

Town of Spencer / Owen County Comprehensive Strategic Plan Meeting Minutes Kick Off Meeting

Date: Tuesday, October 21, 2008

Location: Spencer First Christian Church – Christian Life Center

Facilitator: Scott Burgins, EGT

Attendees: Bob Bandy, Dean Bruce, Craig Coffman, Jill Curry, Patrick Day, Shelly Edwards, Irma Jean Franklin, David Henk, Cynthia Hyde, Greg Jones, Lauren Kadish, Greg Linton, Bob Morris, Mark Rogers, Kurt Rosenberger, Denise Shaw, Stephanie Shaw, Jack Simmerman, Mike Stanley
EGT: Erin Shane, Cory Whitesell

Scott started the meeting at 6:40 pm. He noted that invitations had been sent out to community leaders for this meeting to introduce this new planning project – the Spencer / Owen County Comprehensive Strategic Plan. This is a unique project in that Spencer and the county are working together to complete each of their comprehensive plans. The project is funded by an I69 grant from INDOT, managed through OCRA.

After the meeting attendees introduced themselves, Scott noted that the project should take about 9 months to draft, 3 months to finalize. The first 6-8 months will be spent collecting information by having a visioning workshop, focus groups, interviews, and steering committee meetings. The purpose of the plan is to identify local goals and priorities as it relates to growth and development. More simply, it defines what the community wants to protect and what the community wants to change.

Scott went through the remainder of the agenda, noting the consultants contact info and identifying the project website at www.sdg.us/occp.php.

Scott asked the attendees to voice several things that need to change in the community. Responses are as follows:

- Floodplain
- Broadening the tax base
- Traffic thru Spencer
- Downtown improvements
- Infrastructure for growth outside of Spencer

Several things that the group wants to protect in the community:

- Nature (trees in Spencer – canopy trees)
- Green space
- Quality of life

Scott then led the group through a visioning exercise, noting the handout in the packet that read:

The visioning process creates a mental picture of what residents want their community to look and feel like in 20 years. Why envision the future? Because only by imagining where we want to go can we figure out how to get there.

The vision should be the driving force behind the community's strategic plan. But a vision can fail for any of a number of reasons. It may be too bold and leave people thinking it is impossible to achieve. Or it may be so vague – “We want a nice rural atmosphere and good quality of life” – that it has no real meaning or content.

Responses from the visioning exercise are as follows:

What is the current image of Spencer?

- Bedroom community
- Small town
- Rural
- Somewhat withered
- Downtown area is withered

15 years from now – what is vision of the community?

- Small town still but more vibrant – may need a vibrant downtown
- Examples of vibrant downtowns – Salem, Scottsburg, Nashville
- Homey
- Easy to get what you need and comfortable
- Attractive place to live – Owen county
- Once vibrant want to keep what makes us attractive
- Lower taxes – only 15% decrease from House Bill 1001
- New sidewalks in front of every house – Spencer
 - Linking to shopping and schools
- Fewer gravel roads
- Need broadband – this would be smart economic tool
- Would like to see more healthy options for food / restaurants
- Employment opportunities for kids to grow up here and work here

What is your vision for environment and open space?

- No trash on side of roads – clean up trash
- Better river access – no easy access to it – need a promenade
- River is canoe-able most of the year
- Park assets - McCormick Creek State Park, Leiber State Park, Cataract Falls
- Nothing in Spencer – the park we have floods – no sense in putting money in it b/c it floods
- Have some low income areas that should be parks b/c in floodplain
- Spencer - Cooper Park along walkway – parks and rec had talked about putting in walkway along river

What is your vision for economic development?

- Need more jobs that employ men – jobs that interest men – like construction or automotive – use their hands
- In the life sciences – used to be mostly women – but men are catching up
- We need higher educational attainment - like soft skills – need more community and family support
- We only have a 70% HS graduation rate
- No emphasis on education here – not for lack of opportunity
- Ivy tech has classes here in Spencer
- But if you educate they'll leave for bigger towns, even though we have good jobs here
- 1800 people come into Spencer to work

What is your vision for neighborhoods and housing?

- For the county – lacking QUALITY affordable low income housing
- We may need to look at more high end housing
- In county – have a lot of 10 acre lots w/ average homes on them
- As part of protecting our workforce- can we house them?
- Locally hired engineers are like birds of a feather – they want to live where other young engineers are
- The young want nightlife, shopping in their towns of residence

The group then broke into two stations, one for mapping local issues and the other for taking a survey. The map results will be added to the end of these notes when complete. The survey results will be grouped with other responses over the next 5-6 months and produced later in the planning process. The meeting ended at 8:00 pm.