

Economic Development Focus Group – February 10, 2011

1. Welcome

Mayor Sonny Spossey welcomed everyone to the Economic Development Focus Group as part of the overall Washington and East Washington Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan. Mayor Spossey introduced Amy Wiles, AICP, Lead Senior Planner with Mackin Engineering Company, the project's consultant. Amy provided a brief overview on the comprehensive plan and introduced Steve McKnight and Dr. Jerry Paytas with Fourth Economy, the subconsultants retained to complete the economic development portion of the plan.

2. Presentation

Steve distributed handouts that provided a summary of economic development statistics for the City and Borough. He spoke briefly about the role of economic development in a healthy and vibrant community. Next, he introduced David Yeager, Radnor Property Group, who gave a presentation, which highlighted three examples of successful partnerships between universities/colleges and the towns in which they are located.

- Bucknell University and Lewisburg, PA
- Kings College and Wilkes Barre, PA
- Franklin and Marshall College and Lancaster, PA

3. Questions and Answers

A question/answer session was conducted immediately following the presentation.

- Was a study done on the success of the Barnes & Noble bookstore (Bucknell)?
 - Yes – it was projected to meet current revenues but since, has exceeded expectations.
- As outsiders, what do the Consultants see as assets?
 - W&J's proximity to downtown (only one block separates)
 - Good infrastructure
 - The three growing industries are health care, energy and education – the region is home to a hospital, college, and has potential to take advantage of the Marcellus shale drilling industry as company headquarters
- Has a TIF been used in the City, as it is a powerful incentive to developers?
 - Yes, the City has used TIF as a tool for redevelopment.
- Were any of the towns in the examples provided also home to jails?
 - No. While the Lewisburg Penitentiary is nearby, it is not located within the Borough.
- There is a different situation here in Washington than all of the successful examples given. The City has the county jail, low income housing, the City Mission, which all can be deterrents to economic development.
 - Yes, but as the County Seat, this brings many workers into the City which need to be capitalized upon more fully (i.e. offer housing choices, child care facilities, etc.)
 - Can the Courthouse be a hub?
- With the current state budget situation, what is the likelihood of funding being available?
 - Need to focus on tax credits that are not going away (i.e. Historic Federal Tax Credits and New Market Tax Credits)
- Need to capitalize on assets such as Washington Park, City is the County Seat, Pony League

Baseball, Wild Things, History, etc.

- Need the leadership to build public/private partnerships that allow buildings to remain on the tax rolls.
- The City and W&J completed a vision, the Blueprint for Collaboration, a few years ago but nothing has been implemented. Is there a commitment to implementation now and how do you get there?
 - The plan will identify projects that meet the needs of the City, Borough, W&J, and the Hospital and revisit previous concepts to explore why they have not been implemented (i.e. bookstore).
 - W&J has a need for housing that meets its safety and code requirements – the City has available upperstory housing that could be rehabilitated to meet these requirements and leased to students as taxable property
 - There is a plan being done by JMT that identifies an off campus recreation center
- Can the local share account funding (casino money) be used to fund programs to rehabilitate housing?
 - Yes, this could be done. An idea is to attach requirements to the funding whereby homeowners have to meet certain standards (such as maintenance, historic characteristics, etc.)
- What is the cost of living or working in the City as compared to other areas?
 - Unknown now, but will explore this as part of the plan.
- Who is in charge of real estate transactions in the City?
 - There should be some type of welcome packet provided to new residents/business owners. Perhaps highlight on websites/publications new businesses (such as the new brewery).

4. Top Economic Development Priorities

Attendees were asked to identify their top one or two economic development priorities:

- Utilize the built environment more fully (parking, office space, etc.)
- Increase Housing Ownership – Too many rental units – Could Attract Commuters
- How to serve the existing customer base – Should focus there first
- Keep workers here – housing (Highland Area Elm Street)
- Small Business Incubation – An incubator is needed
- Enhance Building Facades – become more welcoming
- Public Open Space
- Downtown / W&J Development / Partnerships
- Offer Businesses for Students and Faculty
- Clean up the Blight Downtown
- Develop a Safe Passage Way from Downtown to W&J
- Use History and Heritage as an Economic Driver
- Provide Upper Story Housing – could be offered to students, healthcare professionals, city employees, faculty, etc.
 - Need to address issues of egress, elevators and sprinklers
- Farmers Market
- Washington Hotel

- Fund to take control of Blighted Buildings
- Central Hub for Marcellus Shale
- Need to Identify Pilot Projects that can be Implemented (sell the plan and show success)
- Regionalization of Services (cut down on redundancy)
- Small Business Development (loans and programs)
- Entertainment (restaurants, theater, etc.) – Afterhours
- Hospital (residency program, family / social life)
- Need a Forum to bring Economic Development together
- Attractive Gateways into the City
- Fight Perception and Market Better – Crime and Safety
- Rehab Housing to High Standards (need incentives and increased code enforcement)
- Task Force for Implementation – Keep us coming together
- Need a specific project to pilot – a building or part of a block – the Plan should call that out
- Need to further develop and promote relationships with local developers

5. Adjournment

Attendees were thanked for their participation. The consulting team will incorporate these concepts into the comprehensive plan. The meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm.

Core Area Focus Group – June 27, 2011

1. Welcome / Introduction

Brandi Rosselli, Mackin Engineering, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Meeting attendees introduced themselves and what organization they were representing.

2. Core Area

A brief background was given on the Core Area and how it was developed.

- Identified in 2009 as part of the process to begin the Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan
- Includes a mix of uses – Commercial / Retail, Office, Residential, Institutional
- Includes a mix of “districts” – part of the East Washington Historical District and the City of Washington Business Improvement District

3. Discussion Topics

Brandi described some of the assets and issues that have been gathered to date for the Core Area. Each issue was then discussed in terms of what we have heard and ways to address the issue. The discussion was then opened up for comments / feedback from the audience. The following comments were received:

- Parking (Central Business District)
 - Issue: Availability and Cost of Parking
 - City implemented 20-22 “no meter” spaces throughout the Central Business District and in the Citizens Library parking lot
 - City raised rates at meters to discourage employees from parking on the street (encourage them to use the garages) - Revenue from the garages has increased
 - City did contact Waynesburg to discuss their situation (Waynesburg has free on-street parking for 2 hours)
 - Issues with enforcement because people move their cars
 - Waynesburg relies on the money collected from parking tickets to supplement their revenue
 - Issue - Need for signage throughout the City
 - Indicating areas to park and where there is free parking
 - Issue - Need a survey of people coming into the Central Business District to determine destinations
 - Issue - Parking garages are perceived as an inconvenience
 - Located on side streets
 - Topography is an issue
 - Issue - Need to coordinate transit with the garages
 - Provide shuttles for people parking

- This would take a lot of coordination, marketing and outside funding

- Underutilized / Vacant Properties (Central Business District)
 - Issue - enforcement
 - City is involved in a number of Court cases
 - Hoping that Act 900 will help
 - Issue – Condition of existing building stock
 - A lot of the buildings in the Central Business District are older and need a lot of renovations to be brought up to code (expensive)
 - Lack of convenient parking
 - Hard to get to CBD once you get off the Interstates
 - Issue - Need more reasonably priced rentals (local realtors are having trouble finding this type of housing for clients)
 - Issue – Need to coordinate with the Marcellus shale industry (current survey being completed – Pete to send)
 - 6th Ward School and George Washington Hotel are full because they are being used by Marcellus shale gas workers for temporary housing
 - Issue – Need to create historic district in the Central Business District
 - Currently they are eligible
 - Provides access to historic tax credits for renovations
 - Issue – Need to coordinate with BID to utilize façade grants
 - Future funding could be an issue
 - No formal Design Guidelines in place

- Building Codes / Property Maintenance (Commercial and Residential Areas)
 - Issue – Available money for demolition
 - There is CDBG money, but City is tied up in litigation with a number of properties
 - Issue – Is it less costly to tear down and start over (not always the case)
 - Issue – There are a large number of property owners in the Central Business District which makes it hard to coordinate efforts
 - Issue – The City is in the process of creating a Development Council to oversee business and economic development efforts
 - Issue – Need to provide incentives for people to live in the project area
 - Work with large employers (such as the College or Hospital) to provide no interest or low interest loans to employees who want to purchase homes
 - Provide property tax deductions for property owners that live in their multi-unit properties
 - Issue – Need to strengthen Historic District regulations in Borough

- Issue – Need to create Zoning Overlays that limit the size of apartments and number of unrelated people living together
- Issue – Need to institute Community Clean Up Days
 - Focus on certain lots or properties
 - Get volunteers to help – Churches, College, other non-profits could be partners
 - Recent example – 7th Ward in the City
- Issue – City could improve properties and then place a lien on them
 - Issue – City has tried this in the past, but it is difficult to recoup the lien
- **Marketing / Promotion (Properties and Businesses)**
 - Issue – Local realtors have a hard time finding information on properties / events
 - Issue – Need to coordinate efforts within the multiple organizations in the City
 - Lawrenceville neighborhood (in the City of Pittsburgh) has a great informational newsletter
 - Issue - Need to publicize good school district (educate local realtors – school district has done this in the past)
 - Issue - Need to counteract perception of crime
 - Issue – Need to market existing websites and keep them up to date
 - Issue – Need to utilize social media
 - Issue – Need to publicize existing events
 - Whiskey Rebellion Festival, BDA summer events
- **Safe Connections (between W&J and Main Street)**
 - Issue – What do people want when they come into the CBD
 - Issue – Most businesses close by 5:00 PM
 - Solution – Pick one evening a week that multiple businesses stay open (be consistent and publicize)
 - Issue – People perceive CBD as unsafe (especially at night)
 - Issue – Need to light up storefronts (even if business is not open)
 - Issue – Need to provide a human scale streetscape
 - Issue – Need to provide “Meet and Greets” with local policeman; educational presentations by Policemen
 - Issue – Need to cater to people who have money (i.e. Marcellus shale workers)
 - Issue – Need wayfinding signage throughout project area (coordinate with PennDOT) – Once people get off the Interstate it is hard to get around

4. **Vision for the Area**

Meeting attendees were asked what their vision is for the future of the area and what they feel the City and Borough should be known as. The following comments were given:

- City has multiple assets – it is a College Town with rich history, County Seat, Hospital
 - Industry has come and gone but these things have always been here
- The past is part of the future
- Need to coordinate efforts, but be careful not to compartmentalize
- Benefits of Washington
 - Small town – people know who you are
 - Arts
 - Parks and Recreation
 - History
 - Location – once you are on the Interstate there is good access to multiple metro areas

5. **How to Stay Involved**

Brandi closed the meeting by informing the attendees of the next steps and how they can stay involved in the project:

- September 2011 Workshop – Review Draft Recommendations
- October-November 2011 – Public Comment Period
- December 2011 – Public Hearings and Plan Adoption

Economic Development Focus Group Attendees

Attendees

William McGowen
Bob Griffin
Susan Morgan
Dr. Leslie Dunn
Lynn Galluze
Pat Miliotg
Mark Logston
Patrick G. O'Brien
J. R. Shaw
Larry Maggi
Lucas Piatt
Chad Wheatley
John Swiatek
Peter Stefansky
Jeff Kotula
Dan Cautrill
Gary Korlut
Tom Schwech
Sonny Spassy
Terry L. Faust
Joe Manning
Cheryl Daniel
Ray Dami
Rich Cleveland
Tripp Kline
Matt Ukam
Tim Solobay
Carla Mast
Suzanne Taylor
Brandon Neuman
Bay Cario
Denny McMaster

Business / Organization

Redevelopment Authority
Redevelopment Authority
Redevelopment Authority
Main Street Farmers
City of Washington
Office of Rep. Brandon Neuman

First Federal Savings
Washington County Tourism and Promotion Agency
County Commissioner
Millcraft Industries
Millcraft Industries
GSP Consulting
WBDA
Washington County Chamber
City of Washington

West End Neighborhood Watch
City of Washington

City of Washington
Washington Hospital
WEWJA
City of Washington
Downtown Business Center
WBDA
State Senator 46th District

Washington Financial Bank
State Representative
Elm Street Manager
W&J College CFO

Project Team Staff

Amy Wiles
Steve McKnight
Jerry Paytas
Jonathan Glance
David Yeager

Mackin Engineering
Fourth Economy
Fourth Economy
Glance and Associates
Radnor Property Group

City of Washington & East Washington Borough Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan

Core Area Focus Group Sign-In

June 27, 2011

Name	Representing	Email	Phone #
MARIKYN A. PESNER	EAST WASHINGTON COUNCIL		
Jim Ross	WASH COUNTY HIST SOCIETY		
Jeffrey Bull	E WASH COUNCIL		
DAN PATRICK	Brewers House		
SHERYL DANIEL	GARY WILKINSON-WASHINGTON HOSPITAL		
Denny McMaster	W&S College		
Charlotte Hermon	Howard Hanna		
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G.P. Gump	City of Washington		
Diana Courtland	East Washington		
Jenny Oxford	Wash City Museum		
Kandice	WCM		
Ken McIntyre	WCM BOARD	Kenmoir@verizon.net	412 855 5972
Rob Phillips	City Washington	RACW	

