

September 12, 2002

**WPJ'S COMMENTS BEFORE THE
HORIZON PROJECT COMMUNITY WORKSHOP ON 9/11/02**

You are here today to participate in the Horizon Project Community Leadership workshop.

The Horizon Project, today's vision for a dynamic Elkhart County tomorrow.

What is it? It is a plan designed to guide the community through the creation of a comprehensive vision for its future, community, economic and quality of life development activities. The process includes a complete analysis of the general economic climate of the community, supported by input from the community.

The Horizon Project is sponsored by the Elkhart County Community Foundation. The Horizon Project is guided by a steering committee consisting of private, public, and non-profit sector leaders, from throughout the county.

The Horizon Project is chaired by William Johnson, with Diana Lawson, of the Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau, serving as vice chair.

(At this point, introduce steering committee members.)

In my letter inviting you to this workshop, I stated we are at a pivotal time in the economic history of Elkhart County, to position it for positive changes. This process is key in facilitating those changes. Today, September 11, 2002, is the anniversary of a sad day in our nation's history. Perhaps we can remember it in no greater way than to begin the process for positive change in our community.

The Horizon Project encompasses several key objectives including:

- Conducting a comprehensive analysis of the demographic, social-economic and land use components of Elkhart County.

We will be sharing data today, and hope it will be expanded in today's and future meetings.

- Providing guidance, facilitation, and technical assistance in the creation of a comprehensive community based strategy for community and economic development.
- Building consensus on how the county should approach major issues through broad based community involvement.

It must be remembered that we as a steering committee, and as a group, have no authority and no direct responsibility. We can only hope to develop consensus among our governmental leaders as to what issues should be addressed, how they should be addressed, and by whom they should be addressed.

You are here to participate in input sessions to identify key issues which are attacking the county's development and overall quality of life. You are being asked, and will be asked to:

- Respond to and interpret demographic and economic analysis.
- Develop a comprehensive strategic plan.
- Commit to help in the implementation of the plan.

The last Elkhart County community planning meetings were held in 1991, with the help of Purdue University, and the Elkhart County Extension Office.

The outcome was the creation of taskforces in:

- Business development
- Education
- Growth management
- Human services
- Inter-governmental cooperation

Many of the people involved in that study were the impetus for suggesting that we do it again. Why? While there were some successes as the result of the 1991 study, implementation was not carried out in all areas.

More importantly, major trends developed in the 1990's, which I will quickly highlight:

- We had great industrial growth, but the use of technology and the development of needs for higher skilled workers did not grow.
- Ownership of industries in Elkhart County tended away from local ownership, and many of our good locally owned businesses are gone.
- Tourism became a greater component of our economy.
- Population and economic growth put great stress on our infrastructure.
- We saw a great expansion of urban sprawl.
- The educational needs of the county changed dramatically, and our achievement did not increase commensurately.

- We saw growth in non-traditional families.
- We saw a growth in senior citizens.
- Crime increased.
- We saw shrinkage of viable businesses in the “downtowns” of our two biggest cities.
- We saw a great change in the racial makeup of our county.

The steering committee feels we need a plan for a, “Thriving, sustainable economy”.

GROWTH WITH STABILITY:

HOW?

This is the issue we must struggle with.

To grow with stability means:

- We maintain a high quality of life – how?
 - Good schools
 - Affordable housing
 - Recreational opportunities
 - Adequate infrastructure
 - Effective governmental services
 - Clean environment
 - Open spaces
- We find a foundation for sustainable economic development.
 - Not dependent upon one industry
 - Adaptive to new technology
 - Promotes tourism
 - Protects our rural economy
 - Allows for new business formation and attracts a “white collar” component
 - Nurtures existing businesses

- We manage growth prudently.
 - Insure infrastructure in place?
 - Understands some opportunities must be turned down.
 - Provides for a vehicle which gives discipline and judgment to the economic development process.
 - Has balanced policy making, planning, and monitoring.
 - Promotes cooperative efforts between cities, towns, and county governments.
 - Allows for the input and involvement of concerned citizens.

These are our real challenges.

I will now turn the meeting to Elaine Fisher, the Director of the Center of Project Leadership, and our project leader, to explain the process we will use to do this, and what today's meeting is all about.

WPJ's closing comments:

I want to thank you all for coming and participating today. We had a wonderful turn out, and I think our first meeting was a huge success.

I would also like to relate to you a few other points.

In 1988, I was asked to become the founding chairman of the Elkhart County Community Foundation.

In my process of due diligence as to whether I wanted to do that or not, I spoke with the publishers of both of our major newspapers in Elkhart and Goshen. They told me to forget the whole concept of an Elkhart County Foundation, that the communities of Goshen and Elkhart, and the county, could never get together on anything.

In spite of that, the Elkhart County Community Foundation was established in 1989. We brought in a facilitator to talk to us about how we might help the county. He said that he envisioned the day when we would convene, and become a part of providing proactive problem solving for Elkhart County, not just the city of Goshen or Elkhart, and here we are today.

When the 1991 planning committee was formed, it wasn't as effective as it might have been because we didn't have the involvement of all the leaders of our community. Today we have the right people in this room to do the job.

As we do our job, I think we must all remember that we cannot deal with our prejudices, or our preconceived notions of what the problems are, or what the solutions are. We must deal with the statistical facts and information developed to first tell us where

problems are, and secondly lead us towards the right solutions, not our own prejudices as to what the problems and solutions are.

We must also make some decisions as to whether we are making the trends, or are we reacting to the trends, and perhaps it is part of both.

We must remember that yes we have had great economic growth over the last ten years, but our wages have not kept up with the state or the nation.

Our growth has been basically in low skilled, and therefore low paying jobs, which as stated today, has put high stress on our infrastructure and social services.

We must consider the impact of the global economy on our future economic growth. Some of the jobs we have come to take for granted will probably disappear. Many of the jobs we think are immune to global competition; probably sometime in the next ten to 15 years, will be under attack..

We have lost the component of our industrial base that uses highly paid and highly skilled workers. I can think of companies such as Miles, our four locally owned major banks, and locally owned major size companies such as Goshen Rubber who have disappeared.

When these entities disappeared, what disappeared with them are their accounting, marketing, sales, and engineering departments, and with them the high percentage of college educated people that performed these duties. This impacts not only our taxes, but our school's SAT scores, and you can go right down the line.

Many of the great leaders who led Elkhart County over the last 20 years came out of these locally owned companies. These companies were in our county for over 80 years, and many of those companies and leaders are now gone. How will we replace them?

Many of our key white collar professional people now drive into our community from surrounding areas. Why?

- No planned communities which are appealing to white collar people.
- Perception of our schools.
- Perception of the quality of life in Elkhart County.

We need companies, not necessarily those who will be developing technology, because we are behind the curve there, but those who will use high technology, because users of high technology need highly skilled and highly trained workers, who are paid commensurately.

We need companies with a high professional component, companies that will commit to put their white collar workers in our county, who will stop the brain drain, and need college and technically educated, highly paid people.

We in Elkhart County suffer, as does the state of Indiana, from high business taxes and high property taxes. While we have a fair individual income tax, the first two components of tax will continue to be high because we have a very low per capita income in the state of Indiana. Until that can be raised, our budget deficit and high taxes will not go away. They can be changed only by the attraction of jobs that need skilled workers.

Again, we have many problems; the Horizon Project is one of the solutions. We need for you to stay with the process, we need for you to stay with us for the several more meetings we will have, and we can become part of the solution.

I would like to close by reading a quote I found while preparing for today's meeting. It goes like this:

“An America lies at the end of the Wilderness Road, and our past is not a dead end, but still lives in us. Our forefathers had civilization inside themselves, the wild outside. We live in the civilization they created, but with us the wilderness lingers. What they dreamed, we live and what they lived, we dream”.

T.K. Whipple, “Study Out The Land”