DEVELOP
Milledgeville-Baldwin County

Notes and Takeaways

March 25, 2014 Task Force Meeting

Status of Strategic Plan – The written plan should be complete no later than July 1, 2014.

Status of Focus Groups/Grassroots Outreach
- Focus groups completed with MBC Young Professionals, City/County Elected Officials and one Minority Group.
- Pending Focus Groups (to be completed by May 1)
    - Manufacturing CEOS
    - Physicians
    - Learning and Retirement Group (GC)
    - GC Students
    - CGTC Students/Adult Learners
    - "Barber Shop" Group

The March Task Force Meeting began with two expert panels on Transportation and Entrepreneurism. These topics ranked in the top five areas of interest from all community input, to date.

Transportation: Middle Georgia Regional Commission Bob Rychel led the group discussion and fielded questions.

Bob Rychel reported the Middle Georgia Regional Commission four years ago completed (four years ago) a Baldwin County Transportation Assessment. This study was done at the request of Baldwin County resulting of the work of the Chamber's Partners in Progress Transportation Focus Group. Transportation discussions have been recently activated by the Chamber's Transportation Committee. Components of the Assessment included an in–depth demographic analysis of Baldwin County, identifying target groups that would use public/alternative transportation modes; and listed several transportation action items accompanied with potential strategies of implementation. April Bragg committed to email the Transportation Assessment to the Task Force and to post in the document portal on the Strategic Planning page on the Chamber's website.

Status of Current Transportation Activities Driven by the City of Milledgeville and Baldwin County Governments.

City of Milledgeville
- In current pursuit of becoming a "Bicycle Destination Community". The city has apparently created a Bicycle Pedestrian Transient Committee with the goal of obtaining this status. Part of the requirements of reaching this status is the creation of a plan to include proposed bike paths and the passing of ordinances to support the designation.

- The City should also examine and enforce the rerouting of transfer trailer truck traffic around town, whenever possible.

Baldwin County
There are two public transit services in Baldwin County.

1. Baldwin County has a rural, cost-share public transit system consisting of two buses. This service is partially funded by the county, state and federal funds.

2. The MGRDC partners with the Georgia Department of Human Services and Georgia DOT to subcontract with private vendors to provide a similar service.

To avoid duplication of efforts, improve efficiency and increase ridership, consideration should be given to merge these two programs. Other regional partnership opportunities exist with Peach, Twiggs, Pulaski, Crawford, and Jones Counties. All of these much smaller counties, with less ridership than Baldwin, have two or more buses compared to Baldwin's two.

There is little to no marketing for this service in Baldwin yet there is a waiting list for ridership. This service is critically important to support future economic development efforts in order to provide much-needed transportation for job seekers. This service has great potential of expansion and should be considered a key recommendation in the long-range community plan.

FUNDING CHALLENGES – MPO DESIGNATION A SOLUTION? When Baldwin County reaches the 50,000 population mark the county can become an MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization). This designation makes the county eligible to receive federal funds to manage and implement transportation strategies. The community should immediately explore the potential to include surrounding smaller counties in the "50,000 population" requirement. An example of multi-county MPOs include Houston County. To date the county is approximately 500 people short of being eligible for this designation.

More Transportation Discussion…..

"Methods to make Downtown Milledgeville more Pedestrian Friendly & Protect Student Population"
1. Enforcement of Existing Laws and Ordinances was discussed heavily by the group as a means to make the Downtown area a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Local law enforcement officials should enforce downtown speed limits, rights-of-way, bicycle acknowledgement through highlighted (lined) bike paths and rerouting of large truck traffic. Because the major thoroughfare downtown is a 'state' highway, proper signage is the only method to "suggest" alternate routes.
2. The completion of the Fall-Line Freeway project was discussed as a means to provide large trucks an alternative route outside of downtown. The GDOT Regional Engineer should be consulted to provide an update on this and other state projects.

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – FOCUS ON ENTREPRENEURISM

Expert panelists on the topic of "Entrepreneurism and Incubators" included Mary Ellen McClanahan, Director, Entrepreneur & Small Business, Georgia Department of Economic Development (Atlanta) and Lynne Henkiel, Director, Innovation Led Partnerships, Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute.

<u>State GDecD Resources (Mary Ellen)</u>
- Direct resources to support small business include: Tax credits for jobs, investments and R & D; resources to connect business to financial and technology expertise; technology resources; export assistance; starting, growing and maintain business operations; supplier identification; promoting vendor opportunities for small business within Georgia's entertainment industry for film makers and production companies; assisting the artisan community to potential marketing opportunities; resources for music, technology, creative, corporate, government and education sectors and creating brand awareness of talent and assets statewide; supporting high-level mentorship opportunities to connect small to large businesses in Georgia.
- SSSBCI – Small Business Loan Resources administered through local banks.

<u>Considerations</u> – The Task Force should consider the following items to include as "Action Items" in the Strategic Plan:
1) Create a resource network for small business, entrepreneurs, 2nd Stage Companies. This could and should be housed in the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Chamber and supported by the Downtown Development Authority and other entities whose Mission is to grow small businesses (city, county and private sector)
2) Outreach should occur to local and regional lenders to educate them on this Georgia Banker's Association-endorsed program (SSSBCI).   An education event could be hosted locally to help local banks become registered with DCA, which is a requirement for participation.

<u>Georgia Tech– Lynne Henkiel</u>

Incubators – Georgia Tech offers Feasibility Studies in phases.   This model allows communities to fund the feasibility of an incubation program in phases. In example, some private vendors for feasibility studies require a community to pay (IE) $75-100,000 up front for the study. The Georgia Tech model is built on phases.   Phase I determines whether the project is a "go" or "no-go".   If a "go", the community can advance to the next level of plan development and when completed, as funding is available, can advance to final level of execution, etc.

Georgia Tech's Model has four major focus areas/benefits:
- Assist community with real solutions
- Educate community on Return on Investment
- Identifies sources of contributions to make services available
- Provides roadmap for incubation and a detailed "Plan" to move forward.

Reasons for community "NOT" to have an incubator:
- Extremely low education levels
- Low capacity to provide education services (no colleges/universities, no technical college)
- Majority of population possesses "low skill levels".
- No/low funding or resources to support and sustain an incubation program
- No long-term sustainable plan.   Designating a "building" for an incubation program is easy. Sustaining the incubation program, long-term, tends to be the challenge.

Rule: The typical time it takes for an incubator to become self-sufficient is 28 years.

<u>Considerations:</u>
1) Consider first a "virtual incubator" program – this means providing the programs and services, FIRST.   When demand grows a "bricks and mortar" (physical incubator) could be considered.

2) Consider Funding and Implementing Business Incubator Feasibility Study Process

Step I – Community Readiness Assessment – This study phase evaluates demographics and key factors, establishes skill base indicators and serves as a means to educate and engage key stakeholders.   The outcome of this phase is to determine a "go" or "no-go" for a comprehensive incubation program for the respective community.

Step II – Feasibility Study Phase I – defines incubator business model customized for community. Federal agencies, such as EDA, require this documentation to be part of grant/funding requests. To date, federal grants are available for bricks and mortar only and not for operational funds.

Step III – Feasibility Study Phase II – defines in detail specific services/programs for incubator.

BREAKOUT GROUP OUTCOMES

After Task Force members heard from the "experts", the TF was divided into two breakout groups to discuss considerations of plan inclusion in the areas of Transportation and Entrepreneurism:

Transportation:
- Encourage identification of funding for P2P Study
  - Examine regular route
  - Determine demand
  - MGRD compare Baldwin to other communities
- Focuses on Downtown Milledgeville Transportation issues to include:
  - Make pedestrian-friend
  - Bike-friendly
  - More parking needed
  - Address downtown large truck traffic problems by finding solutions.
  - Specifically address the challenges of rerouting truck traffic to the Jefferson Street Bridge.
- Enhance rail service to MBC
- Dual Transportation System (fixed route for transit and expanded "Call & Ride System")
  - Partner with GC
  - Explore regional partnership opportunities (shared routes and resources) with neighboring communities
- T-SPLOST to provide local match funding for road project
  - Road maintenance
  - The most critical road improvement needs are related to the public school district. When all schools were relocated to the same area of the community, transportation improvements were not provided for to adequately service the area. The main thoroughfare needs to be four-laned and redlights installed to address traffic/safety concerns.

Entrepreneurship

- Establish business mentoring program (pairing successful existing or retired small business owners with new start-up business owners/entrepreneurs)
- MBC should become "business friendly"
- Establish "resource bank" for local and state resources
- Support Career Academy and entrepreneur resources like Digital Bridges
  - Provide adequate time to grow, fund and SUSTAIN any and all new programs!

Thoughts on Key Focus Points for Strategic Plan:

- Address community apathy – Make every effort to get full community buy-in to common vision
- Accept 'WE ARE A COLLEGE TOWN' and build, develop and grow from this foundation!
- Foster leadership development
- Better communication
- Communitywide marketing plan
- PR opportunities for local officials – promote what they are doing right, as well as opportunities

Next TF Meeting – Latter part of May.