

**Connecting Leadership and Community to Strengthen Battle Creek  
Community Forum Hosted by Project 20/20  
June 19, 2014, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m., Burnham Brook Community Center**

After a panel discussion with James McKernan from Bronson Battle Creek, Rob Peterson from Battle Creek Unlimited/Downtown Partnership, David Schmaltz from the Battle Creek Fire Department, Dr. Maria Scott from the Battle Creek Area Math and Science Center and Dr. Evon Walters from Miller College, attendees (41) were asked to work in small groups to answer the following questions: 1) What do these leaders need to know to move our community forward? 2) How do you think Battle Creek leaders can help us get to where we want to be? and 3) What role do you have in helping to make that happen?

A recorder wrote down the ideas from members of each small group. The notes below contain the responses recorded by each group in the group discussion.

**1. WHAT DO THESE LEADERS NEED TO KNOW TO MOVE OUR COMMUNITY FORWARD?**

- Know its citizenry
- Need to know its diversity
- Resources available
- History of Battle Creek – who are the players
- Understand the rhythm of Battle Creek
- Need to know what’s working well and what’s not working well
- Data regarding the city
- Collaborating to resolve issues – reach out
- Understand the dynamics of the community
- BCAMSC should expand offerings and numbers enrolled
- Taxes are high for a city of our size
- Residents have poor perception of their community
  - Outsiders could not believe there was no people downtown after 8 p.m.
  - Perception of community as it relates to safety
  - Linear path and downtown are preferred by some for biking and skating
  - We do not appreciate our assets – if it is not safe downtown it is due to people not being visible
- People identify with neighborhoods instead of from Battle Creek
- Lack of mentorship among current leaders
- Shortage of high-end rental housing
- Lack of people working here and living here
- Negativity of citizens is our own worst enemy
- Together there is no other way...until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men’s skin, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact
- Education is the way out
- Job needs of our youth and young adults
- Turn negatives into positives
- Have professionals involved in sharing their skill with youth in schools and institutions

- Re-train our leaders in leadership
- Welcome leaders to get connected to groups of people in different sectors
- Leadership struggles with getting data on information to help
- Not sure how to connect or make the connection to other leaders
- People don't know about Miller College and what it has to offer and Miller doesn't know how to connect with the community
- Need to have earlier conversations with youth and need to educate and get them ready for college

## **2. HOW DO YOU THINK BATTLE CREEK LEADERS CAN HELP US GET TO WHERE WE WANT TO BE?**

- To create an environment that Battle Creek is a good place to be
- Listening and delivering what the citizens want
- Adopting the sense of accountability
- Become a good corporate citizens top down
- A willingness to be creative
- Bringing outsiders in with new experience
- Being receptive to outsiders
- The lack of leaders who are successful in the past such as Russ Mawby, Pete Christ, etc. to push agenda
- Young professionals do not have the opportunity to receive or see leadership and they want it
- Find opportunities to get involved – service clubs
- Focus on keeping the people that are here instead of only attracting new young people
- Continue to offer more opportunities
- Business to offer incentives to live here
- Get upper management to live here then middle management will live here
- Public service, gov't, school employees not residing here
- Get police and fire representation to be a part of the group; active participation other than for reporting as a part of their jobs
- Leaders need to create opportunities to encourage or gather
- No unified vision from community leaders
- No leaders or lack of leaders in city (elected) being unified
- Low level of trust in leadership
- Try not to shoot too big – no working on small goals with success
- Tell our assets – talk about them
- Kids need positive intervention early; leadership core going out to kids and letting them know correct paths vs. strikes
- Respect for leadership and positions of authority
- Success is a function of the books you read and the people to hang out with
- Reach out to the “success” stories and have them suggest the path
- Professionals talking about how they go where they are
- Organized internships for kids (resume building successes)
- Leaders need to re-educate themselves to lead in today's methods (diverse locations, churches, etc.)
- Get on the ground and connect with other leaders and youth

### 3. WHAT ROLE DO YOU HAVE IN HELPING TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN?

- To become and stay active in the community (staying connected)
- Be receptive and supportive
- Building trust within your community
- Be committed to be allies, with other leaders
- Creating partnerships, be a resource and an advocate
- Have a major commitment – job and community
- Getting everyone in the city involved in going in the same direction toward success
- Focus on positivity – accentuate why we are here
- Promote what is good and encourage people to change thinking
- Building up, not tearing down
- Pick one thing to be a part of
- Education people about bussing
- Commit to engage and not converse
- Celebrate successes such as the “we are one march” and the outpouring of support for the fire at Lakeview Meadows (more donations than they can handle); Fire dept. response and effectiveness of policies and procedures – that all went well
- Talking to young women
- Need to start to be open to building relationships of trust