

# Owen County Economic Development Plan Steering Committee Meeting #5 Summary

September 23, 2010 • 8:00 a.m.

## Attendees

Denise Shaw, Phil Bastin, Dean Bruce, Craig Coffman, Jill Curry, Dan Dalton, Shelley Edwards, Charles Hardesty, Mike Heaton, Kurt Rosenberger, Mike Spinks, Jeff Quyle, Chris Wesley.

Consultants: Thayr Richey (SDG), Scott Burgins (SDG) and Cory Whitesell (HWC).

## Steering Committee Member Check-in

Spencer is applying for the Stellar Communities Program, where selected communities will complete multiple community development projects funded by the three agencies - the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, and the Indiana Department of Transportation.

The projects may address housing, infrastructure, roadwork, streetscape, lighting, community centers, revitalization projects and other quality of life issues. The two pilot communities will be announced in the first quarter of 2011.

Denise announced that the county commission has decided to disband the building department. Under this system, the state steps in and does inspections for commercial sites, charging a flat rate. There are no inspections for housing. The county and Spencer officials may talk about teaming up to fill the local position. That idea was explored in the recently completed Town of Spencer-Owen County Partnership Plan.

Thayr said a replacement method is needed quickly. "If you don't have a verification system, then you don't have planning," he said.

## DRAFT Infrastructure Site Assessment Report

Cory presented the draft assessment report for locating a new manufacturing site.

Because site developers ask for shovel ready sites, he talked about state certification for an Owen County location. Certification is a competitive process, but prospective businesses can see the suggested site is good for development.

The assessment answers questions that have been floating around – and blocking progress – for years. For example, is building at SR 43 doable? The answer is yes, but it's a multi-million dollar project.

Using research in the assessment, Cory suggested the community agree on a priority site, then direct serious effort toward that one project. However that decision should wait until the community has decided the best method for paying for the project. If Spencer does not tackle it alone, it is possible to create a regional sewer district.

### **Local Economic Characteristics and Business Climate**

Scott passed out this draft report for the committee's review.

### **Capacity Building**

Thayr talked about capacity building for industrial development. A detailed analysis of available land is the first important step. The next step is making sure the land is good for employers, and is protected for industrial development (it does not have a competing land use activity).

The third step is having some entity – either private, not-for-profit or governmental - acquire control of the land.

All three of these steps must be in place for the community to have an economic future. And, all those steps have to happen BEFORE the community can expect calls from interested prospects.

Additionally, the community must be set up to offer tax abatements and must enforce its planning and zoning regulations.

On August 6, a subset of the steering committee visited Seymour to study the not-for-profit organization that funds local employment site development. Thayr said such a group requires leaders who are willing to take a risk and invest money.

Charlie said Seymour is well organized and has assets such as major railroads, I-65 and a location between Indianapolis and Louisville. To widen involvement, they sold shares in the venture for as low as a few dollars.

With Owen County's location away from an interstate, the chance of locating big box distribution is very small. However other types of manufacturers may be interested.

In other parts of the state – and country - communities are giving away land for development.

Thayr said recruitment is a marathon, not a sprint, and it will take decades. The community should list its strategic advantages, decide what kind of businesses match those advantages and then recruit. However, Owen County should not try to compete just on its low land and labor costs, Thayr said.

### **Regional Tourism**

Scott talked about the tourism work group, which met Sept. 15, 2010 at Spring Mill State Park.

The group selected several possible project for cooperation:

- Create a shared calendar
- Share ideas on promoting tourism to local decision makers.
- Set up familiarization tours of each others' counties.
- Pursue a Chalk Art competition.

At the next meeting, scheduled for late October, the group deiced to invite state park and recreation representatives and regional Main Street groups.

### **Next Steps**

The next meeting is this **Thursday, Nov. 4 at 8 a.m.** at the Owen Community Bank Annex Basement.