



Community Leadership Workshop Summary

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Introduction

About 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 is organized by community segment and topic: Government, Education, Cultural Diversity, Business Development, Redevelopment, Community Development, and Leadership Development. This order corresponds to the priorities that were set.

Priorities for the Next 10 Years

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

1. **Lack of county-wide land-use planning:** roads, utilities, sewer, water, sprawl, growth management (44 votes by individuals)
2. **Lack of cooperation and coordination** among elected officials and among local, county, and regional planning agencies; also concern for coordinated implementation (37)
3. **Lack of 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. **Lack of early childhood education and services** (6)
12. **Midwest location;** close to many large markets (5)
13. **Lack of public transportation** (2)

Introduction

This section is organized by sectors of the community and by topic. Priorities 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. When more than one table group identified an item, it is noted also with a number such as: (3)

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Some responsibilities 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.

Government

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Lack of county-wide land-use planning: roads, utilities, sewer, water, sprawl, growth management (44 persons with this priority)
- Lack of 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 unfounded mandates
- Environmental issues
 - Environmental impact of business and farming practices
 - Poor quality of surface water

Education

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

- Lack of educational attainment; preparing the current and future workforce (36)
- Lack of 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

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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)
- Midwest location; close to many large markets (5)
- Lack of broadband capacity (8)

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 localPoor 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 capitalOver-dependence on recreational vehicle and mobile home industries

Redevelopment

Priorities for increased attention over the next 10 Years

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

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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

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)
 - 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]
 - Improve quality of life through better social services
 - Use natural resources for parks and recreation
 - 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

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)

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- 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 the county for 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

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