Making our Communities vital. Are we Hearing Everyone?

Many have joined different boards, committees, clubs, coalitions, and workgroups with the purpose of making our communities a vital place to live. When considering what makes a vital community we many times consider the ability of that community to provide a means to make a living, provide enrichment to its residents, provide a safe place to live, provide quality healthcare, provide quality child care and education, provide opportunities to grow spiritually, and much more.

As we get into the details of this work, I’d like to encourage us to ensure we are remembering the community as a whole. There can be many varying groups that we should consider when moving forward and it can be as simple as walking over to the next block to find a group in completely different circumstances. Are we considering their needs and ideas in our plans? If we take a little time and analyze our process, we can avoid missing these important inputs.

Are we leaving stakeholders out of the conversation? Do we respect and consider everyone’s opinion equally? Are there biases for or against certain sectors of our community? Are we trying to understand and respect others’ circumstances? Are we building a community that considers everyone’s quality of life? Has work to define and improve our communities become a power struggle rather than a means to improve the public good?

Community work is far more likely to be successful if it involves hearing from as many stakeholders as possible. The earlier they are involved the better. This provides fairness by involving everyone affected by an issue. Planning, intervention, and evaluation all simply go better if there is input and participation by everyone involved. This participatory process results in more ideas, more widespread support, the possibility of avoiding errors because of ignorance of community history or past performance, and importantly, ownership of the resulting action by everyone affected.

-30-

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.