



2017 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs)

Committee Meeting

Wednesday, April 26, 2017

3:00 PM at WPCOG Offices

Committee Members Present: Tommy Luckadoo (Chair), Nancy Taylor (Vice-Chair), Rocky Brooks, Elle Engstrom, Zack King, Gary Herman, Stacey Rash, Crissy Thomas, Malla Vue

Committee Members Absent: Lisa Miller, Sara Black, Jeremy Ku, Lindsay Keisler, Christopher Todd, Trish Johnson

Staff Present: Anthony Starr, Dee Blackwell, Sherry Long, Taylor Dellinger, Wendy Johnson, Jason Toney, Duncan Cavanaugh, Amanda Wallace

I. **Call To Order**

Tommy Luckadoo, CEDS Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:02.

II. **Welcome and Introductions**

Mr. Luckadoo welcomed everyone present.

III. **Approval of April 5, 2017 CEDS Committee Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Luckadoo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the April 5, 2017 CEDS Committee Meeting. A motion was offered by Mr. King and seconded by Ms. Taylor. The minutes were unanimously approved.

IV. **Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board Initiatives**

Wendy Johnson, Workforce Development Director, explained the structure that is required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Ms. Johnson stated that the Western Piedmont Jobs Training Consortium is a formal agreement among the chief elected officials (the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Policy Board) as representatives of their units of general local government. The Workforce Development Board/Chief Elected Official (CEO) Agreement is a formal agreement between the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board and the Chief Elected Official of the Western Piedmont Jobs Training Consortium (also serves as Chief Elected Official of WPCOG). The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WPWDB)/Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) Contract is a formal administrative agreement between the Policy Board of the WPCOG and the WPWDB. Both entities represent the taxpayers, who are in essence the system's owners.

Ms. Johnson explained that the Workforce Development Board is a group of community leaders appointed by local elected officials and charged with planning and oversight responsibilities for

workforce programs and services in their area. In North Carolina, 23 local boards are responsible for developing local plans for the use of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds, oversight of the local One Stop service delivery system, and coordinating activities with economic development entities and employers in their local areas.

The board is responsible for ensuring the funds allocated to the WIOA workforce area are used efficiently and effectively to achieve the intended results. Each board has a responsibility to manage the funds it receives. Annually before July 1, the board develops and approves the workforce funds budget, covering the operation of that fiscal year. In overseeing these funds, the board, consistent with their strategic plan, oversight, and evaluation, uses competitive procurement to determine the best methods for disbursing funds for workforce employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth (ages 16-24).

WIOA federal funding is sent to the state for disbursement. The State allocates funding to the local boards from the Division of Workforce Solutions. The Local Workforce Boards receive allocations for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Services. Service providers (determined through competitive procurement) use WIOA funds to deliver program services as proposed to meet the Department of Labor performance measures.

The purpose of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board is to be at the center of community and regional leadership to identify workforce challenges and to be the convener of the conversation to resolve the challenges. The Board is also the champion for workforce development, used to work in a collaborative partnership with key stakeholders, (especially economic development and education), to bring resources to bear on resolving the challenges, and to act as the accountability agent to ensure the work is completed.

The 2016 Strategic Plan consisted of three subcommittees: Talent Pipeline - Industrial Maintenance, Performance Measures - Dashboard; Center Management Report Outs, and Advocacy & Communication - Board Work, Branding, and Outreach. Through social media, the WPWDB can see how many people read and/or engage in their posts each week.

Ms. Johnson stated that the WPWDB website (www.westernpiedmontworks.org) was designed to maintain accountability, provide information, share recruitment, and labor market resources. The two main supporters for board initiatives include the Economics Indicator Newsletter (produced quarterly) and the Industry Growth Analysis (completed every 4-5 years). Other initiatives include Community Issues Forums (workforce, education, energy, healthcare, etc.) and Business Leadership Summits (Allied Health, Future Workforces Alliance).

Some challenges the board faces includes an interest gap, decreased labor force, and the low starting and experienced wages. Annual gross median wages in the four county region range from \$27,633 in Alexander County to \$31,242 in Catawba County. In 2015, Caldwell and Burke County annual gross median wages were \$29,047 and \$30,351, respectively.

V. **Presentation: CEDS Stakeholder Interview Results**

Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst, presented the CEDS Stakeholder Interview Results to committee members.

Mr. Dellinger stated that public input is required as part of the CEDS process. The committee presented the same 8 questions to a mix of 30 individuals and 3 group interviews. The 30 individual interviews consisted of 10 from the private sector, 8 elected officials, 4 in education, 4 EDCs, 2 Chambers of Commerce, and 2 from community groups. The groups interviewed were the Hickory Young Professionals/Greater Hickory Jaycees, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, and the Regional Aging Advisory Committee/Senior Tar Heel Legislators.

The following responses were mentioned during the presentation from the 30 individual interviews.

Question One asked- "What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?" The top response was a tie between geographic location and people/workforce, with 23.3% (7 votes) each. Natural resources was a close second with 20.0% (6 votes). Education and quality of life each received 3 votes (10.0%). Other topics mentioned were airports, downtowns, economic development, vacant buildings, and the Manufacturing Solutions Center.

Question Two asked- "What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier?)" The topic mentioned most was workforce readiness, with 26.7% (8 people). Job mix/job wages and young people leaving the region each were discussed 7 times (23.3%). Perception of the region was talked about 6 times (20%), and infrastructure and lack of communication about the region were mentioned 5 times each (16.7%). The availability of shell buildings/business parks, education, housing, and vacant buildings were each talked about 4 times, while State policies were brought up 3 times. Lack of amenities, lack of vision, over reliance on the manufacturing industry, and the region being slow to react to problems were each mentioned twice.

Question Three asked-"Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you to live and work here?" A total of 57% (17 people) said they were not originally from the region, while 43% (13 people) stated that they were originally from the region. The 17 people who were not from this region gave various reasons on how they ended up here. Most were for job opportunities. One stated that NC was a progressive southern state. Several chose NC for the climate and to be close to the mountains, and one chose this particular area because the morals and beliefs of this county match their families.

Question Four asked-"What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?" The top response was attracting high paying/diversified jobs to the region with 26.7% (8 people). New industries/industrial parks and improving communication about the advantages of the region were each mentioned 7 times (23.7%). Investing in education/workforce was discussed 6 times (20%) and new housing development was talked about 5 times (16.7%). Other topics that came

up during the interviews included agriculture, airport, attracting small businesses to the region, community colleges, healthcare, local based philanthropy, marketing natural resources, professional sports, research facilities, retaining young people, technology, and tourism.

Question Five asked-"How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?" About 43.3% (13 people) said that improving community college education/training opportunities would improve the workforce. Improving quality of K-8/high school education and improving work ethic/soft skills were each mentioned 7 times (23.3%). Showing students that a 4-year degree is not needed to get a good job was talked about 5 times (16.7%). Creating appealing workplace atmospheres and pursuing K-64 Initiative were each discussed 3 times.

Part one of Question Six asked-"Where do you think our leadership will come from?" About 43% (13 people) thought it would come from young professionals. Ten people (34%) believed it would be a mix of people inside and outside the region, 3 people (10%) said it will be from outside the region, and one person (3%) stated it would be from inside the region. About 10% (3 people) responded that they are not sure.

Part two of Question Six asked-"Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?" Half of the respondents (15 people) did not answer the question. 7 people (23%) said their children have not stayed or will not stay in the region, 5 people (17%) stated that their children have stayed or will stay in the region, and 3 people (10%) told WPCOG staff that they weren't sure if their children will stay.

Question Seven asked-"If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?" Five people mentioned improving the education system, 4 people said improvements to quality of life, and 3 people mentioned changing the perception of the region. Also discussed were affordable/more housing choices, improving communication, improving political leadership, increasing enthusiasm about our community, ready to move-into industrial buildings, and reducing poverty/higher incomes.

Question Eight asked-"Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?" Six people (20%) gave more comments about the regional economy. One quote stated, "I think we are on the brink of something really big happening here. If we could measure it over the next 10 years, it would be huge." Three people (10%) discussed housing, while two people (6.7%) mentioned natural resources.

The same 8 interview questions were also asked to the Regional Aging Advisory Committee and Senior Tar Heel Legislators, where 21 people attended.

When asked "What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?", the responses were local community colleges, church facilities, libraries, senior centers, quality affordable real estate, transportation, and the Council of Governments.

Question Two asked-"What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region?" The top responses were money/funding, bureaucracy, jobs (with pay that brings people back to the community after they leave), lack of a trained workforce, lack of qualified workers, and attitude (seeing more people that do not want to better themselves - complacency).

Of the 21 in attendance, 12 people (57%) were not originally from this region, while 9 people (43%) were originally from the region. Those not from the region moved here for employment, grandchildren, marriage, affordable real estate, and farmland for horses.

When asked what economic opportunities the region is missing, responses mentioned included tourism, natural resources, employment, and technological opportunities.

Some ideas for improving our workforce stated during the group interview were utilizing community colleges and high schools in the region and working with middle school students to broaden their horizon at a younger age to get them eager about the things they can do. Other ideas included providing incentives to stay in the area and starting education when children are young to show them that hard work pays off.

Question Six asked-"where the group thinks our leadership will come from, and if they think their children or grandchildren will stay here for a career after high school and college." This group felt that future leadership would come from those who have stayed in the region. Twelve people (57%) have children and/or grandchildren who have left the region. About 29% (6 people) did not answer the question, and 3 people (14%) have children and/or grandchildren who have stayed in the region.

When asked what they would change about the community if they had a magic wand, responses mentioned included: welcome/well received atmosphere for all newcomers, plenty of employment for everyone, equal opportunity of everyone (you get jobs based on your qualifications and not for who you know). Other responses discussed were improved healthcare for seniors, large centrally located Senior Center in Catawba County, and the addition of a "Cheesecake Factory" restaurant in the region.

The group was then asked-"Is there was anything they wanted to add that had not been covered?" Attendees felt that county government needs to be more open to change and new programming or opportunities were needed to make the region a great place to age. They also believed that more attention needs to be placed on how to attract the younger generations to the region, and not so much attention on those who are already here and aging.

The next group interviewed was the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, where 26 people attended. This group was asked the same 8 questions.

They felt the biggest assets in the region that are not being utilized to its full potential were recreation, workforce, people with some college, level of education needs to be utilized, high

percentage of manufacturing jobs underutilized, manufacturing, community college, higher education opportunities, vacant buildings, diversity in all counties, and young people.

Barriers for economic progress as a four-county region were drug use, lack of mental health physicians, access to healthcare, branding and marketing of the region to attract 25+ age group, entertainment for 25+ age group, the need to get back to basics in the education system, and fixing the rail systems in the area.

Fifteen (15) people (58%) in this group interview were not originally from this area, while 11 (42%) were from the area. Those not from the region moved here for family, employment, relationships, change of environment, and because it is a good place to raise a family.

This group responded that the economic opportunities we are missing in this region include recreation, entertainment, construction and housing, marketing/branding, employers finding skilled workers, people not employable due to failing drug tests/background checks, and attracted young people to the region.

Question Five asked how to fundamentally improve our workforce. Responses mentioned by the group included attracting young people to the community (because population is going down), entrepreneurship, obtaining more resources to improve drug problems, substance abuse/mental health issues, reaching out to younger people sooner, children need to be made aware of how to earn a living, gatekeeper (a lot of manufacturing jobs available), and furniture industry (children need to see).

This group stated that future leadership would come either from the outside, or from recruiting people back who had left the region. About 19% (5 people) stated that their children and/or grandchildren left the region, 4 (12%) were split with some staying and some leaving, and 1 person (4%) have children and/or grandchildren who stayed. A total of 17 people (65%) did not answer the question.

When asked if they had a magic wand and could change anything about the community, responses said by attendees were to change LR Blvd, public transportation, the community taking more risks, making more unity for prosperity, common goals, inclusion, how people perceive manufacturing, fill vacant buildings, more energy like Lake Norman, and having a pride in community.

This group would like to see more young people involved with the decision making process with employers and community. They stated that diversity has come, and that growth in areas makes us a more diverse community. They also felt that community colleges in the area are being underutilized.

The final group interviewed was the Hickory Young Professionals and Greater Hickory Jaycees. More than 70 people attended, and there was a mix of individual and small group responses.

Question One asked-"What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?" Top responses were Lake Hickory, geographical location (proximity to Winston, Asheville, Boone, and Charlotte), Lenoir-Rhyne University, empty commercial buildings, real estate, downtown square, and climate. Some other things mentioned included the arts community, Google, natural resources, CVCC, professional groups, interchanges off of I-40, skilled manufacturing workforce, social networks (churches), leveraging big business partnerships, and Partnership University City Commission.

Question Two asked-"What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier?)" Tied with 18.6% (8 mentions each) were young people moving away for college and not returning, lack of nightlife entertainment, and a drug problem. About 16.3% (7 mentions) of attendees felt the biggest barrier was the collaboration amongst counties versus competition. Lack of growth was next with 14% (6 mentions). Other topics included no public access to Lake Hickory, skills gap, lack of promoting parks and current amenities, no student discounts, LRU is too small (needs more Bachelor Degree options), lack of newer housing, lack of downtown living spaces, parking, and lack of education levels.

Out of the 43 responses collected during the group interview, 25 people (58%) were not originally from the region, while 18 people (42%) were from the region. Those not from the region moved for jobs, family, college, a good place to raise kids, ability to own land, cost of living, and easy traffic/commute.

Question Four asked what economic opportunities the region is missing. Eight responses (18.6%) said downtown/arboretum style living, 16.3% (7 responses) said entertainment, while 11.6% (5 responses each) said advertising outdoor recreational activities, more outdoor entertainment (trails, watersports, vineyards), and family friendly activities. About 9.3% (4 responses) stated the region was not utilizing its natural resources. Other responses included more diversified economy, lake related business opportunities, market location (proximity to bigger cities), downtown festivals, shopping, beer related opportunities, employment opportunities for young professionals, and revamping old buildings.

When asked how to fundamentally improve our workforce, 7 responses (16.3%) said to advertise our location. Four responses (9.3%) each were given for the following ideas: emphasizing training in specialized skills, the selling/perspective of skills labor, re-educate people who want to work and change careers, affordable local college, and flexible work schedules. Other responses said during the group interview included promoting trade school and community college, tax incentives, education (K-64 view), start younger (getting excited about growth/Chambers), learn a trade in high school, Pre-K education, solve/correct drug problem, and incentive innovation.

Twelve (12) respondents felt the region's future leadership will come from current young professionals, while 7 responses said they feel leadership will come from educated youth, 2 believed it would come from progressive employers who support economic development, 2 said it would come from outside the region, and 2 felt leadership would come from inside the region.

When asked if they feel their children and/or grandchildren will stay in the region after high school and college, 42% did not answer the question, 30% said they felt their children will not stay, 12% are not sure if their children would stay, 9% said they felt they will stay in the region, and 7% are planning to move, so they won't be here long enough to find out.

The group was then asked what they would change about the community if they had a magic wand. A total of 25.6% would change downtown redevelopment/nightlife, 18.6% would change the diversity in food, thought, and mindset, 7% each would change exits 125/126 (cleanup), organized activities/events, and support small local businesses. Other responses included less poverty/homelessness, better education, improving Lenoir Rhyne Blvd, get drugs out, newcomers group, walkability, reduce the number of mattress outlets, free Wi-Fi for all, and create new land development.

When asked for comments of observations that had not already been covered, the following ideas were discussed: job website listing all local jobs to make it easier to find a job (multiple websites, even free ones, make the search daunting), if we are wanting it to still feel small town, it will not soon, promoting current activities. One quote stated, "Invest in the future. Don't wait for them to come here. If you build it, they will come."

VI. Discussion of CEDS Stakeholder Interview Results

Mr. Starr asked the committee what stood out from the stakeholder interviews. Mr. Starr wrote responses on a large board, and the committee was told that when the process was completed, they would receive five stickers to vote for the five responses that stood out most. Below are the responses receiving during the meeting (in the order given by committee members during the discussion), along with the number of votes received from committee members.

- Conflict between 2-yr vs 4-yr education path - which is better? **(5 votes)**
- Not a single comment where they "trashed" the region
- Involvement of young adults (i.e. Greenville, SC) **(7 votes)**
- How many thought education was the cure to the solution
- Desire for recreational/entertainment opportunities **(6 votes)**
- That majority of current/future leaders are not from here
- Collaborative effort of the region **(2 votes)**
- Not enough shell buildings as businesses look at our area **(8 votes)**
- Giving people a purpose to return or stay in region excluding work **(3 votes)**
- Making this a great place to age
- Lack of concern about public safety
- That many said the young people would be our future leaders but the young people are leaving **(6 votes)**
- Diversity growing and inclusion **(4 votes)**
- Need for early childhood education **(1 vote)**
- Need to promote our regions/assets **(3 votes)**
- Misperception of what education is needed for the available jobs

VII. Identification of CEDS Regional Issues

Mr. Starr told committee members that most of the issues of the region had been presented to them over the last three meetings. He asked to hear the issues that committee members feel are most important and need to be addressed regionally. Again, responses were written on a large board and committee members were given five stickers for voting. Below are the responses collected and the number of votes given by committee members.

- Keeping our young people **(7 votes)**
- Improve our diversity and inclusion efforts **(3 votes)**
- Need for new housing options
- Resolving education attainment issue/goals (certificate, 2-yr, 4-yr) **(7 votes)**
- Devise short and long term plans to increase number of shell buildings **(6 votes)**
- Making our area a destination **(1 vote)**
- Attracting/retaining employers **(4 votes)**
- Talking to young people about what they want in general **(7 votes)**
- Evaluating quality of life/livability issues to see what we need to improve **(2 votes)**
- Marketing of our region **(8 votes)**
- We need to talk positively about our community
- Develop a plan to increase wages for our area

VIII. CEDS Schedule Going Forward

Mr. Dellinger stated that the next CEDS meeting will occur next Wednesday, May 3, to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the region (SWOT Analysis) and to discuss the region's resiliency. At future meetings, committee members will work on the CEDS goals and objectives, CEDS performance measures and Mr. Marshall, Transportation Director, will talk about the transportation initiatives in the region.

IX. Next CEDS Committee Meeting on Wednesday, May 3 at 3:00 P.M. @ WPCOG Offices in Long View

X. Other Business - There was no other business at this time.

XI. **Adjournment** - As there was no other business, Mr. Luckadoo adjourned the meeting at 5:01 PM.