



PRESS RELEASE

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First East Lewis County Economic Development Summit Begins Process of Strategic Planning for Economic Growth

On Friday, Sept. 8, 2006, more than 30 local and regional business owners, community leaders, community volunteers, and planning and development experts met at Lake Mayfield Resort for the first East Lewis County Economic Development Summit, presented by the East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce. The Summit was sponsored by Integrity Realty and Mortgage Services and TDS Telecom.

Four of the six candidates for County Commissioner positions were participants at the Summit – Mark Bolender (R) of Silver Creek, Lynn Hamilton (R) of Salkum, Ken Norberg (D) of Toledo (all candidates for district 3); and Ron Averill (R), candidate for district 1. Also represented were leaders and staff from WorkSource Lewis County, Centralia College, South Puget Sound Community College, Lewis County Community Development Department, City of Mossyrock, USDA Rural Development, Rep. Brian Baird’s office, Onalaska and Mossyrock School Districts, Lewis County Economic Development Council, Tacoma Power, United Way of Lewis County, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, and Don’t Meth Around in Lewis County. Local businesses represented included Aldrich Berry Farm, DeGoede Bulb Farm and Gardens, Happs, Inc., Integrity Realty and Mortgage Services, Lake Mayfield Resort and Marina, and Timber Country Credit Union.

The event opened with speeches by Jack DeGoede, co-owner of DeGoede Bulb Farm and Gardens, and Robert A. (Bob) Johnson, Director, Lewis County Department of Community Development. The attendees then went into four separate working groups, each tasked to identify the strengths, assets, gaps, and problems of their particular topic as it relates to economic development. The working groups then formulated recommendations and presented their findings to the entire group of Summit participants.

A major theme of all group recommendations was greater coordination between government agencies, civic entities, businesses, and other relevant organizations. A regional, comprehensive approach to solving problems and setting the stage for planned growth was advocated, with

greater local involvement and input. The working group members and their recommendations are listed below:

Growth Management Act & Land Use, facilitated by Bob Johnson, Director, Lewis County Community Development Department.

Group members: Glenn Aldrich, Ron Averill, Mark Bolender, Jamie Fike, Bob Guenther, Lynn Hamilton, Barb Kinkaid, Gerald Rothmayer.

Recommendations:

1. Regional cooperation and participation in drafting a Unified Comprehensive Plan to use as a true guide for development within the County – Establish and use coalitions
2. County office to market the County resources/tourism/recreation.
3. Establish statewide Rural Caucus (Counties, cities, schools, fire districts, civic org., etc)
 - Change laws to benefit rural areas
 - Funding for rural issues
4. Explore “Port” opportunities
 - Existing Ports
 - Airports
 - Others” (PDAs)

Education & Workforce Training, facilitated by Lee Stevens, Director, WorkSource Lewis County

Group members: Karen Ernest, Jennifer Kelly, Bill Little, Dale McDaniel, Joan Meister, Connie Robertson.

Recommendations:

1. Workforce Training
 - Early Childhood Education and Literacy. To be truly successful you must train people from the beginning in what it takes to hold a job.
 - Soft skills (dependability, punctuality, social skills, dress, cleanliness, etc) must be taught as well as technical skills.
2. Mentoring Programs
 - Mentoring programs between students and successful members of the business community are very effective. People respond to one-on-one support.

- People need extra support going to school if they are the first in their family to attempt it (higher ed.).

3. Integration

- All Lewis County agencies and businesses must join together in a partnership promoting programs that further community goals.
- It really does take the whole village to raise a child to become a productive adult.

4. Public Transportation

- This is a big barrier to education and employment. We need a better system in place so people can get to proper resources.
- This system needs to be affordable and convenient.

5. Work with your Representatives

- Get laws in place that allow flexibility in education so that students wanting to enter the Trades can do so without having to meet the educational level of those entering college.
- Law makers want to work for their supporters, but they can't read your minds.

6. Strategic Planning

Decide where we want to go and what industry we want in the county, train our students to fill jobs to be created, then go out and market Lewis County to the industries we want. Don't wait for them to come to us. That way we have control over our own development.

Rural Business Development & Tourism, facilitated by Victor Vasquez, PhD candidate and former Special Assistant to Director, CTED

Group members: Richard Berdan, Beth Fullerton, Maureen Harkcom, Ken Norberg, Mark Scire, Melissa Taylor, Don Wagoner.

Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with existing resources and tie to the Chamber strategic plan:

- Use Washington State Business incubator program (POC Lincoln Ferris 206-527-3347)
- Use Centralia College as central partner
- USDA has rural housing and sewer development resources per www.rurdev.usda.gov
- Use Lending Network for business loans

2. Improve business networking

- The Chamber or some entity needs to bring the business community together for greater collaboration
- A Chamber sponsored educational and information exchange to serve as a resource for all East Lewis County businesses –serve as the universal connector

3. Create incentives and publicize success stories

- Market our own businesses
- Develop recognition programs
- Quarterly introductions and welcome

4. Seek non-polluting businesses like Info Technology or R+D.

- High tech incubator and community outreach
- Study how to reuse existing site

5. Pull Community together--Develop Marketing theme so East Lewis county becomes known for a focused thing like Napa Valley=Wines

- Need to develop a East Lewis County (Theme or brand) focus--or develop a lifestyle concept/clean living

Social Services, Community Support, and Demographics, facilitated by Debbie Campbell, Executive Director, United Way of Lewis County

Group members: John Austin, Jose Diaz, Lori Rashoff, Chris Van Horn, David Waller

Recommendations:

1. Establish an advisory committee between school districts, business and community based organizations
2. Youth Activities Grant Writer
3. Contact youth organizations to establish after school and summer programs
4. Resource directory for East Lewis County
5. More events that foster unity among agencies
6. Petition community leaders
7. Identify and invite diversity leaders

8. Cultural competency training
9. Seek outside help from Federal & State agencies
10. Invite media to broaden their coverage

Most of the participants in the four working groups have committed to continue as participants of the Chamber's Blue Ribbon Panel on Economic Development. They will meet beginning in October to begin prioritizing the above recommendations and set goals, action plans, and schedules for implementation. Others interested in being part of this process are welcome to contact Paul Stewart, Executive Director of the East Lewis County Chamber of Commerce, at 360-983-3778.

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