



News

Task force moving ahead Officials say interest is high

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The effort to target and reduce poverty in Marion remains strong, but still in an infancy stage, Mayor Wayne Seybold said.

It's been a month since Seybold called a group of nonprofit and city leaders together to discuss poverty, and how to ensure people aren't taking advantage of social service systems in the community. A lot of ideas were discussed at the meeting, and Seybold said there's been strong interest in moving forward.

Helping children was a goal of the group, and one concept is to turn Lincoln Elementary School into a center for children after its closure.

The center would allow nonprofit groups to come under one roof.

"There are a lot of nonprofits in our community who provide some of the same exact services, and it would be interesting to see what it would take for the groups to merge if they can — and maybe they can't," Seybold said.

He said the community has got to find a way to be more efficient. Money is becoming more scarce. Just like local units of government have been creative in cutting or sharing resources, Seybold suggests nonprofits become more efficient and ensure that people aren't taking advantage of social service resources.

He said if they become more efficient, there will be more resources available for people that need the help.

Using Lincoln for a community center is still just a concept. Marion Community Schools Superintendent Steve Edwards said the school board is probably waiting for him to bring options on what to do with the school.

"We're losing so much money that there is concern about letting the building go," he said, saying a low-level lease for the building may be difficult.

Board President Mike Luce seemed to agree. While the board is open to hearing about options for the building, the district has to constantly make cuts.

"At this point, we're going to have to be very conservative with any actions," Luce said.

Improving education and targeting poverty was a key point of Mayor Seybold's State of the City address last week. Seybold said while economic development and cleaning up the city are two constant focuses, city administration also plans to focus on poverty, and he said he has been getting plenty of calls of interest.

Groups interested in the poverty task force so far include Family Service Society, the United Way, the county's three universities, housing groups, food banks and elected officials. Seybold said

representatives from the groups will probably meet again soon.

Groups also took a survey about what services they provide in the community so they can draw comparisons. The survey results are still being compiled.

"I think there's a huge spirit of cooperation," Seybold said. "That's why we can tackle this issue, because there's such a cohesiveness in our community today."

The topic was discussed at an Indiana Wesleyan University breakfast last week. Another smaller group also met last week to discuss poverty. Connie Rose, director of Family Service Society, said a group focused on early childhood development talked about issues.

Rose said she, too, has been asked a lot of questions about the movement targeting poverty and education. She said there are a lot of people trying to figure out what the conversation is all about. The early childhood group hopes to strive for outcomes, optimism and building relationships, she said.

"If we're really going to invest in the children, we would like to be the part of the community that talks about hope, optimism and building relationships," she said.

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