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A plan by youth, for our youth

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The dialogue initiated at last weeks Workforce Development Board's Youth Forum between policymakers and youth was a great first step, however we must continue on the right track. If we do not proceed strategically, we could potentially derail a needed process for developing a comprehensive youth master plan with our young people.

Durham cannot afford to continue the lack of citizen and youth engagement in policy development and decision-making. Josh Parker was right in saying that Durham needs a comprehensive youth master plan; however, attempting to create a master plan for youth rather than provide an opportunity to allow young people to develop a master plan will surely result in failure.

We cannot combat boredom and unmet needs by having discussions about and around young people rather than an action-oriented dialogue with our young people. In an atmosphere of trust and respect, youth are capable of identifying their own needs and transforming needs into policy.

Youth know first hand the resources required to be productive students and citizens. To ensure the progressive development of young people here in Durham, adequate and sufficient resources must be provided based on the recommendations of our young people to safeguard their readiness and successful merge into mainstream society.

We cannot continue to offer and support initiatives and services that do not include youth in the planning and strategy process. As gangs continue to form and service our youth, we must position the resources of our community for sustainable competitive advantage over the ills catering to our young people.

If we continue to shift our attention from the real problems decaying our communities, we will face the long-term consequences. Taking the wrong approach to developing a comprehensive youth master plan without young people will continue the cycle of failed policy in Durham.

In order for young people to truly experience social justice, we must create a society in which young people are full citizens, empowered to contribute ideas and make decisions. A collective environment will ensure

innovative and diverse approaches to the issues that continue to be problematic for our young people, local government and the Durham community at-large.

As the people of Durham proceed to develop a comprehensive youth master plan, it is critical that youth participation is present at every stage of the planning process: consultation, formulation, design, implementation and evaluation in addition to broad-based community support. By engaging our young people we ensure that the needs and interests of youth are addressed effectively in programs that service youth.

By involving our young people in the planning process, those responsible for programs and services can direct available resources toward finding more successful approaches to issues confronting youth.

All young people should be enabled to participate in the development process without any form of social exclusion. Youth must be allowed to participate in the decisions made today about the resources of tomorrow.

The next step in this delicate process is incorporating the Board of County Commissioners and the Durham Public Schools Board of Education into the Durham Youth Council established by the Durham City Council. The youth council serves to foster a more formal role for youth and their voices in local decision-making to develop effective strategies for the issues plaguing our young people through a representative council.

Actively including youth on policy issues affecting them will broaden the scope of youth leadership in city, county and educational affairs; promote public awareness of the strengths and abilities of youth and create a sense of community ownership for youth.

The success and failure of our future generation lies on the foundation of how we collectively work with youth to make a better tomorrow out of the resources of today.

The community at large must engage young people in constructive dialogue to create long lasting policies for the overall betterment of Durham.

We fail our youth by not recognizing and valuing their involvement and readiness to pose solutions to the problems they face. We must commit to youth engagement and participation in the development of a comprehensive youth master plan and then market the plan to the private sector. We all have a role in supporting our youth.

DeWarren K. Langley is a junior at Hampton University in Virginia. He hopes to be mayor of Durham some day.

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