

## Fourth community development meeting reveals community's priorities

By Sarah Reed. The Marshall Democrat-News: March 27, 2012.

Tuesday evening marked the fourth public meeting hosted by Marshall Saline Development Corporation in an effort for Zimmer Real Estate to gather some final input for the direction of county development.

After meetings in Sweet Springs, Slater and Marshall brought residents' perceptions to the forefront, a list of priorities has been set for possible growth. Those priorities included developing the Interstate 70 and U.S. Highway 65 junction, school facilities, housing, retail, new business/industry, hotels and Entrepreneurial Rural Initiative development.

"It's a very necessary community conversation to have," Zimmer Real Estate's Troy Nash said. "The residents of Saline County are going to have to chart their own destiny. We're going to go back and dissect the information, to analyze it, massage it a little bit and come up with a set of recommendations that are doable, practical and implementable."

Nash reiterated the value of the entrepreneurial spirit in the area.

"You have a lot of what you need already here," Nash said.

Zimmer hopes to have a final report by the end of July, along with recommendations for county progress.

"We are not associated with plans that sit on shelves and collect dust," he said. "They are action-oriented plans. Because we are developers, our approach is vastly different from what you may find elsewhere. We're looking to do deals. We're looking to get things done. That'll be reflected in our recommendations."

Nash asked the crowd Tuesday -- the largest of all four meetings -- if the list truly reflected the county's priorities. Some asked to add agriculture while others stated the arts should also be reflected. Others recommended cutting schools from the list as it primarily reflected Marshall school development rather than all those in the county.

Some strengths outlined in previous meetings included Indian Foothills Park, the Lyceum Theatre, the county's geographic location and Marshall Municipal Airport among others. Weaknesses included the number of homeless children, housing, an aging population and public transportation.

"I think you're seeing cooperation taking place," Nash continued. "The people are doing the heavy lifting. They are working together. We're seeing that come together."

He did point out community leaders are critical to the development of the region. Many of them were present Tuesday, including representatives from Marshall, Sweet Springs and Slater city councils as well as the three county commissioners. Likewise, leaders of educational and cultural entities were also there, interested in collaborating with others in the community.

"... if we stay focused on our priorities and work diligently, we can achieve some great things here in Saline County," he said.

Zimmer hopes to lend its expertise by not only proposing recommendations for Saline County but by assisting entrepreneurs in taking risks.

"We need someone risking -- to build new housing, to build new retail -- but to do it in a way that is profitable," Nash stated. "Someone said that in life it's not what happens to you that's important. It's what are you going to do about it," Nash said.