

Economic Development Insight

We Need a 'Game Plan'

By Joan Bethell

During the time that I was preparing this article, I was awakened by the radio alarm one morning to a Christian minister talking about "vision." One quote that stuck with me was, "There must be a vision of something bigger than today. If your memories are bigger than your vision, you're in trouble."

Community and economic development is not about an agency or agencies but is more clearly defined as an activity that an entire community is engaged in, to establish a shared vision.

During the five years before I came to Greene County, a number of economic development activities related to visioning and community assessment had occurred. Building upon these historic documents ensures we don't try to 'reinvent the wheel.' Pooling this information revealed commonalities and themes that, with public input, became the initial priorities of our current action plan: tourism, planning and entrepreneurship.

However, Rome wasn't built in a day. The work done to date related to these priorities is only the beginning and the current action plan itself is but a small piece of the picture. Other necessary pieces of the picture (our vision) are the HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC) assessment, the Greene County and Bloomfield comprehensive plans, the tourism strategic plan and the I-69 corridor plan. This entire body of information, historic and current, is crucial in helping us to define our collective vision for Greene County circa A.D. 2030. If we don't know where we're going and what it looks like, how will we know when we get there?

So, as important as it is to make progress, it is equally important that we as a community finalize the framework of our collective future vision and develop a game plan to get us there. In other words, once we know what we want Greene County to be like, what steps do we take to make sure we get there?

It's important to recognize that no one develops a community alone and a successful effort requires strong public/private partnerships. So, the next step involves the collaboration of a broad spectrum of the entire community. This would include representation of key agencies in the county, especially those involved in business development, education and workforce development, finance and philanthropy, community development, government, major business sectors and those agencies already engaged in activities directly related to our prime opportunities.

We need to bring the outcomes and recommendations contained in all the current plans, visions, and opportunities to one table and lay out a large county-wide plan with actions and assigned responsibilities that will implement the combined plan.

We have to integrate with the four HTC pillars (leadership, youth, entrepreneurship and philanthropy) all of our opportunities such as agriculture, tourism, Goose Pond, NSWC Crane and WestGate@Crane technology park and I-69. Each of these areas can lead us to our ultimate

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goal...help Greene County grow. The question is, where is the overlap and common area between them? Identifying that will help us work smarter and not as isolated and fragmented projects. We know that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.’

The Greene County HTC core team is already discussing the need, structure and timing for the formation of a team to develop a strategy plan. The result of this group effort will be a Greene County Strategic Plan that incorporates the community’s values, foundations and vision together with assigned goals and strategies that, once developed, will bring about that community vision. Only in a cooperative and dedicated manner can the vision be achieved.

Expect to hear more about this in the next few months.

Besides the benefit of ‘staying on track’ that a strategic plan provides, there is a secondary benefit that the pastor on the radio also spoke about ... “Long-term goals keep you from being frustrated by short-term delays or disappointments.”

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