

Steering Committee Meeting #1 Summary

John XXIII Retreat Center, 407 W. McDonald Street, Hartford City • Thursday, May 6, 2010 • 6:30 P.M.

I. Introductions

This was the first steering committee meeting of the Blackford County Economic Development planning process. The planning consultants, Thayr Richey of Strategic Development Group (SDG) and Cory Whitesell of Hannum, Wagle & Cline Engineering (HWC), reviewed the planning goals.

Thayr explained that the primary role of the consultants is to serve the client. SDG and HWC will bring the committee research findings, act as objective facilitators, and serve as experts in economic development. The purpose of the planning process is to create an effective, realistic plan for economic development in Blackford County that includes short-term achievements.

II. Review of project activities and timelines

Reports and meeting notices will be posted online on the project webpage:

<http://www.sdg.us/blackfordcountyed>

Cory explained the site assessment portion of the study. It will consider where the county is currently making investments and to what extent those will pay off. The site assessment subcommittee will select two site locations to investigate in depth.

The planning process will include secondary research on demographic trends and a regional business cluster analysis. It will include community input through focus groups, key informant interviews, and public meetings. The steering committee will define goals, objectives, and action plans based on the information from these research activities.

III. Discussion of specific community development issues within scope of services

Thayr asked the group to brainstorm about community issues that need to be addressed in Blackford County. The following list includes the steering committee members' ideas:

- Downtown revitalization
- Work with groups to demolish blighted areas in gateways
- Improve route between I-69 and SR 22
- Improve employment opportunities

- What kinds of jobs do people want?
 - What will jobs be in 20-30 years?
- Build identity for Blackford County
 - Branding
- Get community interested in economic development
- Youth and young adult involvement in community
- Improve morale
- Address “brain drain”
- Expand broadband communication and wireless service
 - Limited access outside of cities
 - Inadequate for business
- Increase cooperation among service groups
- Reduce unemployment to 2% below state levels
- Improve skill level of workforce
- Investigate commuting patterns
 - Is Blackford County becoming a bedroom community?
- Assess skills of young adults
 - Match workforce skills with employers’ needs
- Retention and expansion of existing businesses
- Make government services more efficient and cost effective
- Retail and out of town shopping
- What are the jobs of the future?
 - Green jobs
 - Non-location intensive jobs i.e. IT
 - Healthcare
- Declining tax base
- Remaining competitive without an interstate
- Entrepreneurship
- Available buildings and incentives to new businesses
- Possibility of collaboration with several nearby universities and colleges

IV. Next steps

Cory will tour current industrial parks in the county. SDG will prepare a demographic and peer community profile that will show trends. SDG will also examine regional business clusters in Blackford County and in East Central Indiana.