REPORT ON THE MORGAN COUNTY ECONOMIC SUMMIT -- 6/11/08

THE ORIGIN

As part of an interview for an opening on the Economic Development Authority (EDA), Jeanne Mozier presented to the County Commission the idea of staging an economic summit as a way of having key members of the county economic community talk to each other about common issues. All three commissioners were enthusiastic about the idea and requested that Mozier organize such an event whether she was appointed to EDA or not.

In late April 2008, Mozier was appointed to EDA along with two other individuals to fill three vacancies on the board. It was decided that the Economic Summit could be part of EDA's required activities for being recertified as an economic development community. The plan for accumulating the necessary information for this accreditation process included several work sessions that would assess the economic present and develop an action plan for the future of the county. The Economic Summit would be the first such session. Others would follow.

At their meeting in late April, EDA agreed that it would fund lunch for the participants since the information developed would support the necessary accreditation process. It was also agreed that the letter of invitation would be signed by the County Commission in the person of its president, Glen Stotler and by Bob Hawvermale, president of EDA.

In early May a letter of invitation was sent to a list of 67 Morgan Countians who are actively involved in creating the local economy through their business or enterprise. For sectors like tourism where there are a large number of individual businesses, only a few representatives were invited, generally those with the largest enterprises or with other involvements. Attendees were told:

> *Each of you has been invited specifically because of your role in generating economic activity in a particular sector. If you are unable to accept this invitation, please let us know and we will fill your slot with someone who plays a similar role.*

More than 80% of those individuals attended the work session held at Cacapon State Park on June 11 from 10am to 2pm.

THE PROCESS

The invitation letter outlined the activities and goals of the day. It said:

> *The Economic Summit aims at learning from each other exactly what is occurring in all local sectors as well as considering strategic issues to be addressed in the short-term future. During the course of the day, the group will be asked to recommend three action steps to be undertaken in the next year. Future work sessions will include public policy activities and involve economic actors from outside the county.*

Having been assigned the task of organizing the summit, Mozier prepared the agenda in consultation with the modertaor, Sally Marshall. It was presented to all attendees. The agenda was followed.

10am Sally Marshall, moderator, outlined the goals and purpose of the summit as presented in the invitation.

Five "white papers" were created and presented as "thought provokers." The individuals and their topics were:

- Gat Caperton, owner, Caperton Furniture Works -- Manufacturing and Related Issues of Work Force and the Environment
- Bob Marggraf, Vice President and Regional Manager - WV, Carl M. Freeman Companies – Real

Estate Market Survey and Economic Impact of the Villages at Coolfont

- Charles Trump, Trump & Trump and President, Board of Directors of Citizens National Bank
- John Petersen, Founder/Arlington Institute -- Economic Development, Morgan County, and the World
- Jeanne Mozier, owner, Star Theatre -- The Creative Economy in Berkeley Springs

One-page outlines of the "white papers" were made available to attendees and are available to others along with this report.

A brief Q&A followed with about three questions, all directed to Bob Marggraf about timing of Coolfont development.

11:15am After a break, the group returned to their original tables and were given the following assignment:
based on information provided and other thoughts held by attendees, identify the three to five most important actions that Morgan County should undertake to improve or sustain the economic health of the county. Each table was directed to identify a discussion leader and recorder.

12:15pm The group broke for lunch. During lunch each of the participants introduced themselves and their business to the group then presented the greatest challenge their business currently faced. There was a wide diversity of challenges presented matching the diversity of businesses in the county. The challenges ranged from workforce issues to rising costs of fuel to problems with product to keeping up with technology.

1:15pm The group reassembled at their tables, reviewed their list of recommendations, then reported out the top three. The reported recommendations were compiled on a central, master list with similar recommendations being integrated. The individual group sheets were posted on the walls.

1:45pm Two sheets of integrated recommendations were posted on the wall. All participants were given three dots to use as votes. The single blue dot represented the must-do action; the two yellow dots were secondary priorities. Votes could be clustered, sprawled or traded. The voting was concluded and results tallied as indicated below.

1:55pm. Marshall reported the top two recommendations and commented on a few others. She gave all attendees two final tasks related to the activity of the day that must be accomplished before they could leave:
-- write down one task they would undertake during the next year;
-- write down one task they would undertake during the next month.

TAKING A VOTE

After nearly four hours of presentations, discussions and outlining issues and recommendations, the assembled fifty plus business people of Morgan County rushed the integrated sheets of 18 recommendations to vote on their priorities.

The unanimity of priorities was impressively displayed by swarms of dots.

The undisputed first place priority for economic development in Morgan County was to improve the technology infrastructure. People want cell signal everywhere in the county. They want high speed connection to the Internet and they want both to be reliable. The group recommended that the authorities granting tower and service privileges require that access must be provided to all.

Assigning the first place blue dot 5 points and the second tier yellow dot 2 points gave improved tech infrastructure the top score of 108. The next priority, with 61 points, addressed various aspects of the water infrastructure. Specific segments of this priority ranged from creating a reservoir to establishing a countywide public service district to manage water resources.

The remaining recommendations in descending order are as follows.

39 -- Adequate work force through job fair, training programs, continuing education and affordable housing. This high priority indicated the recognition that a strong, local economy with a place for blue collar and service workers was essential.

33 -- Integrated health care including hospital, increased affiliates, alternative, geriatric and independent living

29 -- Enhance cultural activities, arts, higher education and nightlife. Education (college or other higher ed program) must be high quality to compete.

16 -- Remove fire siren downtown

14 -- Decide direction whether tourism or other

13 -- Tax incentives for new and existing growth businesses

12 -- Incentives for alternative energy companies and installations.

12 -- Improve Cacapon State Park

12 -- Global market perspective

9 -- Regulate consistency in building quality; building inspector

2 -- Recreational opportunities

2 -- EDA work with other groups: Planning Commission, Health Department. Hone and sharpen the economic development focus.

Other main recommendations receiving no votes were:

-- encourage development of specific businesses including dry cleaner, health insurance co-op, data centers, veterinarian emergency facility and boarding

-- parking garage

-- common marketing material and Web presence. Identify and promote advantages of community for plant construction. Label as "green" and creative. All countywide material carries the same message; all Websites have link to common image.

Other critical issues were not reported out as key recommendations but included on one or more small group lists. Several of these are related to key recommendations.

-- Public transportation including commuter transport to MARC train in Martinsburg; bike trail to train at Hancock station; sustain airport
-- Roads
-- Activities for young adults 17-30
-- Need new people; visitors and residents so support Coolfont.
-- Improve infrastructure: water and sewer; technology; transportation; Streetscape; other
-- Education opportunities: community college, high school programs, encourage/develop trades
-- Keep teachers via affordable housing/ nightlife
-- Encourage midweek/local business: support other properties, retail development
-- Package as "ideal place" for data centers because of low electric costs and access to Internet traffic centers.
-- Support for aging and retirement population -- senior arts commune
-- Establish local and informal venture capital

CONCLUSION

Informal comments made by attendees agreed that the meeting was interesting, stimulating and productive. There were many comments about how focused and engaged attendees were.

Economic Summit Outcome

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