ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING MEETING

TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2010

Meeting called by:
City of Americus
Sumter County Board of Commissioners
Americus-Sumter Payroll Development Authority

Facilitated by:
Matt Bishop
Sue Chapman
Dennis Epps
Melvin Garber

Archway Professional for Americus Sumter County:
Barbara Grogan

Report Edited by:
Angel Jackson

Archway Partnership

http://archwaypartnership.uga.edu
(706) 542-1098
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PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

Americus and Sumter County officials representing the City of Americus, Sumter County Board of Commissioners, and Americus-Sumter Payroll Development Authority assembled in Statesboro, Georgia, on January 28, 2010, to discuss broad Sumter County community economic development goals. The purpose of the retreat was to assess community strengths/threats, and set in motion a process for bringing relevant parties together to develop a long-range strategic community economic development plan. Specific objectives of the retreat were to “get everyone on the same page” regarding community economic development in Sumter County; brainstorm ideas for recruiting new and retaining/expanding existing industries and businesses; and gain a better understanding of the role of community entities in implementing community economic development plans/strategies.

The same group had a follow-up meeting on February 23, 2010, to identify the top issues to be considered. A third meeting was held March 23, 2010, to discuss in more detail some of the information produced from the previous meetings, as well as to include community leaders. Specifically, the large group was broken into four smaller groups to discuss identified topics critical to Sumter County’s economic development: the intermodal port, tourism, the health sector, and higher education.

Members and staff of the Americus City Council, Sumter County Board of Commissioners, and Payroll Development Authority identified various individuals from throughout the community to attend the March 23rd meeting. Individuals were recruited to attend based on their professional expertise and background, their passionate interest in one of the four topical areas, and their positions on various boards and commissions in the community.

The four facilitated groups were divided based upon topic of interest and six queuing questions were used to guide the participation and input from community members. Some groups deviated from the questions as needed to ensure all pertinent information was shared. These deviations are recorded as well. Additionally, as the participants are considered community members and leaders, groups did not include professional staff for each subject matter. Therefore, recorded information may not be reflective of the most current activities occurring for each topic addressed. This information will be clarified as the discussion and action process continues.

There are many benefits to a moderated and facilitated conversation, one of which is the ability to create a dialogue in which all stakeholders are given the opportunity to contribute information in a ‘safe’ environment. As a neutral, objective third party provider of higher education resources (and with Americus-Sumter County being one of Georgia’s eight Archway Partnership portal communities), the Archway
Partnership faculty have the appropriate expertise to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders. Thus, faculty members from the Archway Partnership have facilitated all of these joint meetings within the community.

SUMMARY OF THE MEETING

Following an overview of the meetings to date geared at economic development planning (described above), attendees were divided into four separate groups for deliberation of the four topics:

(1) Intermodal Port  
(2) Tourism  
(3) Healthcare  
(4) Higher Education

Faculty from UGA’s Archway Partnership facilitated discussion of the four topics. The following represents the results of those small group discussions:

Intermodal Port

1. What is happening in this community that you are aware of around this economic sector (e.g. – what are the current efforts of the community to keep existing and/or recruit new business/industry in this sector)?
   a. River Valley Regional Commission is looking at transportation planning (e.g. – truck traffic)  
   b. PDA/State are looking at issuing revenue bonds for Sumter/Region  
   c. There is a rail-switching yard  
   d. Community has undertaken an asset inventory in this area  
   e. Started marketing dialogue with existing industry

2. What should be happening in this community (e.g. if you were in charge, what are some broad, overarching goals you would have for this economic sector)?
   a. Identify properties closer to the river/Lake Blackshear  
   b. Increase community awareness about what’s coming down the pipe  
   c. Identify housing opportunities → local government infrastructure  
   d. Front Royal, Virginia – an existing success story we could learn from  
   e. Think more creatively in terms of funding projects ourselves  
   f. Need to know the timeline for the port in Cordele
3. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what data/information would you need to assist you with making decisions? Who potentially has that information, and how are you going to get it?
   a. Need to know how the port will save local business money
   b. We need a report from the “piers” in the Southeast
   c. Economic impact analysis – what’s the target market?
   d. Complete analysis of Americus-Sumter vs. some other port
   e. Time table for growth
   f. Analysis of what’s happening in Mobile, AL
   g. Salary-wage info/investment information
   h. Tax base forecasting

4. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what would your strategies be?
   a. 4-lane highway 280 (The road is critical!)
   b. Increase trucking “supply”
   c. Purchase acres of land near rail
   d. County land-use analysis (infrastructure)
   e. Market ourselves east and west
   f. Incubate businesses – utilize internal capital of the community
   g. Think about how we can become a distribution hub for the port

5. Noting that tonight’s meeting is the first opportunity to bring people together around these economic sectors, what other organizations and/or individuals need to be included in the conversation as the work moves forward?
   a. State elected officials
   b. Regional development representative (Crisp County)
   c. Grants person
   d. Congressman Bishop’s office and other federal agencies
   e. Other business owners who will be impacted

6. What are the next steps? (What will be accomplished in one month’s time? A second meeting is expected. What will happen at that meeting? And who needs to be at that meeting? Need to schedule time/date/place).
   a. Brad Lefevre to host information meeting on what’s going on…Wally to host at South Georgia Technical College
   b. PDA presentation of what they are doing regarding port

Tourism

1. What is happening in this community that you are aware of around this economic sector (e.g – what are the current efforts of the community to keep existing and/or recruit new business/industry in this sector)?
2. What should be happening in this community (e.g. if you were in charge, what are some broad, overarching goals you would have for this economic sector)?

   a. Regional bicycle trails
   b. Downtown, historical museum captures local history
   c. Improve aesthetics/cleanliness
   d. Agritourism: pumpkin patch, berry farm, corn maze
   e. Convention center
      i. Lake Blackshear Retreat and beyond
      ii. Increased capacity to host
   f. Improve communication with groups at Lake Blackshear
   g. Spur line to Andersonville & site
   h. Packages/coordinate events with youth sporting events
   i. Coordinate community calendar & planning/training on how to use it
   j. Become a regional hub/leader
   k. Develop a task force to market events for partner entities
   l. Familiarize all partners with capabilities of others
   m. Do “farm” tour for local entities (it’s also been a while since done for state regional allies)
   n. More “special event” training (i.e. Paula Dean)
   o. Planning with Civil War seque-centennial anniversary
   p. Need cross-functional organization to “bust silos”
   q. CVB umbrella a possibility
   r. Need vibrant Saturday/Sunday businesses – currently a limitation
   s. Need to develop targets based on capabilities – well conceived
   t. No “red dirt” aesthetics
   u. Hwy. 19 = unique opportunity
   v. Need strategies to reach metro market at little cost
   w. Guerilla marketing with current media: 1) you tube/student involvement, 2) social media, & 3) use writers to feature products/stories without using advertising
   x. Planned/mapped out tours – make it easy
   y. Farmers Market
   z. Ag tours – hands on experience
   aa. Maximize web priorities – move up on search engine
3. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what data/information would you need to assist you with making decisions? Who potentially has that information, and how are you going to get it?
   a. Meeting spaces/locations
   b. Bed spaces
   c. Digital website for both meeting and bed spaces
   d. Database of decision makers/client bases
   e. Food, fun, & learning = key attractions
   f. Tourism council meets monthly

4. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what would your strategies be?
   See question 2 above for group’s brainstorming ideas.

5. Noting that tonight’s meeting is a first opportunity to bring people together around these economic sectors, what other organizations and/or individuals need to be included in the conversation as the work moves forward?
   a. Restaurateurs
   b. Hoteliers
   c. Merchants
   d. Tourism council meets monthly

6. What are the next steps? (What will be accomplished in one month’s time? A second meeting is expected. What will happen at that meeting? And who needs to be at that meeting? Need to schedule time/date/place).
   a. Tourism council is important to the facilitation of many of these ideas

Healthcare

1. What is happening in this community that you are aware of around this economic sector (e.g. – what are the current efforts of the community to keep existing and/or recruit new business/industry in this sector)?
   a. New partnership with Phoebe Sumter Medical Center
   b. Growth at Magnolia Manor
   c. Perfect Care (assisted living)
   d. Sumter Retirement
   e. Southland Ridge (new)
   f. Pharmaceuticals & health education companies – expecting growth
   g. Home health

2. What should be happening in this community (e.g. if you were in charge, what are some broad, overarching goals you would have for this economic sector)?
a. Physician and medical professional recruitment & retention (on-going)
   i. Be smart about recruitment/retention (targeted at right people)
   ii. Identify and recruit those who grew up here
b. Improve overall quality of life
c. Improve work force quality (e.g. – certified nursing assistants and registered nurses)
d. Coordinate with what’s happening at Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech in the way of trainings and curriculum
   i. Health building at Georgia Southwestern
e. Market new hospital → become model for the nation
   i. Consider RCI assistance

3. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what data/information would you need to assist you with making decisions? Who potentially has that information, and how are you going to get it?
   a. Understand the community’s perception regarding quality of care
      i. Need to survey community
      ii. Market what we have both externally and internally

4. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what would your strategies be?
   a. Increase the size of community
      i. “recruit patients” (returning young retirees)
   b. Utilize local higher education to address healthcare training
      i. E.g. – optometrist program
      ii. Current MCG partnership for residencies will help

5. Noting that tonight’s meeting is a first opportunity to bring people together around these economic sectors, what other organizations and/or individuals need to be included in the conversation as the work moves forward?
   a. Public school system
      i. Workforce
   b. Both higher education institutions
   c. New physicians
   d. Rick Davis/Southland Ridge development

6. What are the next steps? (What will be accomplished in one month’s time? A second meeting is expected. What will happen at that meeting? And who needs to be at that meeting? Need to schedule time/date/place)?
   a. Continued discussion around recruiting retirees/baby boomers (i.e – quality of life – health care)
   b. Marketing plan
   c. Continue to support hospital efforts
   d. Enhance partnerships
Higher Education

1. What is happening in this community that you are aware of around this economic sector (e.g. what are the current efforts of the community to keep existing and/or recruit new business/industry in this sector)?
   a. Need to keep graduates in the community
   b. Improve connections between business needs and what Georgia Southwestern has to offer
   c. Increase enrollment at Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech
   d. Budget concerns
   e. Increase student housing at Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech
   f. Great collaboration between the two institutions
   g. South Georgia Tech moving toward COC accreditation
   h. Retailers reaching out to students, faculty, and staff
   i. More students from outside Americus
      i. In-state
      ii. Regional
      iii. International
   j. Georgia Southwestern partnering with two-year colleges
   k. New programs at Georgia Southwestern
      i. Professional golf management
      ii. Criminal
      iii. Health & human science building
   l. New programs at South Georgia Tech
      i. Basic law enforcement
      ii. Work ready
   m. Business and industry partnerships
      i. Electrical linesman
      ii. Aviation
      iii. Welding
         1. Total of 400 jobs waiting for graduates
   n. Continuing education programs at both
   o. Increased infrastructure
   p. Increase on-campus residences for both
   q. Nursing program at Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech at capacity
   r. Enhanced athletic programs at both

2. What should be happening in this community (e.g. if you were in charge, what are some broad, overarching goals you would have for this economic sector)?
   a. Tell more people about the assets (Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech)
   b. More community higher education collaboration
   c. Increase secondary/postsecondary collaboration
   d. Community needs to provide more – social opportunities, movie theater, bowling
e. Community support for on-campus activities – sports, culture
f. Grow enrollment
   i. May need a catalyst
   ii. Determine our niche
g. Health care focus
h. Tie community goals, higher education, and K-12 together
i. Best little college town in Georgia
j. Increase specialty degrees

3. If you were in charge of keeping existing and/or recruiting new business/industry in this sector of the community, what would your strategies be?
   a. Competitive edge on marketing
   b. Events for college town
   c. Community needs visible spokesman for advertising
d. Internship programs for Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech
e. Need more informed community champions – educate community on value of students
f. Scholarships for local students to attend both – institutions collaborate
g. Get more high school students in classes at Georgia Southwestern and South Georgia Tech to retain in community
h. Community advisory group – Archway college town working group
i. Maximize alumni – get them more involved

4. What are the next steps? (What will be accomplished in one month’s time? A second meeting is expected. What will happen at that meeting? And who needs to be at that meeting? Need to schedule time/date/place)? In general, what do you want to see happen?
   a. College town task-force meeting
   b. Leverage the two institutions to facilitate recruitment of industry – website & marketing information
c. Consider a football program to keep students in community on weekends
d. Address funding – tuition increases
e. Need more part time jobs for students
f. Make industry aware of pool of skilled graduates

NEXT STEPS

Participants were directed during the opening session and through the queuing questions to recommend the next steps needed to further discussions and begin taking action. As many of the responses reflect, additional data may be needed for action to occur. Each participant will receive a copy of the report, as well as direction for moving forward with the process. Each participant is encouraged to continue working with the subject matter they discussed, and join other topics should they so desire. It is imperative that steps be
taken to continue the overall dialogue in the community of how Americus and Sumter County can benefit from recruiting jobs and sustaining the intermodal port, tourism, healthcare, and higher education sectors. The Archway Partnership recommends, and will facilitate according to the directions of the City, BOC and PDA, that each group choose a leader and assign specific responsibilities to various individuals. It is critical that additional follow-up meetings be established and that members of each group understand their responsibilities to ensure the needs and desires of the community are addressed.