

Visioning 2026 E.D. Focus Group Session 2

November 16, 2006

11:30 – 1:00 p.m.

Chamber Office

Present: Cindy Johnson, Debb Hickman, RJ Baker, Susan Lutz, Leslie Coleman, Tom Higginbotham, Virgil Froehlich, Joe Ferguson, Dan Mauk, Mark Hall, Pam Carlson, Jennifer Adams

Introductions were made around the room and the group was asked to review the notes from last weeks session.

Financing, Virgil asked the group, as he was not there and did not see any mention of it in the notes, if anything was discussed about financing or funding for economic development? We need financial assistance for start up costs for new entrepreneurs. Why is the city not spending the .5% sales tax increased voted for a few years back on E.D.?

RJ explained that the sales tax portion was passed but there was no verbiage on the ballot as to what designation the city should spend the new tax dollars. Thus the city can spend it anyway they like.

Joe stated he felt the citizens of Norfolk were misled by the City.

Dan stated that the businesses in town bought into and helped promote the LB840 legislation, however, by keeping the two issues separated on the ballot the E.D. portion was voted down, while the city got what they wanted. Maybe, we could put forth for consideration a plan that would include revolving loan funding to get new businesses here.

Joe stated that we would need to examine what other communities are doing as far as E.D. funding, and get the figures together to present to the community. Many smaller communities are have a lot more money available than our city.

Mark suggested that we look at a more regional development, we are already ahead of the game in some areas here with RJ's organization already working for a 4-county area, we need to take advantage of this more.

Virgil stated we need more one to one with potential and current entrepreneurs.

RJ, we have Karen who does work one to one and is currently servicing 26 clients in the area.

Mark suggested a creation of a venture capitol network, there are investors out there, most people don't know about them. It's tough to find funding, would need seed money, something to get them started, this may be something we should look at.

Virgil asked, how do we get them going, there are a lot of good ideas out there.

Mark explained that the UN Extension office in Lincoln is developing a Entrepreneur Skills Investigation program which include business plan education, where to seek funding assistance. This program starts with the FHA with a younger age group to get the excited about developing a business. Creation of some type of scholarship fund for students who have creative new ideas, this would create a more nurturing community.

Cindy, funds are out there, help is out there, how do we find them?

RJ, we have funds for forgivable loans in our budget.

Cindy, how do we get professionals to want to come here?

Joe, we need the new entrepreneur to educate them self, take the time to do the research as to what they need and where to find and apply for funding.

Mark, how do we integrate FBLA into school system?

Joe, we have the best plans available, but institutions can't take on any more programs, there is not enough education funding dollars or the staff to implement the programs, many of the programs that are available are available for k-12 introduction.

Mark, should we bring business owners in to the classroom.

RJ, we could have demonstrative projects introduced thru Senator Nelson into the Senate.

Joe, Grand funding provides special training labs at the college for brilliant students who are bored with the traditional school curriculum, this program could be expanded to include all students.

Mark, could we as a community use wireless communication so students could stay at their own high school to participate in the higher learning classes via satellite and have them travel only for the lab work session.

Joe, Classroom space is not available, except for in the evenings. Traditional learning practices takes precedence, no child left behind. It would be difficult to get the kids back to school in the evenings to take advantage of this type of learning.

Dan, should we look at a program that focuses on the baby boomers, to prepare them for retirement? This program would include how to train younger entrepreneurs in all aspects of the business, giving them time to learn the business and when retirement time comes, the retiree would have someone in place to continue the business. The community would not lose that business due to retirement and the young entrepreneur would have what he wants a business of their own.

Virgil, how do we get the smaller community behind one business to keep it open? Groceries store in Coleridge was kept open because the communities got behind it, however, this does not always happen and businesses close in smaller communities.

Dan, maybe we should seek funding from Wal-Mart, they are trying to erase the negative view from consumers concerning the closing of the mom & pop stores who can't compete in the area where a Wal-Mart is built. Funding from Wal-Mart to assist the mom & pop stores to help them stay open.

Dan did a verbal review of the discussion and points brought to focus thus far, they are in not particular order of preference:

- 1) Regional – Improve collaboration –
- 2) Global Internet
- 3) Education – Enhance entrepreneurship
- 4) Health
- 5) Population
- 6) Transportation

Discussion continued:

Mark, think more regional partnerships are need to invest in TANN Program, where are these resources and how do we find them?

Virgil, S. Sioux City is having outstanding growth, they also have a full time E.D. Person but he has the funding behind him.

Joe, Potential prospects meet with city, chamber, county, school and utility officials and they speak as one voice. This provides for relationship building with the prospects. Prospects leave the meeting excited about the community and desire to become a part of it. They have an annual community banquet showcasing each partner who takes time to speak on what their portions of the successes were for that year.

Mark, looking at question 7: What aspects of our current economic development/entrepreneurship system do we feel need a fresh approach? Maybe we should create a one stop shop.

Mark, then looking at question 8: What ideas do you have for positively transforming our economic development/entrepreneurship system?

Cindy, maybe we should consider moving our youth towards something besides sports activities, here that is a limited prospect and there are many students who don't make the team, we need something for them then to do.

Joe, we need a different face for E.D and the Chamber office. City and NPS admin buildings are bad as well, how can we get the community behind getting some type of new/different building, put on a campaign?

RJ, need to keep central identity by staying downtown

Mark, need to maybe look at using the .5% sales tax for funding source.

Dan, how do we change the perception that may be out there? Perception is that our city is not friendly, difficult to work with for existing and new business ventures. Columbus is perceived as a good city to work with. We need to create a perception of a business friendly atmosphere. RJ, new building should include non-profit partnerships, such as NE. Nebraska ED District. Tom, new business owners are looking for the best deal

*The Education Focus group discussed building wealth in there last session.*

RJ Business recruitment, there are so many uncontrollable's when working with brining in new prospects.

What about transportation, we need public access, expressway expansion should continue, we need high quality airport, railway system with some type alternative system in place for back up.

RJ, Should we consider a regional airport between here and Columbus? This would open up land to create an industrial park, the city may consider investing in the infrastructure of the land to make it shovel ready.

Debb, our community and this area is stuck with the "we can get by mentality", we deserve more, how do we change the mindset that we don't have to just get by?

As time was coming to a close, the group agreed on the following to be considered for the next phase of the visioning process, public poling to be done in the spring of 2007.

A) Regional – Improve collaboration –

- a) County, City, All Resources
- b) Educate public on how and why of E.D.
- c) Finance:
  - ❖ support and nurture new and existing businesses,
  - ❖ support Active E.D. Process
  - ❖ Create Venture Capitol funding

B) Improve image of City, E.D., Chamber, Tourism and School offices

- a) New Building to possible house all and may include more non-profits
- b) Create Business Ready/Friendly atmosphere
- c) Creation of Industrial Park

C) Education – Enhance entrepreneurship

- a) Schools K-12 and at NECC
- b) JR. Achievement, FBLA and or similar3
- c) TANN Academy like partnership
- d) Career Awareness
- e) Business Transition (Next generation)

D) Transportation

- a) Local Public Access
- b) Highway to expressway
- c) High Quality Airport