



## A vision for Staten Island takes shape

By Stephannia Cleaton

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Advance photo/Robin George

Norma Sue Wolfe, left, takes notes and Julie Moody Lewis listens to a speaker during a recent Vision for Staten Island brainstorming meeting.

More than 460 Staten Islanders had their say at this month's borough-wide brainstorming sessions run by the Vision for Staten Island group, generating about 1,600 suggestions that ran the gamut of better roads and more buses, to a summer reading program to boost proficiency test scores.

So what's next? Even more polling.

"When you're trying to improve something, the first thing is to envision what you want. There's a lot of open questions on Staten Island," said Jonathan Peters, a professor at the College of Staten Island (CSI) and the transportation expert for the organization. "It's not short-term."

The nonprofit group spent a week questioning Islanders at "visioning" meetings all over the borough, but through January it will be reaching out to groups it knows it missed: Immigrants, twenty-somethings and the lesbian and gay community.

Those who did attend the public free-for-all that wrapped up last Monday had plenty to say, if much of it was familiar: Fix traffic; more buses, especially late-night; put an end to overdevelopment and, as the borough grows older, give seniors affordable housing.

Some suggestions were specific, such as an indoor running track, a cultural center on the South Shore, and a summer youth reading program for third-through-eighth-graders to boost school proficiency test levels.

By March, the Vision group hopes to hold "reality checks" with industry experts to see which ideas are doable, followed by another round of work groups to whittle down goals into something that can be presented to politicians and government.

"That's one of the things people don't get -- they say, 'Oh, 1,800 ideas, how are you going to do all that?'" Vision for Staten Island executive director Adena Long said. "There are certain things that are going to flow to the top."

--- *Contributor Phil Helsel*

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