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## **Meeting generates sustainable ideas**

**By Brielle Schaeffer** | *Peninsula Clarion*

Curbside recycling. Green spaces. Ride shares. Developing a city center. Diversifying the economy.

The Challenger Learning Center was swarming with such ideas Saturday at the City of Kenai's Town Hall Meeting on building a sustainable community.

"This is really what democracy is all about -- people coming out and talking and having ideas heard," said Peter Glaser, the city-contracted meeting consultant.

Some 25 local residents -- not all from the City of Kenai -- devoted a good chunk of the day to witness and participate in the public process.

"A lot of good work got done," said Kenai City Manager Rick Koch. "I hope this kind of process here will create some kind of momentum for positive interaction."

The city hired professional facilitators Peter and Susan Glaser to run the meetings with their researched method for efficient communication. City staff and council members -- who were barred from speaking -- assisted their process and sat in on discussions. During the meeting, citizens were divided into small groups to pinpoint the things most important to them.

Moira Ireland of Kenai said she wants the city to become a model of energy efficiency, starting with improving the quality of the tap water to reduce plastic bottle consumption.

"Our levels of arsenic are deplorable," she said. "My kids won't drink tap water."

Ireland also advocated for improved public transportation, including bike and walking trails on Bridge Access Road and Beaver Loop.

And she was not the only one. Each group's ideas for a sustainable community ran together. The initial raindrops might have differed but the brainstorming was all the same.

Most attendees felt strongly about prioritizing renewable energy sources, making programs that promote health and well-being, responsible city planning and zoning, and economic development to promote year-round employment for all ages.

Issues with the dipnet fishery also seemed to be on the collective conscious, with several people talking about needing to ameliorate the parking problem, evaluate its benefits to the community, or just fix it altogether.

"I feel energized that many of us want the same things," said Michelle Martin of Kenai, and a founding member of community group Kenai Resilience.

For her, though, the onus is not solely on the city but on the individual. "Let's make sure we do some of these things."

Eric Sandberg of Sterling said that sustainable issues should be addressed all across the Peninsula in similar collaborative and open formats.

"I feel this needs to grow to a borough-wide level to institute some of the ideas that are coming up," he said.

The City of Kenai's Town Hall Meeting was intended to be a jumping off point for the city council to gather public opinion and see what potential council action could be taken on the ideas.

"We need to start somewhere," Glaser said.

Kenai's town hall meeting was spurred from city council and public discussions surrounding the divisive Alaska Coastal Communities Global Climate Change Compact last fall. The meeting cost the city about \$11,000.

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