

Memorandum 1

To: Vision 20/20 Stakeholders
From: Derek Okubo, National Civic League
Date: July 23, 2009
Re: Kickoff Meeting, Next Meeting

Congratulations on a remarkable turnout and some great work to get this project started in beautiful Jay County. The most valuable resource in any community is its people and I have said time and again that Jay County is one of the friendliest places that I have had the pleasure to work with. That is an asset that we need to find a way to capitalize on in the planning and implementation.

Despite the late start, you demonstrated the ability to focus and get down to work in order to complete the tasks of the day...and you did so. We were even able to finish the meeting early! At this meeting, you identified what you thought were the most pressing issues facing Jay County. You then discussed why it was difficult to solve these pressing issues. The purpose of this exercise was to set the context and rationale of collaborative community problem solving - where we are convening local government, business, non-profits and residents to develop the community plan together. The responses from this exercise are transcribed from your small group notes below:

Question 1: What are the Pressing Issues facing Jay County?

Issues Related to Economy and Employment

- Jobs
- Jobs in a tough economy
- Employment
- Higher Paying Jobs
- Job loss
- Employment issues
- Employment
- Need jobs that kids can get when they graduate from HS
- Agriculture - livestock, CHFO's, revenues
- Economics/Jobs in the community
- Lack of opportunity (not many manufacturing jobs)
- Unemployment and job market
- Jobs-unemployment
- Better paying jobs
- Smaller communities have no industry

- Not enough quality jobs to attract
- No enough inward migration of educated people
- Jobless rate -financial status of economy
- Minimal jobs for college grads
- No resources for entrepreneurs (is Jay County attractive to entrepreneurs?)
- Need foresight to create jobs that will be needed in the future
- Economy
- Wal-Mart comes in and leaves an eye sore in the community
- Retail loyalty
- Empty buildings not utilized
- Unemployment - where are the jobs going? What can we do to bring business here?
- Offering more quality/professional/high paying jobs
- Economy
- Jobs, money, recession
- Need state and county wide exposure
- Upgrading technology to attract businesses and people
- Employment
- Looking outside for talent rather than using our own people
- Empty buildings
- Downtown developed
- How to combine rural ag issues with city/business issues
- Loss of local control
- Loss of governmental revenue

Issues Related to Education

- Education
- Youth not caring about education
- Change in priorities to education
- Lack of extra-curricular activities
- Education standards-low
- High school drop outs
- Low educated folks
- Educational opportunities and education employment
- Continue educational and healthcare quality
- Level of education - self-worth and value
- Quality education
- Bringing back secondary education citizens
- Education is the answer to everything in community
- Education
- Education (25% dropout rate)
- Volunteering (kids learning that at a young age)

Issues Related to Community Dynamics/Mindset

- Lack of standards (lower standard of expectations)
- "It was good enough..."
- What do we want to be?
- The ying and the yang
- Expectations-low for both family and school
- New leadership
- Community has a lack of self esteem
- People don't think highly of what they have
- More community camaraderie
- Afraid of risk
- Decline of relationships - marriage, families, single parent babies
- Pushing lower 1/3 who are under-educated, uninspired
- Culture of "why try?"
- Partnerships with other communities
- Attitude of "you're not going to tell me what to do"
- Not working together
- Stronger work ethic
- Town pride
- Barrier to change is prejudiced people
- Resistance to change
- To get the county to be one large community working together
- Independence

Issues Related to Retention of Talent

- Brain drain
- Hard for kids to stay here
- Negative decline in population
- Outward migration of youth
- Decreasing population
- Retain Youth/People in area
- Retaining our Youth
- How to get the educated people back into the community?
- Keeping our young people

Issues Related to Amenities

- Activities, events, needed for "county" participation
- Child care amenity/tutoring of JJCL students' children
- Shopping in Jay County
- Pluses: JJCL, TPF, county-wide chamber, Arts Place, library, LCDC/JCCD, county-wide school corporation; partnerships seen as helpful
- Spending what you make here
- Shopping/entertainment
- Shopping out of town/spending out of town - If we can't get it how do we?
- What will the youth do for fun, entertainment, quality of life

- Entertainment

Issues Related to Support of Residents

- Parental Education
- Community Assistance -coordinate assistance through community, family services and churches
- Food help
- Gas help
- Morale help
- Diversity

Issues Related to Infrastructure/Transportation

- Location - JC is off the beaten path
- Funding for infrastructure
- Lack of infrastructure - no easy access to interstates
- Transportation

Issues Related to Health/Public Safety

- Youth and drugs - needle drugs
- Drugs in schools
- Drugs
- Violence and crime

Specific Issues

- Environment
- Health
- Uninsured
- Recreation
- Municipal infrastructure
- Increased taxes

Question 2: What makes it difficult to address these issues?

Difficulties Related to Mind-Set/Hope

Poor me attitude

Apathy among kids

Core values

Core needs

“Good enough for Jay County” attitude

People are happy with the status quo

Hard to get people involved

How do you make someone care?

Drug issue are so accepted that it is difficult to try it
Tend to look at the negative and address them
Change is difficult when residents have been here all their lives

Difficulties Related to Focus/Priorities

Having one idea and working on it - is hard
Not having individual agendas
Compromise needed
Chicken and the Egg syndrome
Hard to identify what is the problem that needs to be solved first
Lack of time
No goals, vision for the community
Personal agendas
More time spent working
Which issue do we solve first?

Difficulties Related to Systems/Practices

Good "old boy" system
Everybody gets a trophy syndrome
Can-do attitude among leaders, but leadership not broad enough; too many have a "good enough for
Parental involvement
Parents don't want to parent
Many interruptions to family (i.e., cell phones and family)
Various standards in county make it difficult
Getting people to understand and work together and not alone
Bring people in (education, medical and housing)!

Difficulties Related to Resources

Economy/Money
Employment
Technology Availability
Per capita income lower
Lack of money for infrastructure
Housing
Lack of technology
Funding
Funding
Type of industry available
Need medical technology

Difficulties Related to Communication

Promoting place like John Jay Center-when others don't see the advantage it provides and only as a renovated building
Lack of marketing

Lack of participation, communication
Local awareness of job opportunities
Advertise of jobs

Difficulties Related to Geographic's

Large area to get things built that community can support-when within driving distance there are so many things are available

Location

Geography

Competition from larger metropolitan areas

Difficulties Related to Understanding

Lack of education

Diversity with the community

Other

Positive: very culturally mixed so we are a more accepting community

Summary

When reviewing the responses that emerged from these two questions, the pressing issues are complex and multi-faceted. They can be defined in a variety of ways and as a result, there are a variety of solutions based on those different definitions. In addition, the responsibility to effectively impact those challenges requires the participation of all parts of the community. It is simply not a reality for one entity to do it alone. For instance, is a high crime rate a police problem or a community problem? To effectively impact crime, residents, businesses, service providers and the police must all play a collaborative role to make a difference.

As reflected in the small group answers on the second question, "What makes addressing these issues difficult", we saw that the vast majority of these difficulties were more process related than content related. In other words, our effectiveness comes from how we work the problem rather than the challenge itself.

Thus, we need to bring the different viewpoints to the table to collaboratively come up with a shared desired outcome (vision), a common definition of the issue (assessment), agreed on strategies to address that shared problem definition and identified roles and responsibilities of what players must do to jointly impact the problem (action planning).

In this exercise, I did notice that this group was very astute in recognizing the role community dynamics and mindset plays in the area of problem solving. This is a good sign and demonstrates higher level thinking! For

many other communities I work with, we have to build to that level of understanding through the process.

Vision Themes

As a final task of the meeting, we worked on developing our themes for our vision statement - the desired outcome for Jay County in 20 years. The themes developed across the different groups were strongly related - another good sign. Stephanie Arnold and Doug Inman are putting together a vision drafting committee that will develop a first draft to be reviewed by the stakeholder group at our third meeting on September 1, 2009.

At our next meeting on August 11, we will start our Jay County assessment process by taking a look at Jay County's civic infrastructure - looking at the civic health of the county community.

Good work and I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting!!

Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 11, 2009; 6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.;
West Jay Middle School