.lahontanvalleynews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100206/NEWS/100209910/1055&ParentProfile=1045&template=printart>