

Meeting Notes, Columbia Economic Development Corporation

Friday February 12, 2016

Compiled by Victoria Storrs

These are not minutes, but a memo of important ideas and questions raised during discussions.

County Demographics (discussion after presentation)

Requests for more information:

- Traded vs. Local clusters – get information that shows trend between 2009 and 2013 to see where, for example, the auto sales/repair drop occurred.
- Try to capture the economic contribution of second homeowners – past initiative looked to see where tax bills were mailed out of county.
- Data on unemployment [more], discouraged workers, and source of employment – try to capture home based and other types work not captured in numbers shown. (*Alyson said she knows where to get this.*)
- % of people on public assistance.
- Veteran’s unemployment – does number include seniors or represent veterans who want work and can’t find it.

Mission Statement

Role of CEDC in applying for and managing grants for business:

- CEDC not currently reimbursed when it incurs expense but dollars can be substantial.
- Not all companies have resources to do this so CEDC should have a role to play.
- What is standard practice in industry on activity and cost reimbursement?
- Getting involved can be a good idea but CEDC would have to add staff .

4 Pillars

Infrastructure

- Broadband: not a good idea to get involved in speculative investments but “if you don’t build it they won’t come.”
- Infrastructure could be presented as a package; water/sewer, power, broadband together in certain sites.

Approvals Process, Planning, Sustainability

- Wait times can discourage projects.
- CFA projects risk non-completion because of process.
- How to build support [in advance] so a project doesn’t get stopped?

- Possibility of CEDC acting as leader or moderator, e.g. performing a generic environmental impact statement so when projects are proposed it is clear early whether it is suitable.
- Basic structures for planning are needed. What is CEDC role when planning is done by towns and villages, something not expected to change?
- Be a voice, advocate, raise issues, put together resources. Don't just react.
- CEDC is not a government so it can ask "what if?"
- CEDC can generate projects, build a series of persuasive arguments and eventually "make it impossible to say no."

Workforce and Education

- Poverty level is unconscionable.
- Current quality of schools much diminished from prior generations.
- Projected 26% decrease in school-age population. Who will be the future residents and consumers?
- High participation in school lunch throughout county; it's not just an urban issue.
- 50% or more of high school graduates not considered "college ready" by state standards.
- State's focus on Regents as only path leaves out other opportunities for success.
- Could CEDC have role in high school internship programs.

Economic Development Issues (discussion moderated by Alyson Slack)

- CEDC should do more business mitigation, navigation, addressing of climate issues.
- Look into reviving idea of one-stop web portal – why was effort by another organization abandoned?
- "Concierge" is a good word to describe these services. It is not currently clear who would be first contact, nor is there a program for keeping records of contacts, queries.
- University development arms can serve as a model for how to "push the envelope" and share what CEDC learns with other stakeholders. If groundwork has been done and relationships improved CEDC can more readily make the case for a project.
- Engage town supervisors about needs and try to fill them, e.g. a shoestore in Philmont.¹
- Proactive could mean:
 - Talk to towns about what CEDC offers, for example loans.
 - "Rurbanism" = city and village amenities combined with rural landscape.
 - Reach out to industries investing elsewhere in region to see what complementary businesses might suit the county even if direct project (e.g. semiconductor plant) is unlikely.

¹ Alyson suggests retail leakage analysis in response to additional comments about loss of retail in county

Funding Model, Organizational Management

- Possibility of being authorized to do SBA loans in Rensselaer County as in Greene.
- Staff reorganization and human resources processes underway soon.
- CEDC Board members will undergo Authorities Budget Office training (required.)

Creating Successes

Regionally

- Be more engaged in region – the boundaries are becoming blurred.
- Try to find a home for a project unsuitable in county but appropriate elsewhere.

Within the County

- Engage broadly, not just certain people or businesses.
- Go after low-hanging fruit, let people see what can be accomplished.
- Recognize difference between what people say they want and what they need.

Next Steps

- Public feedback (planned)
- Update to the 3-page statement (suggestion)
- Develop a list of 8 measurable activities for the coming year (suggestion)
- Move forward on search for new President (planned)