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U of I students, educators meet to discuss economic growth

A group of University of Illinois students and their urban and regional planning professor is making Hoopeston a class project.

Professor Beverly Wilson and Zachary Kennedy of the U of I Extension, along with five students, met with members of Hoopeston's economic development committee and others on February 22.

Wilson's project included a survey sent to some Hoopeston residents, the results of which "appears to us that economic development is among the concerns," he said.

The February meeting was designed to "get some feedback and direction" for the project, he added.

Wilson handed out a community profile, which gathered together information from other sources, such as the U.S. census, which showed Hoopeston lost 11.5 percent of its population between 2000-2010, going from 5,965 to 5,351. Going from 1990-2010, Hoopeston lost only 9.7 percent of its population.

The report states that "Hoopeston's declining standard of living is most apparent in the school cafeteria," where 89 to 186 students per building are eligible for free lunches, with another 18 to 47 eligible for reduced price lunches. Between 59 percent and 71 percent of Hoopeston's students come from low-income households, according to the report.

The numbers paint a gloomier picture than the reality, which is that Hoopeston has had several new businesses open and significant economic development in the past few years.

Bill Nicholls, member of the economic development committee, spoke about development at McDonald's - both new and old facilities. Also, Hoopeston Commu-



Professor Beverly Wilson, right, University of Illinois urban development professor, makes a point at a meeting Friday in Hoopeston as Zachary Kennedy of the U of I Extension, listens.

nity memorial Hospital's integration with Carle resulted in additional growth there, as has the building of a new nursing home. Additionally, the tire recycling business in the former FMC facility has hired about 30 people and has plans to hire more.

The economic development committee is also trying to attract businesses and industry to Hoopeston "but as you all know, there's no big factory going to fall out of the sky," Nicholls said.

Nicholls talked about the committee's work with Hoopeston Area High School and Danville Area Community College in an effort to offer a vocational program. He cited several Danville firms which "are crying for help but they just can't find quality people."

The loss of young people is another issue, faced not just by Hoopeston but by all of Vermilion County. "We've been bleeding young people for years," said

See GROWTH on other side

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Briefly

Breast cancer support group

A breast cancer support group will meet at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 7 in the community room at Carle Hoopeston Regional. Please join this organizational meeting and bring ideas of what you would like to see in a support group for breast cancer survivors in and around the Hoopeston area.

For more information, call Pat Foster 815-984-4040 or Misti Runge 217-260-2092.

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Stingray signups

Hoopeston Stingrays Swim Team will register swimmers during the WHPO Business Expo at the Hoopeston Civic Center for the Summer 2013 season. Signups and swimsuit fittings will be held on Saturday, March 9 from 10am-4pm and Sunday, March 10 from noon-3pm.

Another signup and swimsuit fitting will be held Saturday, March 23 from 10-2 at the Hoopeston Masonic Lodge. A final signup will be held on Saturday, April 27 from 10-2 at the Hoopeston Masonic Lodge.

Youth who will be age 6 by September 1, 2013 through age 18 who can swim freestyle (front crawl) 50 yards may join the team. Registration fee is \$40 for one child, \$60 for two, and \$75 for three or more. For more information, contact Jeff at 217-772-9005, or email hoopestonstingrays@yahoo.com.

February winners in the Women Making a Difference drawing were: \$25, Donna Field and Carolyn Tweedy; \$15, Jill Voyles and Pattie Gibson; and \$10, Bob Mayberry and Steve Dalton.

WMD winners

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Growth continued from other side

Linda Bolton, of Vermilion Advantage. However, she said, the trend is reversing as global companies located in Danville retain some local youth.

Elizabeth Silver, of Carle Hoopeston Community Memorial Hospital, said she can relate to young people leaving. Silver said when she left for college, she had no intention of returning to the hometown she loves. "I just kind of fell into my job," said the marketing/public relations manager.

Another issue is lower property values and an abundance of abandoned houses, said Jerry Urich, owner of Urich Realty. In 1991, two of 10 properties were in bad repair but now, the number is seven or eight of 10. Such properties need to be razed but city officials don't have funding for that, he added.

Wilson asked about an inventory of such properties. "Just take a drive," Urich answered.

The committee's wish list for Hoopeston includes filling downtown businesses, getting a motel and finding uses for the former Essex and Willdon buildings.

Bolton said recent upturns in development have had a positive effect on the town, causing people to believe in themselves and the community. She praised the committee, saying the all-volunteer group "struggles mightily to do the things they do."

Wilson suggested his project might best benefit Hoopeston by finding possible funding sources and ways to help market Hoopeston, such as a video.

Weather



Snow/sleet today. Accumulation 1"-3". High 34. Tonight, chance of snow. Low 26. Tomorrow, breezy. High 35, low 25.

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