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HOT

City officials get feedback from North End businesses

Star staff report

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Rick Sawyer, right, owner of Winchester's Costa Oil franchise at 709 N. Loudoun St., meets last week with city officials including Winchester Sheriff's Office community liaison Elyus Wallace, from left, City Council member Emily Windle, North End advocate Bubbie Headley, City Manager John Piper and Winchester Zoning Administrator Alfredo Gutierrez-Velasquez.

Courtesy of Bubbie Headley

City officials took a walking tour of Winchester's North End last week to meet with business owners and hear about some of the issues they face every day.

City Manager John Piper, Ward 2 City Council member Emily Windle, Winchester Sheriff's Office community liaison Elyus Wallace and Winchester Zoning Administrator Alfredo Gutierrez-Velasquez took part in the Thursday evening tour organized by North End advocate Bubbie Headley.

Despite the 100-degree heat, the delegation made stops at Costa Oil at 709 N. Loudoun St., Dale's Grocery at 702 N. Cameron St., El Oasis Grill and Bar at 821 N. Loudoun St., Madame Mocha at 811-A N. Loudoun St. and Botas Leon Guanajuato at 807 N. Loudoun St.

According to a media release issued by the delegation, North End business owners voiced many of the same concerns, chief among them a desire for a stronger, more consistent police presence in the area. Several owners recalled an era of community policing in the North End when officers regularly stopped by local businesses, building relationships with merchants and becoming familiar faces in the neighborhood. Business owners said that visibility not only helped deter crime but also fostered trust and communication between law enforcement and the community.

The desire for increased police/community engagement comes as many North End businesses are reporting operational and loss challenges related to theft and homelessness, the release states.

Business owners also discussed opportunities to improve the appearance and safety of the North Loudoun Street corridor. Because many operate in leased storefronts, the release states, they expressed hope that property owners would partner with tenants on façade improvements, lighting and other investments that could create a safer and more welcoming environment for customers.

According to the release, the business owners share a common vision of making Winchester's North End a neighborhood where residents and visitors alike feel welcome to shop, dine and invest.

The city officials who participated in Thursday's walking tour hope to continue building community partnerships by connecting residents, businesses and the local government in meaningful ways that lead to lasting improvements, including formalizing a North End business committee similar to the Friends of Old Town nonprofit that promotes Old Town Winchester.

Community members interested in bringing positive changes to the North Loudoun Street corridor are invited to attend the next North End Neighborhood Watch meeting at 6 p.m. Thursday at the former Douglas School, 598 N. Kent St., in Winchester.

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