

Economic Development Insight

Why Economic Development?

By Joan Bethell

In some of the responses to recent articles, I've been asked why I would want to change anything about Greene County, when I consider that it has so much for which we should be thankful. Well, being thankful doesn't mean ignoring potential for improvement but an adequate response to the question begs the asking of a second question: Why economic development?

If we think about the ultimate goal of economic development as the creation of more and better quality jobs, increasing the tax base and improving the overall quality of life, then we can more easily assess the reasons for engaging in activities that will help to bring that about.

First, let's discuss who the primary beneficiaries of such actions might be. According to the latest information posted on the STATS Indiana website, the median personal income in Greene County is \$26,121, which is \$6,167 a year less than the Indiana rate. That's a whopping \$514 a month that I'm sure every one of the 15,718 employed Greene County residents would appreciate getting in their paycheck.

Now, what about the 15.1% poverty rate in Greene County? That means, (very) conservatively, of our 13,372 households, there are over 2000 living below the poverty level and needing some form of government or community assistance. Or the 23.3% poverty rate among children? That's nearly one in every four children in our community. I'm pretty sure that any one of their households would like to have the opportunity to increase their income. They would enjoy being able to comfortably pay their bills and expenses, plus have some additional expendable income left over, for a change.

What about the government's ability to maintain, or even improve, the various facilities, such as swimming pools, parks, street lights? Or their ability to provide needed services, such as security, ambulance, fire service, etcetera? Would we not want to ensure that such features that improve our overall quality of life are provided for? With the recent HB1001 provisions causing a realignment of tax appropriations, all local governments are feeling the pinch.

As for overall quality of life, some residents are content with their personal lot. As for me, my heart is moved with compassion for those less fortunate. This is why I work hard to do whatever I can to improve things for them.

I've walked a mile in their shoes. I've had seasons in my life in which I've had to 'scrimp and scrape' just to try to make ends meet. I know what it's like to walk a mile or so to the closest grocery store to get a few meager supplies, having to walk because I had no money for gas. I've felt the anguish in having to deny my young daughter new shoes when she really needed them.

There is a sign in my office that provides a constant reminder of my priorities and it reads, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

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It takes more than just one agency, like Greene County Economic Development Corporation (GCEDC), to improve the quality of life for an entire community. And there are many facets of improvement that could be, and need to be, addressed.

The HTC Entrepreneurship pillar is working on program development that includes improved online resources for all small businesses and business start-ups, workshops and training sessions, trade fairs, funding mechanisms, youth involvement, etcetera.

The GCEDC-initiated Greene County Chamber Coalition is preparing to explore development of a local artisan product catalog and a marketing brochure that could be used as an outreach to potential tourists. We also need permanent wayfarer signage, training for merchants, exposure to more markets, exploration of new markets like agri-tourism venues, coordination with regional partners.

Behind the scenes, GCEDC is engaged in activities that improve our chances of attracting relocating companies. Whenever, a company is identified as a potential “fit” for Greene County, we scour the area, looking for feasible sites and buildings to house the company, identify available workforce, determine accessible utilities and anything else important to the client. We need a full community asset inventory from which we could easily identify matches for those client priorities.

The list of things to do is pretty extensive so, if you have any interest in seeing Greene County blossom into a thriving, innovative community that others would want to visit (and some of whom will want to stay), then please contact GCEDC to discuss your ideas.

The folks who need help the most are the least equipped to do something about their plight. They may think things like, “I wish someone would do something to help me.’ Are you a ‘someone’?

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