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Troubles defined, answers needed

Urban expert sees potential for York

By EYANA ADAH MCMILLAN
The York Dispatch

For York County to become an example of what America aspires to be, more people will have to develop a YIMBY attitude, as in "Yes, in my back yard," said David Rusk.

Rusk, an urban policy expert who has written extensively about York County, said the county has the potential to be the land of equal opportunity, economic development and fiscal stability.

He talked about the county's potential while addressing more than 250 people who attended the Metro-York Community Dialogue sponsored by YorkCounts, created in 1999 to define the quality of life in the county and to determine desired improvements.

The dialogue, held at the Evelyn and Earle Wolf Hall at York College, is part of YorkCounts' Metro-York Project, created last year to determine solutions for problems affecting the center city, including tight finances and an eroding tax base.

"Everyone agrees that problems exist with the economy, finances, schools, and

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ANSWERS

Setting high goals

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Rusk has done the studies on that," said James DeBorg, YorkCounts' director. "Now it's time to say, 'Here are the solutions.'"

Work still to be done: Rusk, a former mayor of Albuquerque, N.M., who lives in Washington, D.C., told the audience that the things he recommended to the county in 1996 when he delivered

the Rusk Report, and in 2003 when he returned for a two-day speaking tour, still need to be done.

He also spoke at the 25th annual Dr. Frederick D. Holliday Memorial Celebration held in October by the York City Human Relations Commission.

As he has done in his other visits to York, Rusk told yesterday's audience that he's tough on York because he considers it one of six cities that could "be all America aspires to be" if the county turned itself around. The others are Portland, Ore.; Seattle, Wash.; Charlotte, N.C.; Madison, Wis.; and Franklin, Tenn.

Again Rusk criticized the division of counties into dozens of municipalities, saying such fragmentation has been linked to slow economic growth and high racial and economic segregation.

Help for schoolchildren: He said that creating affordable housing in mixed-income developments throughout the county is key to dispersing the concentrated poverty in York City, which would alleviate the school district's financial strain.

Mixed-income developments also would give families with low incomes opportunities to move to more affluent areas with fi-

nancially sound school districts, which means their children will have a chance to receive a better education, Rusk said.

"Low-income children learn best when they're at middle-class schools with middle-class students," he said. "Children who live in an area with such a concentration of poor children won't have a chance to succeed."

He also told the audience that the county has a responsibility to help York City and the York City School District deal with its poverty issues.

Developing the city's historical areas will draw more investors and business

owners and will lead to increased property values, he said.

York County President Commissioner Lori Mitrick said she felt that Rusk was honest in his analysis of how far the county has come in 10 years.

"I wish he would have taken a more optimistic view of what we have been doing proactively," she added. "Good things are happening here. But he felt charged to talk about the hurdles and gave us a lot of things to think about."

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Dialogue

A Metro-York Community Dialogue will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 24, at the Recital Hall of Evelyn and Earle Wolf Hall at York College, 441 Country Club Road in Spring Garden Township.

The speaker will be Myron Orfield, executive director of the Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota.

To see a videotape of David Rusk's talk and for information about the Jan. 24 session, call YorkCounts at 815-6430.