Piner tornado brings people together, prompts survey

By the time a tornado struck Piner in March 2012, devastating the community and structures to the east of it, a small group of area citizens had met several times to try to bring their neighbors together. The immediate needs prompted by the Class 5 storm solidified that group’s goals and provided fuel to move it forward.

Talk of bringing neighbors and friends together was replaced quickly by actions that were more effective in helping southern Kenton County residents see the value of working together. While pursuing relief efforts, group members also sought to bring structure to residents who value individualism and privacy. The strategy worked.

As the storm’s devastation transitioned to a memory, local discussions moved on to Direction 2030, a coordinated effort by the Kenton County Planning Commission to engage as many Kenton County residents in the crafting of a new comprehensive plan for the community.

Residents got together and discussed past planning efforts and current needs. In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the area’s needs, the group decided to pursue a survey of their friends and neighbors across the southern part of the county. With the support of Kenton County Fiscal Court, NKAPC, and the Kenton County Agriculture Extension office, group members mailed approximately 3100 surveys to all households on January 10.

Three-hundred fifty responses were needed for the survey to be considered statistically significant; the community came together and returned more than a 1000 surveys.

The survey document was developed by Dr. Lori Garkovich with University of Kentucky who has extensive experience dealing with rural issues in other parts of Kentucky. Garkovich helped with a planning effort in 1996 for this part of Kenton County and has a good understanding of the community.

After the survey was developed, it was shared with a group of residents for initial feedback to ensure the questions were clear and understood.

The survey includes demographic questions that will provide general information on the respondents such as how long they have lived in southern Kenton county and their reasons for moving to that part of the community.

During the preliminary planning process one of the main themes raised by residents was the need to preserve the rural heritage of the area. In order to capture the varied perceptions of rural heritage, additional questions regarding what defines rural heritage were also included in the survey so as to provide a variety of options including farms, large homes, small stores, large office buildings and retail. Also included are questions regarding respondents’ satisfaction with existing roadways, Internet access, employment centers, access to retail and residential development.

“The survey is a way for public and elected officials to understand better who we are and what our needs are,” said Bill Schneider, a resident of Cruise Creek Road in southern Kenton County. “The individual leadership that has come forth to design the survey is inspiring. We are thrilled with the huge response that shows how hungry our citizens are to be heard.”

The survey response period was closed on January 31, 2014. Staff is compiling the data that will be sent to Garkovich for analysis. Results will be available in mid-late March.

Focus groups and public meetings are being planned to seek additional input. “This is a very community-driven planning process for an area of the county that has a very strong sense of community,” said
Sharmili Reddy, AICP, planning manager at NKAPC. “We are providing a service and helping the process by facilitating and bringing in resources as necessary.”

The results of the survey and information gathered from focus groups and public meetings will be used to develop policy for the southern portion of Kenton County as part of the Direction 2030 planning effort. The comprehensive plan for 40 years has promoted growth and development north of this area while encouraging the protection of the agriculture and rural nature of Southern Kenton County. This effort will help determine if the policy is still valid or if changes need to be made to represent community desire.