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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Date: Thursday, September 15, 2011***

**Final River District presentation by consultants marks only the beginning**

River District consultants BBP & Associates and Allison Platt & Associates made their final presentation Wednesday on a plan that will serve as a starting point regarding the future direction for the River District.

Now, city of Danville staff will undertake the task of determining which recommendations from the consultants are financially feasible in the current fiscal year, ending June 30, and which ones should be scheduled later.

"It is not a secret that we have budget challenges," City Manager Joe King said at the forum, which brought more than 80 citizens to the Community Market. "Making this kind of investment over a long period of time is going to have to find a place in the overall budget."

Ralph Basile of BBP & Associates said the city should use \$4.1 million in its cash reserves for initial improvements on Main Street.

"We think that is the amount of money that will be needed to move ahead and have the city make a statement about what it intends to do," Basile said. "Hopefully, the private sector will come right along, but the city understands that the business of redevelopment at times involves seeding and continued commitment."

Over the next five years, Basile said the city should commit at least \$10 million in its own funds to improve the River District and leverage investments by others.

King said the matter will be brought before City Council. A plan of action then will be put in place and presented to the public on Nov. 10 at a meeting to be held at the Pepsi Building at the Crossing at the Dan.

"Between now and Nov. 10, we will be asking for as much input as you care to give to help us shape those ideas," King said at the forum. "We are very modest in how we see the city in the role it plays. It is not the only mover and shaker here. There are buildings that are owned by

private individuals. There are businesses that are run by private individuals. There are institutions in the downtown. There are residents in the downtown. They have a lot to say about what happens to the River District.”

Karl Stauber, president and chief executive of the Danville Regional Foundation, challenged those in attendance to make investments in the River District.

“We (the foundation directors) have a pretty basic belief that if the River District does not prosper, this region does not prosper,” Stauber said. “Nobody from Richmond is going to turn this place around. Nobody from Washington, D.C., is going to turn this place around. It’s going to be the people here who want to turn this place around.”

Stauber and King pointed to Greenville, S.C., as an example of how the district can turn around.

King said, “Greenville had a similar history of a textile-dependent economy and transitioned into something pretty spectacular. They were very convinced that doing something in the equivalent of their River District made all the difference in the world.”

He publicly thanked Stauber and the foundation for arranging the field trip taken 10 months ago to Greenville by council members and city staff, as well as funding the work of the River District consultants hired by the city.

Stauber said the River District can transition into a bright spot similar to Greenville’s downtown.

“I visited Greenville in 1968 as a high school student. There was open heroin use on Main Street where today there are very high end stores,” Stauber said. “It didn’t happen overnight. It took lots of investment. It took lots of hard work.

Wednesday night’s public forum was the fourth on the River District, which will encompass the traditional central business district, the historic tobacco district and contiguous business areas – extending east to west from the Carrington Pavilion to the White Mill Property and north to south from the Dan River to Ridge Street.

The consultants summarized the public sector and private sector projects that they believe could bring new life to the district.

The public sector projects involve possible changes in vehicular traffic patterns and use of space that would allow for a more pedestrian-friendly area and include wider sidewalks, green spaces and a large “gateway” river park with a waterfall.

The first phase of private sector projects targets four projects on Bridge and Lynn streets – a hotel, an apartment building, an office complex, and a mixed-use building.

A second phase of private sector projects include the White Mill, River City Towers (former Masonic Temple), the Bridge Street fire station, the Bridge Street power station, the former Richmond Cedar Works building on Craghead Street, the first block of Main Street, and the former Belk-Leggett building on Main Street.

Basile and Platt cautioned that any plan will change over time as conditions change and opportunities arise.

“It is very important to understand what this plan represents and what it means,” said Platt, an urban design architect. “Often there is a lot of misunderstanding about what the process is all about. Basically what we are trying to look at is – in the big scheme of things – how to make what you have here already work better. It’s not just ‘let’s make it pretty.’”

Platt said a civil dialogue is important as the process moves forward.

“Everybody wants the same basic thing,” Platt said. “They may disagree about particular goals. It is important to give people credit for wanting to do the right thing and work it out as opposed to assume bad faith.”

Platt specifically addressed the situation regarding the building at 231 Main St. that houses Lou’s Antiques Mall. Platt has presented a concept that shows the building being replaced by a pedestrian area with a walkway and water fountain.

Last night, however, Platt cautioned against forcing the business from the site.

“There are two issues here,” Platt said. “One is the business, and one is the building. Regarding the business, any business that’s downtown that is successful is a good thing. ... On the other hand, there is the building. If you go look at that building, it is not a very attractive building nor is it a building that fits with the rest of historic downtown.

“This does not lead you to say that Lou’s Antiques should go somewhere else tomorrow. In fact, Lou Antiques should not go anywhere until they want to go somewhere.”

If the business one day relocates to another location or ceases to operate, Platt said the building then should be replaced.

“The whole purpose of this plan is to keep viable businesses and to get more.”

King agreed, saying in a statement released Wednesday prior to the forum, “Lou’s Antiques is exactly the kind of business we want in our River District. It’s charming, interesting and brings customers to the district. It’s part of what makes the River District cool. We want the business to prosper and, if anything, to outgrow its building and need a bigger space downtown.”

King also said the city wants to avoid doing harm to the River District’s unique historic and architectural features as revitalization projects are undertaken.

Basile cautioned those at the attendance that the plan as it now stands represents only the beginning, and not the end.

“We are recommending a strategy that we think will work,” Basile said. “That strategy is going to be remolded and reshaped by the discussions that are going to take place beginning tonight and down the road.”

Deputy City Manager David Parrish called attention to the growing activity in the River District, ranging from infrastructure improvements to new retail, institutional and manufacturing tenants.

Parrish also pointed to statistics that show less than 2 percent of all criminal activity in the city occurs within the district.

“The River District is a safe place to be,” Parrish said. “Our staff has looked at this in great detail.”

Wednesday night’s forum, as well as previous presentations and maps, are available for viewing by visiting the city of Danville website – [www.danville-va.gov](http://www.danville-va.gov) – and clicking on the River District Development tab on the left rail. Comments may be submitted by way of the website.

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