

Business recruitment ideas suggested

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By MICKEY POWELL - Bulletin Staff Writer
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Martinsville City Council candidates, speaking at a forum Monday, offered ideas on how to lure businesses to the city, including cooperation with nearby localities, a city shell building and improving roads.

The city has “special needs,” said candidate James Clark, the city’s vice mayor. He said that due to a lack of large vacant sites, Martinsville is better suited for stores and small companies than heavy industry.

If a new shell building is built in the Patriot Centre at Beaver Creek industrial park, as Henry County officials have proposed, the next shell should be constructed at Clearview Business Park in Martinsville, said candidate Mark Stroud.

Stroud also said he supports development of the Rives Road Industrial Park, which is vacant.

The proposed Interstate 73 needs to be built, and the widening of U.S. 58 to four lanes between Stuart and Hillsville needs to be finished, candidate Danny Turner said. He added that I-73 will be “the engine that gets us going.”

“We need to open our doors to any business” interested in locating in the city, regardless of what they pay workers, said candidate James Crigger Sr.

Also, “we need to spruce up our community” and improve its infrastructure — such as roads and water and sewer lines — so that companies can see Martinsville is a good place to live and work, Crigger said.

Candidate Kimble Reynolds Jr., who is the city’s mayor, agreed. He also said the city should cooperate with neighboring communities, including those in North Carolina, on economic development projects when possible.

The five candidates, who are running for three council seats in the May 6 election, spoke at a forum sponsored by the local Property Management Association at the Dutch Inn.

During the forum, candidates said they want to see more apartments built in Martinsville for people who do not need government rental subsidies.

“We need regular apartments for regular paying people,” Stroud said. He indicated that might be possible if interaction between property managers and owners and the city can be improved.

“We need to create an atmosphere that people can live in Martinsville at a reasonable price,” said Clark.

Reynolds said the city council’s goals for the future include developing neighborhoods suitable for retirees, such as putting them near drug stores and grocery stores.

Crigger said he would like to see “campus-style developments,” similar to ones recently built in California, set up locally. Those developments aim to help younger people and older people get to know each other, he said.

Clark indicated that students attending the New College Institute might be interested in living in apartments created in vacant spaces uptown.

Turner said he favors giving people interested in redeveloping uptown as few restrictions as possible.

“If you own property,” he said, “you should be able to control, within reason, what you do with it.”