

# Owen County Economic Development Plan Steering Committee Meeting #3 Summary

July 15, 2010 • 8:00 a.m.

## Attendees

Mike Spinks, David Henk, Kurt Rosenberger, Charles Hardesty, Dean Bruce, Shelley Edwards, Jill Curry, Pam Chapman, Cindy Coffman, Bobby Hall, Irma Jean Franklin, Phil Bastin, Dan Dalton, Stephanie Shaw, Denise Shaw, Matt Sward.

Consultants: Thayr Richey (SDG), Scott Burgins (SDG), Brett Tearney (SDG), Cory Whitesell (HWC), Matthew Pierce (HWC).

## Updates

This was the third steering committee meeting of the Owen County Economic Development planning process.

Denise mentioned that Gosport recently started discussions to expand/improve water infrastructure.

## Business Site Analysis

Matthew led the discussion of three general site locations. He indicated that sewer costs were similar, so water issues presented the major difference.

- Gosport site has a workable lift station and is 'shovel-ready.' The main constraints center on lot sizes and hilly topography.
- 231/67 sites are far away, but possess potential utility tie-ins along the route. There are two water options (Bean Blossom & Gosport), but both are cost prohibitive and place stress on existing infrastructure.
- SR 43 sites make the most sense, but are not cheap (estimate around \$2.5 million). They already have water and two sewer options exist. The Freeman Road alternative allows for a phased approach and accomplishes multiple community service goals, but it will not allow for development of the site currently for sale or existing area businesses. A northern lift station makes the state park, sale site and existing businesses accessible, which presents cost sharing opportunities and ensures base flow.

Matthew and Cory introduced the idea of installing a large pipe next to a bigger one to support anticipated growth at a lower long-run cost. Overall option costs were also introduced.

Questions were fielded on topics such as: impacts to and limitations of Spencer infrastructure, the grant impacts of not targeting residential service, and whether local

utilities must mandate sewer connection. Attendees raised opinions regarding the 46 corridor and their desires to tread lightly when it came to mandating residential service.

### **Reasons for Developing Employer Sites**

Thayr began by addressing a rhetorical question about why site development is necessary. He explained how important recruitment and retention is to an economic development strategy.

He also noted that businesses don't want to pay for infrastructure development, so to be competitive communities must figure out a way to pay for the work themselves. Right now, Owen County is often unable to participate with prospect inquiries, as this site deficiency presents a fundamental detriment to growth.

The economic impact of insufficient employer sites was highlighted by a recent greenhouse project that Owen County was forced to pass on. Thayr reiterated that while most selected sites are less than 15 miles from an interstate exit, communities without such access, such as Switzerland and Daviess counties, have proven successful. Site development, including land acquisition and funding, are the top priority. However, active support from community leaders – like those on the steering committee – is needed.

Questions arose regarding whether Owen County was better equipped to focus on services rather than manufacturing. Thayr identified food processing, manufacturing and services as the most likely development targets.

### **Update: Matching Priorities to Resources**

Thayr reminded the steering committee of the budget and resource limitations facing the EDC. However, Spencer recently authorized a \$20,000 increase to the organization. Thayr's suggestion of approaching county government for additional funding was met with uncertainty by the steering committee. Denise highlighted the fact that local philanthropic groups were not investing long-term and a paradigm shift was needed.

### **A Closer Look at Economic Development Approaches**

SDG presented the idea of partnering with brother/sister communities to learn from their successes and expertise. SDG offered to coordinate meetings with such entities. In addition to the industrial park, SDG identified the following development focus areas:

#### a) Tourism

Thayr discussed creating a regional entity of similar rural communities. Scott then described his spending pattern on a recent trip to Spring Hill State Park and how it represented the multiplier effect of tourism dollars. Scott showed examples of brochures he picked up during his travels across the state. Lawrence County was identified as a well-positioned community.

Bobby, Irma-Jean, John and Mike volunteered to meet with other counties to discuss tourism approaches. SDG agreed to distribute the meeting schedule in order to see if others want to attend.

b) Small Business Development

SDG advocated helping local businesses better serve the existing tourism market as a first step.

c) Brand Sweet Owen County

SDG noted the desire to protect the Owen County quality of life and leverage the recently completed Spencer-Owen County Partnership Plan.

d) Build Local Capacity

Thayr identified the Seymour Industrial Development Corporation as being particularly successful in assisting with economic development funding. Craig, Pam, Dean, and Charlie volunteered to meet with SIDC.

e) Formalize Retention-Expansion Program

Thayr noted that Daviess County serves as a model example.

f) Build Relationships with Developers

**What's Next**

The next meeting would take place on August 10<sup>th</sup> at 8 a.m.