

**Discussion notes from Radford meeting, February 26, 2009**  
**Taken by Mel Jones**

**What to do NOW**

*People:*

- Retrain workers that have been laid off in order to give them skills for which there is a high demand. Those who have been laid off worked in the furniture and textile industries which have left and will not return. There are now opportunities in tourism and technology. The retraining must have an IT component in order to allow those participating in retraining to get higher paying jobs.
- We need to provide more K-12 IT instruction.
- When the economy is down there, the demand for higher education increases. We can take advantage of this tendency by supporting Radford University which has recently put emphasis on graduate education. The added emphasis on graduate education will attract valuable individuals to our community.
- A lot of people have volunteered to help others get GEDs, but not many people take advantage of those volunteers. Perhaps there is a stigma surrounding studying to get one's GED. We might remove that stigma by putting a GED preparation program at RU, Virginia Tech or the NRV Community College. There are some people that would take advantage of the program if they could blend in with students at one of the universities or the community college.
- We need a drug court in order to give kids more appropriate punishment for less serious crimes. People who are not violent are given minimum sentences of 2-5 years in our regional jail. This punishment is excessive and expensive.
- Substance abuse education should change to focus on prevention rather than punishments.
- We need to promote the creative arts in our school and community because they are one way of helping our youth become creative problem solvers.
- We need basic personal finance training for youth and disadvantaged populations.
- Additionally, people in our community need "soft skill" training. People don't know how to dress for work or interviews; don't know how to fill out applications or the protocol for coming/being punctual to work.

*Employment/Business/Industry:*

- We need to rely on local resources, rather than on the region's universities.
- We should put forth the effort to patronize local businesses.
- We should adopt a policy where 35-40% of items for the local government are purchased from small businesses run by minorities or women.

- Business incubators are available. In order to promote their usage we should let people use them for free for a few months. Many businesses need incubator resources since they don't have a good business plans and don't understand the work ethic required to maintain a business.
- We need to provide start up information, mentoring and a support system for new, small businesses.
- Businesses and employers need to be encouraged to be involved in our community and participate in efforts such as the Vision 2020 plan update.
- We should work with unemployed people to find out what interests and skill sets they already have, but haven't pursued or used since they have been employed. We need to encourage entrepreneurship among those who are unemployed. There are micro finance opportunities that are not being used.
- We must evaluate the needs of citizens and use that evaluation to assess the training programs we have in place. We have five work force centers that are underused and need to be promoted.
- We should encourage communication, becoming public information officers not with holders. We need to understand and utilize different types of media (e-mail, text messaging) in order to better disseminate information.

*Community Resources:*

- There are opportunities for revenue at Claytor Lake and the New River. People involved with the enhancement of these areas for public enjoyment say that we are just at the tip of the ice berg as far as its utilization. These are sites that will draw tourists into the area if there are more amenities such as bed and breakfasts and campsites for them to enjoy.

*Energy:*

- There are programs that will help mature individuals reduce energy costs in their homes by installing better insulation and long lasting, low energy light bulbs. We should promote these programs.
- Promote recycling facilities and facilitate community recycling through curb side recycling, for example.
- There are no projects/studies relating to the feasibility of alternative energy. If we initiate such projects and find what forms of alternative energy are feasible for our community we could take advantage of Economic Stimulus monies.

*Infrastructure:*

- We need broadband to be widely available. It is as important as improvements to road and sewer systems.
- We should promote regional mass transit, perhaps and energy efficient rail way system.
- We need to change prohibitive utility fees for business. For instance it is approximately \$300 to hook up water in a home, but \$1500 for a business.
- We should consider regionalization of utilities and other infrastructure.

## **What to do Today for the FUTURE**

### *People:*

- We need a school breakfast program.
- We need to bring community and education together. Schools should be involved in community service and the community should be involved in education. We should have the grocer come to speak to classes, for example.
- We should create an internship program in community businesses for 6<sup>th</sup> graders in order to promote entrepreneurship.
- There should be a business liaison in each school who can say “We have students, how can they work for/learn from you?”
- Our park spaces are lacking and we don’t have many recreational opportunities for teenagers.
- We need to promote K-16 seamless education.
- Children’s education and happiness should be a priority in order to keep families in our community and encourage other families to move here.
- We need to promote computer literacy in children.
- Provide laptops for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.
- Promote travel through organized trips, for example.
- Attract a more diverse community in order to energize the community.
- We need to promote the acceptance of diversity. We should train everyone for world peace.
- Youth need to be on community commissions and involved in the local government.
- We have to break poverty cycles.
- Include “soft skill” and work ethic education in job training programs.
- We don’t have a public pool.

### *Energy:*

- We should have alternative energy education in High Schools. There is and will continue to be high demand for people in the alternative energy field.
- We should promote the “Go Green” message
- We should invest in green technology
- We should upgrade the Little River hydro-electric plant in order to increase its production capacity.

### *Infrastructure:*

- We should promote wi-fi technology as a way to get Broadband to everyone in the area.

*Community Resources/ Culture:*

- We need to encourage dance, theater, music and performance training. We need the richness coming from individual, private teachers. We need to rebuild the importance/value placed on culture.
- We should connect park paths.