

The economic development subcommittee of the Greenville Community Vision Task Force met at 4:30 p.m., Thursday, July 11, at Fresh Grounds. Scott Graubard, Marty Johnson, David Reeves, Caleb Stright and Joe Wilson were in attendance.

The group reviewed the Economic Development strategies recommended from the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, but, 14 years later, found none truly addressed.

For example, the plan calls for identifying unique assets and characteristics of Downtown Greenville. While we're aware of what those assets are, we're not aware of any formalized list. Perhaps we could put one together. Similarly, the plan called for a downtown coordinator to focus on the development of downtown. While a good idea, no such person currently exists.

The group discussed the importance of finding dedicated people for its efforts, as well as being able to find waves of equally dedicated citizens to help replenish them, to ensure our ideas don't just languish in a study.

The bulk of the discussion focused on the borough's current struggles — specifically in the realm of economic development — and strategies for addressing them.

### **Potential goals:**

#### **1. Spreading the word about the wealth of affordable property in Greenville.**

Businesses like Life's a Yarn and the Greenville Tool Company take advantage of low property costs, operating a business out of their store front and supplementing with sales on the internet.

As Joe put it, "Sometimes people don't know what they don't know," but if we could spread the word, we could woo investors that may have otherwise chosen the Valley or elsewhere.

#### **2. Addressing the code hurdles developers face in building in Greenville.**

It's a common, and longstanding, refrain that anyone trying to build in Greenville will find the borough much more likely working against them than with them; while entrepreneurs in other communities find a lot more flexibility and support.

I suggested, after sitting down with developers and entrepreneurs to get a firm feeling for their frustrations, meeting with borough representatives to

communicate those concerns, and the concerns of the larger community that the current strategy is hampering development.

Scott suggested taking a plan to state Senator Michelle Brooks to allow Greenville to serve as a pilot program for more flexible codes (he can explain it better), and as the changes potentially ease the borough's exit from Act 47, the state could point to our community as a shining example.

To do so, I believe we'll need to talk to builders and developers to establish the case for this need, then develop a concrete plan for what these eased codes would look like, as well as a vision for what the changes could produce and assuage any fears they might cause.

### **3. Fostering entrepreneurs.**

As Dave pointed out, just because someone is skilled in technology or has produced a good product, doesn't mean they're going to be a strong entrepreneur.

Marty suggested a kind of entrepreneur teaching team, a group of people in the borough that would work with people looking to go into business how to get off the ground. Perhaps that's helping them identify property that will fit their needs and their budget; getting them into contact with the borough. He pointed to the site Small Town, Big Ideas as a source for inspiration.

There's potentially a lot of people out there interested in starting their own business, but without the guidance, are apprehensive.

With the founder of the next Amazon potentially currently enrolled at Thiel, Scott suggested gathering seed money and developing a kind of incubator in town, cutting down on the start-up costs, and increasing the likelihood of a lucrative tech company starting up here.

### **4. Developing waterfront property, i.e. property on Front Street along the Shenango River.**

Scott pointed out how desirable the property could be, although current tenants and landowners leave the residences room to be desired.

Other notes:

I'd also recommend that we define our scope a bit. That is to say, the comprehensive plan focuses on downtown and retail, but we can all agree that economic development can and should incorporate more than that, i.e. tech, manufacturing, etc.

That scope should also entail what our role is and what our responsibilities are.

The previous comprehensive plan identifies goals, but, it's very clear, that's where their responsibility ended.

The group plans to meet next at 4 p.m. Friday, Aug. 10, and potentially the second Friday of every month at the same time.

Goals for the next meeting are to take a closer look at the SWOT analysis and survey results, and perhaps solidify a vision for the subcommittee and its goals, and define some objectives.

Submitted by:

**Caleb Stright**

U – Understand vision

V - Value the vision

E – Embrace the vision (so we can...)

I – Institutionalize the vision – (meaning, long after we are gone the ideas and plans are still being used)