

# **Coos Economic Action Plan Steering Committee Kickoff Luncheon 11.08-2007**

Emerson's Outfitters, Grovoton

## **Recap of Kickoff Session**

**Present: Gary Armittance, The Balsams; Dave Atkinson, Wausau; Dave Auger, Chair, Groveton Schoolboard; Steve Barba, PSU; Mark Belanger Employment Security; Paul Casey, Fish&wildlife Umbagog; Mitch Couture, Chair Berlin Schoolboard; Chris Diego, GM Mountain View Grand; Brian Emerson, Groveton; Kathy Eneguess, President NHCC-Berlin; Dave Govatski, Pondicherry Reserve; Steve Griffin, Isaacson Structural Steel; Burnham "Bing" Judd, Pittsburg; Barry Kelley, White Mtn Lumber; Katie Kelley, Chair Randolph/Shelburne School board; Louise McLeery, CEO Upper Conn. Valley Hospital; Robbie Munce, AV Chamber of Commerce; Barry Normandeau, Normandeau Trucking Groveton; Peter Powell, Powell Real Estate Lancaster; Jim Tibbetts, First Colebrook Bank; Rick Tillotson, Tillotson Fund; Chuck Prausa for Tom Wagner, US Forest Service; Howie Wemyss, Mt. Wash Auto Road; Jeff Hayes, North Country Council; Peter Riviere, Coos Economic Development Corp. (The latter 2 individuals represent staff supporting the effort); Brad Wyman, Chair Timber TRC; Sam Stoddard, facilitator, Timber TRC;**

**On a cold and slippery day (in some higher spots) we gathered for our first face-to-face session to kickoff the Coos Economic Action Plan effort.**

**Kathy Eneguess, a member of the planning committee, explained how this would be a different "plan" than others most present had participated in, plans that largely served as dust collectors.**

**In this instance the acknowledgement that a regional approach is the only way to begin economic reconstruction in the wake of failing paper industry. (Berlin's most recent election is indelible proof of a different focus in that community). Kathy said "we have to define our region and take action" on what makes sense for the entire region. For instance, business growth in any corner of the county benefits the rest of the county in providing jobs, spin-off spending (the multiplier effect of spending) and a sense that everything is not negative.**

**This new, regional attitude was bolstered last spring by the results of a broadly distributed survey of Coos County residents' attitudes. Those results were overwhelmingly positive about the reasons we all live here and the obvious shortcomings of the region (lack of jobs, economic activity/diversity/opportunity).**

**Kathy read a quote from the Aspen Institute which defined outcome-based economic development as :”Abundant, quality jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities that sustain and enhance the well-being of families and communities.” That’s pretty simple to wrap our efforts around.**

**She added that it is important to grow from within which, translated, means: helping those locally who already want to live here to start a business, expand a business, and grow their roots here; to build more leadership capacity with an eye to long-term sustainability. (That partly explains why there is a smattering of younger business and community leaders at the table in an effort to sow the seeds of a leadership legacy.)**

**She explained too that we would be tapping technical expertise of those around the state to develop specific action plans that will serve as the road map for future success.**

**Ed Toomey has been hired on as a consultant to facilitate the process by which we get from A to Z in developing those action steps and a “consensus plan” for adoption by the broader Coos County community.**

**Jeff Hayes of North Country Council explained that the four economic focus areas of the Technical Review Committees replicate those selected by the Northern Forest Sustainable Economic Initiative study underway in the 30 million acre Northern Forest states of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York.**

**Combined with the Northern Forest Sustainable Economic Initiative report the Coos Economic Action Plan should enjoy broad project funding support from a variety of resources, said Hayes.**

**He also informed the group that Thad Gulbrandsen of the Rural Partnership program at PSU would assist by conducting literature searches that support the work of the Technical Resources Committees.**

**Peter Riviere explained that the Technical Review Committees then were driving the substance of the action plan. And while there are concerns that there might be**

spillover or common issues that arise in each of the TRCs those common items will be synthesized in the final report.

### Technical Review Committee Facilitators and Chairs

- **CREATIVE/KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY:**

Katie Kelley, Chair

Katie Paine, Facilitator

Katie Kelley said having a draft plan available by Feb 6<sup>th</sup> (the next scheduled Steering Committee session) is a tall order but she and K.D. Paine have begun by fleshing out areas they will focus on and providing interesting quotes to support their thesis. She said knowledge would become the new economic commodity, what others have called the transition from the left (linear thinking) to the right brain (creative thinking) driven economy. Moving in this direction will require sharpening the region's critical thinking skills as it looks to transforming the economic fabric.

### **ALTERNATIVE ENERGY:**

Dave Auger, Chair

Rick Demark, Facilitator

Seen as a potentially lucrative and expansive economic engine (especially as conventional fossil fuels and other energy prices escalate rapidly) Coos County could become an alternative energy model for the rest of the state and other regions. The county could use lower-cost energy as a manufacturing lure (much as Littleton's industrial park used low-cost power to land many manufacturers in the 80s and 90s). Discussion will focus on: renewable supplies/new products/transmission capacities and limitations/local distribution/cellulosic ethanol (or other fuels and chemicals). Conservation and efficiencies are also part of the energy discussion. As part of the EDA funding for this planning effort DeMark's North Country Resources and Development Council is studying district heating of all structures in Groveton. This is fairly mature technology in northern Europe and elsewhere in the states (UNH, Dartmouth College and the NH Legislative office buildings and much of downtown Concord).

### **TOURISM:**

Howie Wemyss, Chair

Jayne OConnor, Facilitator

**Broader marketing focus is a definite need as is branding for the county/region as a whole with messages that can be repeated across the county.**

**Efforts to return Roger Brooks of Destination Development will follow the theme of developing a county-wide brand and marketing plan.**

**A reconvened Great North Woods Region Association session in early October focused on regional signage, resource inventories, development of standardized visitor kiosks which would contain brochures about sub-regional and regional activities and attractions and revamped websites that focus on activities and attractions instead of place.**

**TIMBER:**

**Brad Wyman, Chair**

**Sam Stoddard, Facilitator**

**Brad said this group will start with a brainstorming session but believes there is a need for an updated wood supply inventory for the county (including supplies from adjoining states). This study is being scheduled by DRED's Forest and Lands office as part of the same EDA funding that is supporting creation of the Coos Economic Action Plan.**

**All the TRCs have been provided guiding principles for their work which includes: likelihood of being accomplished; funding for action projects; financial benefits (jobs/sustainable addition to economic base, measurable improvement in the quality of life); current state of activity in each sector in moving forward; estimate of broad base of support; reflects latest knowledge/best practices management.**

**Each TRC has been asked to present up to five, solid action plan items with many side issues being covered elsewhere in the report dealing with shared infrastructure needs as well as spillover concerns between TRCs.**

**Peter Powell, co-chair of Coos Economic Development Corp. outlined Coos Economic Development Corp.'s role in managing the action plan once it is developed. He quoted Will Rogers who said "Plans get you into things, but you have to work your way out of them." It would be CEDC's role to work our way out of the economic doldrums in following the Coos Economic Action Plan.**

**He explained that CEDC's strategic plan speaks directly to investing staff time in remaking the infrastructure that supports economic opportunity in the county.**

**He said it is important to develop consensus support for the plan so that the Steering Committee and the county as a whole can "work together to influence those outside**

the county” He mentioned his belief that there are two sectors to the economy: the shelter economy side where we do each other’s laundry and the traceable sector in which we have something to sell. “We have a small window of opportunity to get things done and change the outcomes. We’re few people who can see meaningful change,” concluded Powell.

He reminded all that the North Country (that land above the great notches) is the steward of the image that is New Hampshire.

### **Steering Committee Members’ Responses:**

Overall community and business leaders serving as Steering Committee members expressed optimism that the effort could succeed.

Many were impressed with the quality of the horsepower assembled and spoke of the regional value to the effort.

Ric Tillotson spoke eloquently about his concern that we not export our resources and that it is important to monetize the value of the outcomes we are considering.

He also urged that we consider non-traditional tourism markets, especially given the weak dollar in relation to foreign currency like the Euro and the Canadian Loonie.

There was strong support for preserving the region’s natural beauty and traditional uses. (echoed in the Coos Survey results)

Barry Kelley (besides offering several Pallindrome challenges) said “we are defined by our isolation.” Paul Casey mentioned that there is “opportunity in change” which, I think, echoes Chris Diego’s comment that there is opportunity in anarchy and chaos” (Coos?)

Louise McLeery warned all to be cognizant of the intergenerational needs of the region as she sees a preponderance of the health care services populated by folks in their 50s. “We have to build for the future and package for the younger generation.”

Steve Barba said that historically it was individual drive that made the region successful and that it “really is the whole community that has to be involved.”

He added that the region had not “made the devil’s bargain to sell its soul,” and that, in itself, sets us apart from much of the rest of the state.

### **Next Steps:**

Include the TRCs engaging, meeting, working out their scope of work and identifying their path forward and producing a working draft of those concepts and action items for the next Steering Ctte session on Feb. 6th 9a.m. to 4 p.m.(at the Mountain View Grand).

At that session we will review the drafts, try to set an end date, discuss public listening sessions and sharing sessions for elected officials at the local, state and federal level.

**Meanwhile, we may circulate interesting studies, literature or nuggets of information about the county or other work in the study areas of the TRCs. Some of this information may be in the form of blogs and websites that contain TRC minutes and studies of value in understanding the issues.**

**Submitted by Peter Riviere**