

Discussion notes from Christiansburg meeting, March 19, 2009
Taken by Mel Jones

What to do NOW

People:

- There are many people who would like to volunteer in the community. We should therefore, broadcast opportunities for them. We must take care to broadcast those opportunities to everyone, not just certain classes or groups with certain access to information.
- We need to promote cooperation between school boards and local governments.
- Communities need to offer workshops for entrepreneurs and if such classes are already being offered we need to make sure everyone knows about them.
- Health care needs to be accessible and affordable.
- As the economy gets worse, there should be a clearinghouse accessible to the general population. Everyone should know who to call and who to turn to for information and support. If Virginia 211 can fulfill this need, we need to make sure everyone knows about that service.
- We need to keep housing and food affordable.
- Additionally, we need affordable, accessible higher education and life long learning.
- Affordable family entertainment is also a concern. Entertainment is the first part of personal budgets to get cut in hard times, so the community should try to provide more “Radford After Five” kinds of entertainment.
- High school students need to be able to take class at the region’s universities. Too often there are scheduling conflicts.

Employment/Business/Industry:

- We need to recognize job worth.
- We should consider how farming can support our communities as well as the individuals and businesses that make up those communities.
- We should create an entrepreneur network so that entrepreneurs in the NRV can work together, be social and share business opportunities.
- There has been a boom in the market for local foods that we should not ignore, it is an excellent opportunity.
- We can use local arts as a business center piece. The arts are often a catalyst for community economies. We should not consider the arts as something extra, outside of our economy. Instead, we should take advantage of existing facilities (including the one being built by Virginia Tech) to enhance the quality of life in our region and thereby attract people who bring with them valuable assets.

- Economic and business development processes are fragmented. People need to know where to get help if they have a business or development idea they would like to pursue. Entrepreneurs need help to plan businesses from the very beginning.
- We should continue to focus on NRV downtown projects. We need to emphasize both market and brand.
- Marketing and public relations are important to all of the ideas mentioned above. We must market what we have.
- We need to consider new, technology oriented business and not simply promote the old industrial development model.

Community and Resources:

- We should promote residents to use libraries and take advantage of life-long learning opportunities.
- Virginia Tech Arts initiatives are great opportunities for the region. We should take advantage of those initiatives.
- Existing economic development projects should be completed.
- We should accelerate research for alternative energy and implement what we already know is effective.
- We may be able to tap into the school bus system to help with other transportation needs.
- We need to utilize and upgrade existing resources instead of proposing new development projects.
- In order to get people to job opportunities, we should expand transit within and between towns.
- Virginia Tech's climate action effort is producing a lot of valuable information. That information however, is not accessible to lay people. We should encourage Tech to disseminate this information to everyone.
- To improve rural transit, we should facilitate ride sharing and car pools.

Infrastructure and Energy:

- Green infrastructure is the newest perspective emphasized in comprehensive planning. It involves considering how the natural environment should help focus the built environment. We should consider how this perspective might help the NRV develop.

What to do Today for the FUTURE

People:

- Our region should dramatically increase taxes for education.
- We should initiate some form of parenting skill counseling.
- Availability of child care is limited, we should find ways to provide more affordable child care opportunities.
- We should promote and expand the philosophy “love children.”

Business, Employment and Industry:

- The region should increase small business incentives.
- We must promote employment opportunities that provide a living wage in the New River Valley.
- We should shift our industry recruitment focus from large employers to emphasize small scale employers.
- We should initiate summer work programs for teens.

Community Resources/ Culture:

- We should encourage regulation and programs to protect the region’s rivers for our children.
- Accessibility to outdoor activities should be improved and advertised.

Infrastructure and Energy:

- We should initiate regional programs to decrease energy dependence.
- In order to promote regional sustainability and energy efficiency we should encourage people to undertake life-style simplification.
- We need to incentivize carpooling.
- High speed transit would promote regional economic development.
- The region should shorten transit vehicle purchasing process.
- We must promote research and development of green infrastructure.