

Town of Spencer / Owen County Comprehensive Strategic Plans Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Date / Time: Thursday, November 06, 2008

Location: Spencer Owen School Corporation Building

Attendees: Dean Bruce, Bobby Hall, Bruce Hamlin, Greg Linton, Mark Rogers, Jack Simmerman, Patty Steward, Denise Shaw
EGT: Erin Shane, Cory Whitesell, Brian Pohlar

The steering committee introduced themselves to one another and noted the responsibilities they have in the community. After a short trivia quiz, Erin read through the agenda. The Owen County comp plan was last updated in 1994 and the Spencer plan was last updated in 1976.

The group noted that they do not have a lot of development happening, so we need to make sure the focus of this effort reflects the type of issues the community is really dealing with – and not talking about development that will not likely occur in any great degree.

Steve Redenbaugh is leaving office is someone else will be appointed to the committee in his place. The group suggested that Gwen Deiter and Mark Evans (county extension agent) would be good to add to the steering committee. Invite Owen Valley and Cloverdale FFA, Boy Scouts, other youth to committee meetings and visioning workshop.

It was recommend that the EGT use a Spencer PO Box as a return address on all mailings (i.e. use the chamber address). The newspaper reported on the Big Tent can – the reporter can be contacted to help get turnout at the next meeting.

Erin stated that focus groups would be run in January with groups such as community leaders, schools/school board, large employers and utilities. For the public safety group, there is a captain's meeting where the fire chief's meet. Denise Shaw can get the team contact information. It was suggested that the group could get input from farmers / landowners and that these persons can be indentified through the farm bureau, county extension service, and the soil and water conservation board. The steering committing will ask Woody Barton who to contact about the timber industry. Committee members are to send Erin names of suggested focus group members. Committee members are also invited to attend focus group meetings.

Erin brought up the EGT's concerns about the two plans being completed by one shared group. The group noted that the people around the table are the key people who need to be involved in decision making for the community as a whole, and that they were comfortable with each other in these roles.

They noted that Spencer and Owen County have a good relationship, and that the committee expects to work together for the betterment of the community without regards to politics.

The committee discussed what issues were unique to each community, which issues could potentially cause division, and examples of how the community can work together on shared goals:

- It was discussed that the Town has more zoning issues because of the intensity of land uses.
- The Town has had planning and zoning for a long time. County zoning is relatively new and therefore still a somewhat controversial issue. Zoning has been defeated many times in the past in this county.
- Town is going through annexation process. Much of this is voluntary. It is not anticipated to be an issue with the county.
- Spencer has given its fringe area rights back to the county because the size of the fringe was more than they could manage with limited resources. However, one of the expectations of this plan is to help identify and plan for items of common interests in the area.
- The group wants to investigate pooling resources – such as providing one building inspector for the city/county.
- Fire protection and law enforcement have been points of contention in the past.
- The County and Town have same attorney.

The group discussed that planning in the community as a whole, and especially in the county needs to be treated carefully with the public. It was discussed that planning needs to reflect issues the community is facing and not reflect big city development issues. It will need to be presented slowly to many county residents.

Erin read through the preliminary demographics for the county and Spencer. The Town believes that the population has increased, even though the population is showing to be decreasing. Denise noted that she has been told by the Agency for Aging that the elderly population is the oldest in the state. The committee noted sidewalks were an example of how this is an issue. Deteriorated sidewalks are certainly not senior friendly. Spencer is actively looking into this and is considering a tree ordinance update to prevent the type of trees that damage sidewalks. Other comments during the demographics discussion included:

- Boston Scientific is near 1300 employees now.
- Cook is near 600 employees.
- Owen Financial Corporation and Owen County State Bank are the same entity. 66 is the correct total of number employees.
- World Arts/Spencer Evening World is owned by the same entity. It is over 100 people now together.
- Numbers of housing units have decreased since the flood.
- Population numbers do not include considerations for I-69. The EGT is attempting to get this data from INDOT.

- The committee noted that they have seen data where the educational attainment for high school is 85% currently. This is higher than the presented demographic data.

The committee would like to see the SR 46 project updated to provide the right image on the highway through town. Gosport is also looking at this right now. The committee noted that INDOT has stated locally that they expect traffic to increase negligibly. Higher counts are expected on SR 46, but lower numbers on SR 231.

Cory went through the mapping exercise results from the Big Tent meeting, and the group concurred with the notes for both Spencer and the County. Additional comments for each community were discussed as follows:

Spencer

- Critical sub areas are the quarry south of town, the field northwest of town, and the ballfields/housing area that was flooded this summer.
- Cook is currently expanding, and is acquiring property to the south to expand further.
- Boston Scientific is land locked and will have to relocate to expand. The City wants to help them relocate within the Town if they need to expand.
- Hyden Road intersection (near Wendy's) is the most dangerous intersection in the City.
- Drainage north of town is a critical concern. There is a large watershed north of town that drains through Town. The Town would like to see a watershed protection plan for that area that preserves existing tree canopy and vegetation and other steps needed to protect runoff.
- There are 17 railroad crossings in a one mile stretch in Spencer. Grants have not been able to be secured to allow for safe crossings. A study was done to relocate the railroad out of town, and the cost was over \$50 million.

Spencer Critical Sub Areas are:

- Quarry South of Town: They would like recommendations on alternative uses for the land (i.e. residential vs. industrial use)
- Field Northwest of Town: They would like recommendations on future land uses. This needs to consider the high water table in the area. There is discussion on this being the future park/athletics fields, but it is the largest track of land available outside the floodplain so the community is not sure it would be the best use.
- Housing/ballfields area that was flooded: This area is being vacated and bought out. The plan needs to identify a future land use plan for the area.

Owen County

- Sanitary sewer is a major need throughout the county. Steep slopes and high water tables make installation of sanitary sewers very costly. This is especially an issue around Cunot, Coal City and at county lakes. A number of regional sewer districts have been studied over the years.
- Drinking water is also difficult to obtain in the county. Water wells are 200-300' or more deep, and even then often result in water with a high sulfur content that is not suitable for consumption. It was estimated by Jack Simmerman that 60% of the county does not have adequate water available.
- South Central Indiana REMC investigated providing water service to the northern part of the county some time ago.
- The flatwoods area is the primary critical sub area identified for the county.
- The intersection of county line road and SR 46 is the most dangerous intersection in the county because of the blind hill to the west.
- Some development pressure is expected in the Whitehall area (near SR 48/SR 43 intersection) since that location is closest to I-69.

The committee then discussed next steps and future meetings. Greg Linton noted that 2nd and 4th Thursdays are school board meetings so the board room would not be available at those times. The local bank would be available if the committee cannot meet at the school. The committee is open to having meetings other places.

The committee recommended that public workshops will be held in multiple locations in town. These will be at the Freedom community hall, the Cunot community center or the Coal City fire department.

The next event will be focus groups between now and January. Public workshops will be held in January/February. There will be no committee meetings until February 5th.