

Seeing the future, making it happen

The thing about a community's visioning process is, the more involved citizens get in the job of "seeing" an ideal future, the more work there is to be done — and the more likely the work will get done.

That's precisely what Buellton city officials and a large group of very involved citizens are discovering about creating a blueprint for the community's future.

After months of committee meetings and the hiring of a consultant, Buellton's visioning process has reached a nexus of sorts. There are plenty of ideas about building the ideal town, but the process has now entered a phase during which the rubber begins to hit the road. It's closing in on the time when the vision needs to be completed and presented to the City Council, whose members will then have to vote on a strategy.

To be sure, the vision created so far is truly grand — a museum, cultural arts center, state-of-the-art library, perhaps coupled with a civic center, an Avenue of Flags that would be Buellton's crowning centerpiece, among other ideas.

But, as one member of the visioning process steering committee pointed out recently, before dessert, you need to finish dinner, which in Buellton's case involves sprucing up. Before the building of the dream city can take place, city codes need to be strictly enforced, and some commonsense beautification — in the form of painting, fixing and sweeping up unsightly debris — needs to be done.

Fortunately, getting that spiffing up accomplished won't require a big capital outlay. It's mostly a matter of local residents and business owners rolling up their sleeves, grabbing a broom or paint brush, and getting to work.

Once the slate has been cleared, so to speak, the real work of turning vision into reality can begin. Fortunately, the consulting firm hired by the city to guide the visioning process along is also quite adept at finding and securing state and federal money to get specific projects done. In these difficult economic times, that is critically important because, left to their own devices, there are few small communities in America that could actually afford to turn dreams into concrete and steel.

So, as far as this process has come in recent months, there still is much to be done. The visioning group's wish list and recommendations are to be presented to the City Council at a meeting on Thursday, July 22. After council review, yet another public workshop will be scheduled in the fall, at which citizens will learn what the city plans to do with the vision.

This entire process is a rare opportunity for a community to shape itself for the future. Too many times, and in too many towns and cities, only a handful of elected officials or paid staff members are allowed make these decisions. And just as often, they ignore the wishes of taxpayers.

That's not happening in Buellton. And there's still time to get involved in this visioning process.