

Community Leadership Workshop Summary

The Horizon Project

Ramada Inn and Conference Center

Goshen, Indiana

September 11, 2002

Introduction

Over 120 persons met in September 2002 for the first of three Community Leadership Workshops. The goals of this workshop were to:

- Understand the economic and demographic analysis which was presented
- Identify economic, demographic, and social strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities (SWOT) for Elkhart County; set initial priorities for focusing attention and action
- Identify priorities for greater input through focus groups

The first page of this summary is a list of priorities for increased attention over the next 10 years. The second section (pages 2-8) is organized by community segment and topic: Government, Education, Cultural Diversity, Business Development, Redevelopment, Community Development, and Leadership Development.

Priorities for the Next 10 Years

Which strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and strengths should get increased attention over the next 10 years?

1. **Strengthen county-wide land-use planning:** roads, utilities, sewer, water, sprawl, growth management (44 votes by individuals)
2. **Strengthen cooperation and coordination** among elected officials and among local, county, and regional planning agencies; also concern for coordinated implementation (37)
3. **Strengthen educational attainment;** preparing the current and future workforce (36)
4. **Cultural diversity** – must deal with it well, including housing and social services (20)
5. **Competition** – national and global; implications for incentives, property tax rates, and the workforce (15)
6. **Redevelopment of “brown field” areas:** underutilized and abandoned houses and buildings (14)
7. **Opportunities to attract commuters to become residents;** implications for housing, quality of life, and education (13)
8. **Build on entrepreneurial spirit;** grow our own businesses (12)
9. **Lack of broadband capacity** (8)
10. **Danger of being too comfortable with the status quo** (6)
11. **Strengthen early childhood education and services** (6)
12. **Midwest location;** close to many large markets (5)

13. Lack of public transportation (2)**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats**

This section is organized by sectors of the community and by topic. Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 years were identified through the votes of individuals. When more than one individual supported a priority, this is noted by a number such as (5). All strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were identified and reported by table discussion groups of eight persons each. When more than one table group identified an item, it is noted also with a number such as (3)

Some priorities for increased attention overlap several segments of the community and some topics also have overlap. For the sake of simplicity all priorities are listed only once under one segment or topic. Most strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are also listed under just one community segment or topic.

Additional comments and ideas from written feedback forms are included at the end of each section, following the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) material.

Government**Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years**

- Strengthen county-wide land-use planning: roads, utilities, sewer, water, sprawl, growth management (44 persons with this priority)
- Strengthen cooperation and coordination among elected officials and among local, county, and regional planning agencies; also concern for coordinated implementation (37)
- Lack of public transportation (2)

Strengths

Leadership

- Good inter-governmental cooperation

Weaknesses

Leadership and Coordination

- Lack of land-use planning; no master plan for infrastructure development (4)
- Fragmentation of efforts – governmental and private; sometimes relates to the use of incentives (3)
- Inadequate community leadership (2)
- Poor management of growth

Transportation

- Lack of public transportation
- Inadequate road transportation capacity
- Weak north-south transportation routes
- No direct air service

Opportunities

Land use planning

- Maximize the use of developed areas through better land use policies (2)
- Better land use planning: improve core areas in cities and gateways to cities, and redevelop brown-fields and vacant land within cities
- Develop greater tax uniformity in the cities and the county
- Preserve farmland through the redevelopment of underutilized land already within cities

Countywide approach

- This Horizon Project effort to develop a countywide approach with more collaboration (5)
- Develop the attitude of being a county team rather than parochial city approaches

Threats

Governmental policies

- Property taxes discourage business growth, retention, and attraction
- Lack of infrastructure planning, especially roads
- Urban sprawl
- Lack of public dollars makes it difficult to be proactive, e.g., infrastructure development and guiding growth
- Excessive government regulation and unfunded mandates

Environmental issues

- Environmental impact of business and farming practices
- Poor quality of surface water

Other ideas and concerns from written feedback

- Collaboration among municipalities, across county borders – regionally.
- Concern – “The public allowing the government units to work together to improve the county!”
- Concerned about loss of farmland (the rural community is the very basic foundation for our high values system and high work ethic). Farming also brings diversity to our income producing businesses.
- Although “land use” means addressing natural resources issues to me, I’m not sure it does to everyone. To improve the quality of life and attract anyone to our area, we must consider the physical (biological) community to meet human needs.
- Loss of farmland - and the backlash of this, which will be because of the lack of understanding and cooperation of business leaders.

Education

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Strengthen educational attainment; preparing the current and future workforce (36)
- Strengthen early childhood education and services (6)

Strengths

Community Attributes

- Educational opportunities

Weaknesses

Education

- Lack of educational attainment (5)
- Lack of early childhood educational services (2)
- Wide range of performance in school districts
- Lack of affordable [public] higher education

Opportunities

Community development

- Energize youth as our future workforce

Threats

Economy

- Brain drain – educated young people seek jobs elsewhere

Cultural diversity

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Cultural diversity – must deal with it well, including housing and social services (20)

Strengths

Values and identity

- Caring; shared values

Weaknesses

Values and Identity

- Lack of ability to embrace cultural diversity

Opportunities

Capitalize on cultural diversity

- Build Hispanic leadership
- Greater integration of diverse cultures
- Capitalize on cultural diversity

Threats

Community

- Dual language problems

Values and identity

- Comfort with the status quo

Business development

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Competition – national and global; implications for incentives, property tax rates, and the workforce (15)
- Build on entrepreneurial spirit; grow our own businesses (12)
- Lack of broadband capacity (8)
- Midwest location; close to many large markets (5)

Strengths

Competitive advantages

- Manufacturing base with key products (3)
- Affordable housing (3)
- Midwest location; close to major markets (3)
- Proximity to markets
- Low cost of living
- Good water sources
- Competitive utility costs
- Tourism industry

Weaknesses

Economy

- Loss of corporate headquarters and related white-collar jobs (3)
- Dependency on manufacturing; need to diversify
- Lack of diversity within the manufacturing sector
- Lack of economic incentives, both state and local
- Poor balance in job classification stratification; losing middle-income jobs

Transportation

- No direct air service

Infrastructure

- Lack of broadband capacity

Opportunities

Business development

- Deeper support for entrepreneurs and locally grown businesses (2)
- Build on competitive advantage of our location – proximity to resources and markets (2)
- Become a hub for business consolidation, rather than see our businesses get bought out by larger companies with corporate headquarters elsewhere
- Technology development and application
- Expand and attract companies involved in biotechnology
- Creation of more service-sector jobs
- Attract industry that compliments existing industries
- Support local bank infrastructure
- Attract businesses and workers to Elkhart County because of the low cost of living
- Diversify the economic base
- Aging population will create demands for more healthcare services

Threats

Business challenges

- Losing manufacturing jobs to other communities and other countries (4)
- Loss of quality jobs
- Loss and lack of venture capital
- Over-dependence on recreational vehicle and mobile home industries

Other ideas and concerns from written feedback

- Lack of high-speed, broadband is a problem (4)
- Technology jobs (2)
- We are so fortunate to be blessed with a good water supply for our many uses. I think many people are not aware how this is so vital to all of Elkhart County.
- Loss of jobs due to globalization
- Flight of white-collar jobs from Elkhart County is a huge, on-going problem – it drains leadership from the community and civic organizations.
- Be more proactive in attracting the “creative class” of people i.e. more cultural events, public art, preservation of historical sites and districts, museums, galleries, concerts, etc. Creative class people start technology and biotech companies.
- Development of local capital - local financial institutions or change financial institutions to focus on local and area growth
- “Economic and Tourism hub” – within 150 miles; 20% of GNP and 20% of national workforce

Redevelopment

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Redevelopment of “brown field” areas: underutilized and abandoned houses and buildings (14)

Strengths

- None listed

Weaknesses

- None listed

Opportunities

Land use planning

- Maximize the use of developed areas through better land use policies (2)
- Better land use planning: improve core areas in cities and gateways to cities, and redevelop brown-fields and vacant land within cities
- Develop greater tax uniformity in the cities and the county
- Preserve farmland through the redevelopment of underutilized land already within cities

Threats

- None listed

Other ideas and concerns from written feedback

- Downtown Development

Community development

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Opportunities to attract commuters to become residents; implications for housing, quality of life, and education (13)

Strengths

Community Attributes

- High quality of life (3)
- Availability of jobs (2)
- Cultural diversity
- Educational opportunities

Weaknesses

Economy

- Severity of poverty in concentrated areas
- The community is overtaxed by the high need for social services
- Lack of decent affordable housing

Health care and social services

- Current capacity of medical services is not able to meet demand, especially access to dental care

Opportunities

Community development

- Attract commuting workers to be residents in Elkhart County (2)
- Improve quality of life through better social services
- Use natural resources for parks and recreation
- Governmental entities have good bond ratings, so that they can borrow cheaply to make infrastructure investments [Note: I'm not sure that this is the correct interpretation of this comment – DK]
- Energize youth as our future workforce

Threats

Community

- Increase in non-traditional families
- Drugs
- Crime and personal safety
- Perceptions that crime and educational attainment levels are worse than they actually are
- Dual language problems
- Aging population may place a greater burden on the working generations

Values and identity

- Average per capita income is lower than the national average
- Poor persons are poorer than state averages

- Lack of skilled workers for technology industries because of poor educational attainment and the brain drain of educated workers to other parts of the county
- Comfort with the status quo
- Lack of fun

Other ideas and concerns from written feedback

- Make Elkhart County a single insurer for healthcare – will attract non-residents to be residents – make healthcare affordable
- Social services, family values, family erosion, single head of family – services to strengthen single head of family or weak dual parent families; most juvenile crime comes from weak parenting skills; support of developing children in education, interpersonal skills need to be enhanced (3)
- Gentrification of inner cities; crime/drugs we have poor people who are poorer than anywhere else in Indiana
- Establish a Nursing School (2); two good hospitals, aging society
- Develop cultural life – art, historical sites/districts, museums, galleries, concerts

Leadership Development

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Danger of being too comfortable with the status quo (6)

Strengths

Values and identity

- Entrepreneurial spirit (reported by 9 tables)
- Strong work ethic (4)
- Small town environment with big city can-do attitude
- Conservative values (hard work, honesty, family, etc.)
- Caring; shared values

Leadership

- Good community leadership (3)
- Political will to make changes and improvements

Weaknesses

Values and Identity

- Lack of ability to embrace cultural diversity
- Poor image – old manufacturing community
- Failure to adopt daylight savings time

Leadership and Coordination

- Fragmentation of efforts – governmental and private; sometimes relates to the use of incentives (3)
- Inadequate community leadership (2)
- Lack of development of future leaders
- Successful business owners earn their money in Elkhart county and then leave in retirement and spend their money elsewhere

Opportunities

Countywide approach

- This Horizon Project effort to develop a countywide approach with more collaboration (5)
- Develop the attitude of being a county team rather than parochial city approaches

Community development

- Energize youth as our future workforce

Threats

Leadership issues

- Exodus of corporate headquarters to other communities; losing the ability to support local activities (2)
- Not leading in a positive way on cultural diversity (2)
- Lack of leadership for cooperation among communities
- Lack of implementation following a planning process
- Loss of central business districts

Other ideas and concerns from written feedback:

- I would do a top-level review of the demographics of this assembled group. I am concerned that the average age is 40+. We are establishing direction for people that are currently in their 30's. Are their views similar to ours????
- Emphasize positive aspects and potential
- Many concerns and related solutions are in opposition to each other i.e. providing public utilities will increase the cost of living for a community.
- Importance of attitude and perception in setting goals
- Extend invitation to religious leaders
- Implementation of change - how do we make change happen?

Compiled 9/19/02

Revised 9/20/02

End