

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

HARRISON COUNTY 2030

Economic Development Stakeholder's Meeting

Wednesday March 19, 2008

Meeting Design

A facilitated discussion of three items:

1. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Harrison County
2. Discussion of common ideas which lead to a shared vision of needs and opportunities
3. Role of Harrison County in support of economic development vision

Notes Design: Summary of key ideas from overall discussion followed by detailed notes on each aspect of the items listed above.

Attendance:

Brynn Joachim, Tradition

Monica Walker, Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District

Allison Beasley, Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District

Gena Lentz, Mississippi Power

Elizabeth Slade, Coast Chamber of Commerce

Monte Luffey, Stirling Properties

Jim Foster, Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport

Bruce Frallic, Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport

Nicole Learson, Harrison County Tourism Commission

Warren Doussan Sr., The New GetAway

Ellen Cowell, Ohio State University Consultant Team

Meghan Gough, Ohio State University

Jennifer Cowley, Ohio State University

Patrick Bonck, Harrison County

Key Ideas from the Meeting

- Recognition of the port as an important economic development asset
- Recognition of the importance of a widely known regional brand (inc. slogan)
- Recognition of the importance of the federal sector to the economy and the opportunities available to leverage its regional investments.
- Recognition of the importance of industry diversity to the economy

- Recognition of the importance of strategic forward motion in economic development rather than sole focus on recovery efforts
- Recognition that some of the structural/physical barriers to economic development include: insurance costs, limited workforce, limited workforce housing, and limited industrial land supply
- Recognition that the social/organization barriers to economic development include: limited assets for “creative class” retention/recruitment, turf issues, lack of data on economy, and planning fatigue.
- Recognition that increasing local and national awareness of the assets rather than the stereotypes of the Gulf Coast is key to changing perceptions and increasing investment
- Recognition that government and citizens have key roles to play in creating an attractive environment for development investments.
- Recognition of need to balance development with preservation of local character and identity
- Recognition that cooperation is key to ensure success

Detailed Notes Part One: SWOT Individual Assessments

Participants were asked to read an assessment of initial strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and to mark those that caught their attention. Note that asterisks after a comment indicate items of concern to multiple people.

ECONOMIC STRENGTHS

Intrinsically present assets or developed areas of competence which foster economic activity

Natural environment

- High quality natural environment for residents and visitors
- Economic strategies built on presence of natural assets
- Tourism sector enabled by climate, physical features, animals and vegetation, etc
- Waterfront development potential of port, industrial seaway, etc***
- Citizen support of natural protection/preservation efforts*

Destination economy

- Outside money comes into area
- Concentration of amenities raises quality of life for residents*
 - Improved air service, increases tax revenues to governments, provides financial and volunteer support to non-profit sector, ensures more retail choices etc.*
- Branded strategy for area reflects true strategic market position. “Relax. It’s the Mississippi Gulf Coast”***
- Active leadership and community support for this economic strategy
- Regional effort to raise profile of destination economy to Tier 1 status*

Federal government installations

- High paying jobs**
- High skilled labor force**
- Commitment to region**
- History of research and development/technology transfer***

International and national trade

- Port and air cargo facilities enable region to participate in global economy*
- Pool of logistics and transportation providers enable national connections

Industry strategy

- Leaders actively working to diversify economy into five targeted industry sectors: shipbuilding, geospatial, aerospace, advanced materials, and marine science****
- Many targeted industries in emerging or growing stage of industry life cycle*
- Presence of successful businesses in Harrison County in many targeted sectors****
- Workforce agencies strategically aligned to train labor pool**?***

Recovery and renewal mindset

- Citizens and leaders willing to plan and learn from the past**
- Funding available to make things happen**

Additional Comments on Economic Strengths from ED Stakeholders Meeting:

- We have it all...it's the Gulf Coast.
- Regional effort—tremendous position for the Coast
- 1 tourism job=5 indirect jobs, \$1 dollar spent=more than \$5 spent indirectly?
- Support of Smart Code growing
- Public image campaign efforts
- Quit focusing on recovery; shift to Building, Expanding, Growing...We're moving forward.
- Slogans: Relax, it's the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Yes! Building, Expanding, Growing
- Port-direct access to Inter Coastal Waterway. [Need] to increase depth of channel ways
- Slogan: We have it all—the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
- Governor Barbour mentioned strength of federal sector at the Hancock Bank Economic Symposium
- Industry strategies: at I-10 exits 28, 24, 20, three most looked at industries are medical, leisure, and hotels. Ex: I-12 exit 6A – most exits have malls, [commercial], etc.
- Yes! HCDC message [is a strong asset].
- [Tourism efforts of] the Gulf Coast Business Council
- ?=[regarding workforce strategies strategically aligned to train labor pool] this is not what we're hearing. We're hearing that there is a mismatch between jobs available and what people are trained for.
- ? Are not sure on multiplier mentioned for hospitality industry.

ECONOMIC WEAKNESSES

Intrinsically present limitations or undeveloped areas which hinder economic activity

Natural environment

- High insurance costs for business and residential*****
- Area will always will be vulnerable to natural hazards, a deterrent for some people and/or businesses***

Destination economy

- Lower average earnings than other industry sectors translates into lower incomes for citizens*
- Lower skilled jobs and lower skilled workforce...limits kind of economic activity region in which the region can participate*

- Monopolizes the current and future labor pool...limits economic expansion in other industry sectors... one in every five jobs are related to leisure and hospitality sector
- Higher risks to local economy if the destination sectors falter than if more diverse economy
- Employment and earnings growth in the leisure and hospitality sectors did not pace with national peers from 2001-2005

Federal government installations

- Amenities of area may not appeal to the younger retiree demographic*
- Few ties to area, so can choose not to rebuild after storm or to retire here when able

International and national trade

- Land conflicts between international trade and destination economy
- Land conflicts between international trade and citizens

Targeted industry strategy

- Limited supply of HCDC-owned industrial land. ****
- No public land presently available to meet new prospects needs, maybe in 2009 with Saucier Industrial Park**
- Private land available in existing parks but at high costs**
- Existing parks relation to community—"permeable boundaries" between residential and industry or community use of industrial areas*
- Current labor pool too small for significant growth in targeted sectors****
- Area not competitive to attract "creative" class/younger workforce****
- Local industries weren't as competitive in employment or earnings as national peers from 2001-2005*

Recovery and renewal mindset

- Danger of planning fatigue...too much planning, too little action****
- Track record of past land development decisions may hinder citizen support, especially for industrial development and trade*
- Leaders focus on their jurisdiction, industry sector, strategy, etc to the exclusion of all other efforts ***

Additional Comments on Economic Weaknesses from ED Stakeholders Meeting

- Quality of life for creative class: area has lack of visual "charm"
- High insurance costs, [finding/obtaining] information on building permits
- Smoking ban affects tourism
- Community non-receptive to development by a vocal minority
- Lack of uniform distribution of development incentives
- Data problems—demographic, housing starts, disconnect between cities and county on data
- Lack of reliable market data, incomplete data [if it exists at all]
- Tremendous [number of] temporary construction jobs, bridges, casinos, naval has large number of large scale development projections, apartments, shopping centers, schools
- [Need] temporary housing for temporary workers; need workforce housing overall
- [on lower incomes] High quality construction will lower insurance costs
- [on lower incomes] opportunity for green building that lowers cost of ownership and power bills
- [Little] public support for incentives
- Mississippi image

- Small market
- NIMBYism
- Sewerage for property—small lots and too much red tape
- College graduates leaving county and state.
- Lack of communication ex: Long Beach and Highway 90
- We have to change peoples mindset to positive situations

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Outside trends that may foster local economic opportunities

Natural Environment

- Increasing popularity of eco-tourism activities worldwide*

Destination economy

- Repeat visitors inclined to extend days in area
- Aging of population favorable to increased visitor traffic
- Boosts from Post-Katrina recovery softens effects of national economic downturns**

Federal government installations

- Consistent levels of military and civilian federal activities***
- Military contracts for Northrop Grumman tanker projects***

International and national trade

- Emerging market opportunities from shifts in global trade
- Changes in logistics and distribution in business supply chains
- Export opportunities increase from weak US dollar
- Attractiveness of US for foreign investment*

Targeted industry strategy

- Targeted industries tied to global market trends in New Economy

Recovery and renewal mindset

- Nation still willing to help region recover from storm*

Additional Comments on Economic Opportunities from ED Stakeholder Meeting

- Nation still willing to help to help by sending volunteers
- Media promotion [local and nation], educating about assets
- Promote new PUD developments
- [greater opportunities from work at] at Stennis Space Center
- Short haul visitor travel because of gas prices
- [Share message of] building, expanding, and growing because population is recovering
- No mention of Hispanic population

ECONOMIC THREATS

Outside trends that may hinder local economic opportunities

Natural environment

- Global warming...increasing frequency of severe weather patterns
- Increased government regulations

Destination economy

- Flagging consumer confidence affecting tourism market*
- Market demand limits commercial rebuilding*
- Increasing cost of fuel***

Federal government installations

- Future base realignment and closure efforts

International and national trade

- Globalization shifts economic activity to offshore locations

Targeted industry strategy

- Downturns in housing and credit markets and/or economy at large may affect business operations of existing and prospective targeted industries and limit supply of workforce housing.*

Recovery and renewal mindset

- Shifts in national political will toward recovery efforts long term
- Potential loss of political clout from changes in senior political leadership at the state and federal level*

Additional Comments on Economic Threats Made at ED Stakeholder Meeting

- FEMA locating residents into hotel inventory
- Limited funding and sharing of development in [destination economy activities]
- Shortening of the vacation season
- Need to bring people here
- Hold more job fairs [in other places to recruit] that's how high-tech industry [does it]
- Virgin land at exits 20, 24, and 28 north of Interstate 10
- [Let people know] that SBA will help small businesses
- Air quality restrictions
- Federal Trade Administration—foreign trade areas with Panama Canal

Detailed Notes Part Two: SWOT Group Discussion

Participants were asked to share their thoughts in a group discussion.

Economic Weaknesses

- Incomplete data between the city and county
- More information needed about green building opportunities
- Universities should be utilized to increase regional labor force
- Actual and perceived land prices should be distinguished
- Past experiences, such as Hurricane Camille
- Inter-jurisdictional needs
- Increased capacity needed to gather regional information, and agreed-upon data sets
- Regional support and regional promotion needed to attract business
- County and private sector cooperation needed
- Turf wars are preventing successes

- Regional clearinghouse needed to maintain and standardize information
- Need to know where we are in terms of recovery, limits time spent on other efforts
- Attitudes are only going to change with education – need to learn to accept change
- Losing college grads to other states because no incentives to stay (i.e., well-paying jobs, technology)
- Homes are not being rebuilt because there are no services in place
- Uncertainty limits economic development, especially government incentives, local level input/support needed
- There is a perception of future identity as Destin, FL. This results in public concern and development hesitation
- Need to balance the potential to develop with maintenance of the local character and identity
- Housing is not affordable to support workers in the service industry
- Small business is struggling because it cannot absorb post-storm insurance, costs
- Education needed on ability to secure SBA loans
- Young professionals want aesthetics, pleasant environment, which is not present now
- Diversity of economy is needed for stability when one sector struggles
- Public land is needed for industrial park land opportunities.
- School education is low and drop outs are high
- Higher school/certificate degrees needed

Economic Strengths

- MS State and others offer many opportunities for workforce training
- Gulf Coast Business Council offers a forum of private and public cooperation
- Branding message – “Relax, it’s the MS Gulf Coast”
- Slogan – “Yes!”
- Airport exceeded expectations, which opens up MS as a destination (with 5 air service destinations)
- Tourism – accumulates benefits from money spent
- County support for permanent relocation to MS Gulf Coast – not just tourism
- Retiree relocation, and active retirement in multi-generational communities, second career, medical facilities, attractive for family visitors
- Education/promotion of regional assets through media attention to business success, public awareness through advertisements
- Gulf Coast Business Council as a leader in education and promotion
- Education to average citizen – reach out to local community, results in pride!
- Population maintained post-storm. All stakeholders in success, empowered citizens, strengths of population
- Manpower is here – just needs to be utilized
- European tourists are needed because they stay longer.

Economic Opportunities

- Use leadership (i.e., Governor) to advertise the coast and jobs

- Small business resources meet on a quarterly basis to determine how to help each other
- 60 percent of travel is business travel, not tourists – speaks to diversity of industry and economy

Detailed Notes Part Three: Key Ideas on Economy

Participants were asked to comment on the “golden threads” which appeared to run through their previous discussion and suggested areas of common values toward future economic development strategies.

- Balance: maintain character while growing economy
- Diversity: need many strong economic sectors
- Promotion in and out of MS: let everyone near and far know about our assets.
- Forward thinking: region isn’t staying in recovery mode but it moving beyond to building, expanding and growing
- Cooperation: many players needed to ensure success
- Communication and appreciation: enable everyone to share and celebrate what has been accomplished so far

Detailed Notes Part Four: Role of County Government in Supporting Economic Development

Participants were asked to comment on the potential roles Harrison County government could take in supporting economic development.

[Participate in the] Council of Governments – [provides a] balance between public and private interests. COG is the main avenue for local government information sharing

[Identify] tangible ways the County can be a catalyst.

[Identify] direct ways County can implement these ideas. [How county can help] achieve these goals and strategies for how to do it

Actions can be achieved by County in relation to cities through collaboration. [All must] acknowledge differences, but find common ground

Can’t expect county to do things in cities jurisdiction but find common ground on some issues.

[Influences on county/city dynamics] annexation impacting regional wastewater, HUD monies

[Attitude for future work on economic development must be] “Work hard, work smart, and do it”

[Participate in changing] the MS image to be recognized by others

County [should find ways to] support high school education

Other Ideas/Questions for Economic Development Strategies

What effort is state making in advertising MS Gulf Coast?

Advertise in nearby states (Orlando close) to target similar tourists

Return on investment needed to quantify reasons and impacts on community indicators

SMPDD should gather subjective information

Highlight outdoor recreation

Regional indicators maintained by SMPDD – use as a basis

[Need] Cooperative (public/private) advertising, marketing and promotion

[Need/develop] integrated transportation systems – city-countywide taxi/limo, and transit

Go Zone extension