



2017 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Committee Meeting

Wednesday, April 5, 2017

3:00 PM at WPCOG Offices

Committee Members Present: Tommy Luckadoo (Chair), Nancy Taylor (Vice-Chair), Sara Black, Rocky Brooks, Elle Engstrom, Trish Johnson, Lindsay Keisler (via phone), Zack King, Jeremy Ku, Lisa Miller, Christopher Todd, Malla Vue

Committee Members Absent: Gary Herman, Stacey Rash, Crissy Thomas

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

I. **Call To Order**

Tommy Luckadoo, CEDS Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:00.

II. **Welcome and Introductions**

Mr. Luckadoo welcomed everyone present. Committee members and WPCOG staff then introduced themselves.

III. **Approval of February 1, 2017 CEDS Committee Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Luckadoo asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 1, 2017 CEDS Committee Meeting. A motion was offered by Mr. Todd and seconded by Mr. Brooks. The minutes were unanimously approved.

IV. **Continue Discussion of CEDS Regional Profile**

Ms. Taylor stated that since only the millennials of the group had time to speak at the last meeting, she wanted to give the others a chance to add their opinions. Ms. Taylor asked those 40 and over to tell their thoughts on the regional profile discussed at the February meeting.

Some comments included:

- Went to college at Lenoir Rhyne, which was difficult to conceive in her family since they were all factory workers.
- Being in a small town, it is easier to see a result to your efforts, unlike living or working in a larger city. Change is more noticeable in a small town.
- Loves the idea of raising a family here - lots to do, but still has the "small town feel."
- Came to this area in 40's and it was a shock because there weren't any "arts" or as many restaurants, but evolved as time went on.
- You can move things faster in a small town. You can dig in and make a difference you can see.

- Felt "connected" to the area through church, children's activities (sports, summer camps, science center).
- As someone who cares about where you live, get involved. Find progress. Make progress yourself.
- You can drive or fly to get to arts. You cannot fly or drive every day to make a difference in a community.
- Unlike living in other areas, socialization happens in the home in this area.
- Starting a business is hard no matter where it happens, but in a small town where you are well known, it makes getting established easier. People know your name and your brand more quickly.
- When recruiting employees for the area, people who already have a family are more likely to come to this area and stay.
- If you don't go to a well-known church and/or you aren't a native of the area, you are often shunned. This area needs to work on embracing all cultures and people.
- We have a symphony, minor league baseball team, decent shopping - the area is small enough that it isn't threatening and still has the small town vibe.

V. **Presentation: CEDS Survey Results**

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

Mr. Dellinger stated that 982 people completed the 32-question survey, compared to 244 during the 2012 CEDS process.

A little less than half of the responses were from Burke County, almost a quarter were from Catawba County, about 12% from Alexander County, and close to 11% were from Caldwell County. When asked which county they worked in, 48% said Burke, 28% in Catawba, 9.4% in Alexander, and 5.3% in Caldwell. About 5.8% were retired or unemployed, while 3.7% worked outside the region. A little over a quarter of respondents were under 40 years old, 29% were between 40-49, 36% were between 50-64, and 9% were 65 and older. Possibly due to because a lot of school employees taking the survey, 65% were female and 35% were male.

Almost 93% of respondents were white, 2% were mixed-race, 3.5% were African-American, 1.3% were Asian-American, and 0.6% were American Indian or Alaska Native. 98.9% were not Hispanic or Latino, while 1.1% were Hispanic or Latino.

A total of 42% of respondents worked in a public school system/community college/university, 20% worked in the government sector, 19% worked in a private industry/business sector, 11% worked for a non-profit, and 5% were retired. Less than 2% were students or those who were unemployed or seeking employment.

The highest educational attainment levels were those with a Master's degree or higher, with 38%, followed by Bachelor's degree next with 36%. About 11% had an Associate's degree, 11% had some college, but no degree and 3% had a high school degree or equivalent.

Looking at individual earnings, had the highest percentage came from persons making \$25,000-\$49,999 a year, with almost 38%, while 35% had earnings between \$50,000 and \$99,999. Less than 7% had earnings ~~were~~ less than \$25,000, while almost 13% made more than \$100,000 a year, (8% of people preferred not to answer the question). Mr. Dellinger stated this was typical for this type of survey.

When asked what economic opportunities exist or are developing in your county, the top five assets listed were education/training, healthcare, furniture, banking/finance, and agriculture. Mr. Dellinger stated that ~~the~~ agriculture was surprising since it was not often mentioned by survey takers.

When asked how your county can use its best resources to boost the economy, the top five topics mentioned were businesses, jobs, education, industry, and tourism. Mr. Dellinger noted the two varying opinions on education: some wanted more vocational training, while some wanted a larger 4-year state university.

When asked what adaptive capabilities people saw for the county's economy, the top five response categories were vacant buildings, manufacturing, furniture, existing spaces, and new businesses. One notable quote was, "The schools MUST take the initiative to bring back vocational skills. Computers are great, but they cannot come to your home and repair plumbing or electrical issues."

The highest scoring existing assets were community colleges within a reasonable proximity, adequate fresh water resources, adequate cellular phone service, adequate road/highway system, and adequate local healthcare facilities. The lowest scoring existing assets were Manufacturing Solutions Center, adequate public transportation, after work social opportunities, adequate entertainment venues, and adequate programs for the aging population.

Respondents were then asked if their county currently markets its assets. Nearly 34% said yes, 18% said no, and 48% said "I don't know." For those who answered yes, they were then asked to give some examples of their county's marketing efforts. The top five response categories were general marketing, festivals and events, social media, Chamber of Commerce, and signage. One respondent mentioned wayfinding systems. Mr. Todd suggested using popular hashtags, like #nofilterneeded, so people from around the world could see your post when using this popular tag.

When asked if the community they lived in has a specific brand it uses for promotion of the area, 25% said yes, 25% said no, and 50% said, "I don't know." Mr. Dellinger stated that in this case, "I don't know" most likely means no - meaning 75% do not know the brand of their community.

High-speed internet access questions revealed that 81% of respondents have adequate high-speed internet at home, while 19% do not. At work, 88% have adequate high-speed internet,

6% do not, and 6% do not work. In public spaces, 38% have adequate high-speed internet, 35% do not, and 26% answered "I don't know."

A little over 50% of respondents believe their community just "adequately" supports affordable housing choices, while 16% stated housing choices were good and 29% stated that choices were little/poor. Only 3% felt that there were no affordable housing choices and 1.9% thought choices were excellent.

When asked if there were opportunities for minorities and low wealth individuals to engage in community planning, 52% thought opportunities were little/poor, 28% thought opportunities were only "adequate," 8% said good, 3% said excellent, and 8% said there were no opportunities.

About 38% of survey respondents felt that their community invests adequately in healthy, safe, and walkable communities. Close to 34% thought there was little investment, 19% said there is a good investment, 5% stated that investment is excellent, while 4% believed there is no investment.

The percentage of respondents who said their municipalities promote the restoration of their downtown areas equaled 57%, while 16% said they did not promote, and 26% answered "I don't know." Of those who answered yes to this question, they were then asked which town and to give examples. The top five municipalities mentioned were Morganton, Hickory, Valdese, Lenoir, and Newton.

The next question of the survey asked if their community has the resources to develop a skilled workforce. Survey results show that 59% felt that their community did, 18% felt their community did not, and 23% responded with "I don't know." When asked how well their community does working to maintain a skilled workforce, 43% felt their community did an "adequate" job, 35% said little/poor job, around 17% felt their community did a good job, 2% said excellent job, and around 3% said their community did nothing towards maintaining a skilled workforce.

Participants were then asked if they believed there are gaps in educational resources. About 47% of survey respondents said yes, 33% said no, and 20% answered "I don't know." Of those who thought there was a gap in educational resources, they were then asked to specify the gaps. The top five response categories were in gaps in high school (35%), community college (30%), 4-year university (24%), public schools (24%), and technical training (5%).

When asked their local government encourages small businesses to locate and grow in the community, 55% of respondents said yes, 17% said no, and 28% responded with "I don't know."

Next, participants were asked if they believed their community has gaps in its healthcare services. About 40% of survey takers said yes, 36% said no, and 24% answered "I don't know." Of those who answered yes to this question, they were asked to specify the gaps. The top five

response categories were gaps in hospitals, services, insurance, doctors, and specialists. The lack of a hospital in Alexander County was brought up frequently, as well as unaffordable healthcare and the perception of poor quality.

Finally, when asked if there were any other thoughts about the region's economic competitiveness, the top five response categories were jobs (38% of survey respondents), businesses (36%), miscellaneous opportunities (29%), retaining young people (9%), and entertainment (9%).

The full survey results are available for download in CEDS 2017 section of the WPCOG website.

VI. Discussion of CEDS Survey Results

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

- Need for different education opportunities
- Surprised that the Broughton re-use project was not mentioned more
- 4-year college options lacking and their friends left and not coming back (**3 votes**)
- Mixed use spaces/recreation spaces (**3 votes**)
- Internships/apprentice but did not hear about businesses that have a role in this
- Conflict between pushing internships vs 4 year college (**1 vote**)
- Mistaken perception that we don't have a lot of internships in schools
- Living situation/lack of apartments (must rely on verbal communication to find available units) (**6 votes**)
- Lack of community brand awareness
- We are a region but we tend to look at issues on a community basis
- Inspired by desire for entertainment
- People are "down" on what they are not "up" on – awareness – the public does not know what is going on
- How do we market to people outside the community? (**2 votes**)
- Housing – lack of good housing choices – lack quality affordable apartments
- Q14 – the high % thought that there were poor opportunities for minorities to engage in community planning – outreach needed
- Recruiting/retaining college educated positions that keep young people (**3 votes**)
- Comments about incubators – links between industries (agriculture to restaurants)
- Loss of medical treatment business to places outside our region
- Perceived lack of professional jobs (**2 votes**)
- Need for breweries, farm to table
- Need for middle income housing (**3 votes**)
- Repurpose of vacant buildings is needed, especially along key corridors
- Perception that we have ability to develop the workforce but not maintain it (**2 votes**)
- Need for internal marketing

- Lack of websites/social media by businesses (**1 vote**)
- Surprised that the higher educated respondents did not know the brand of their community
- Maximize opportunities to draw people to the area with recent publicity (Our State magazine)
- Q3 – Economic opportunities in Agricultural industry
- Impact immigration changes might have on our Agricultural development
- Concern that minorities don't feel a part of community decisions (**7 votes**)

VII. **CEDS Schedule Going Forward and Request for Additional CEDS Committee Meetings**

Mr. Dellinger stated that additional meetings are needed in order to complete the CEDS process on schedule. Mr. Dellinger proposed additional meetings on Wednesday, April 26th, and Wednesday, May 31st, both at 3:00 P.M. at the WPCOG offices in Long View. A motion to approve the additional meetings on the proposed dates was made by Mr. Vue and seconded by Ms. Johnson. The motion was unanimously approved.

VIII. **Next CEDS Committee Meeting on Wednesday, April 26 at 3:00 P.M. at WPCOG Offices in Long View.**

IX. **Other Business**

There was no other business at this time.

- X. **Adjournment** - As there was no other business, Mr. Luckadoo adjourned the meeting at 5:00 PM.