

South Bluefield Neighborhood Association

Recommending a Strategy

Ideas for Today and Tomorrow

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SBNA Mission Statement

- *We are committed to improving and enhancing the quality of life in our community; respecting the rights and civil liberties of individuals in our community; working with our City Government to allow for effectiveness in both cost and purpose; and preserving the physical and historical structure of our community, Nature's Air-Conditioned City and the Gateway to the National Coal Heritage Area.*

SBNA Goals and Objectives

- *Crime Prevention and Reduction*
Enhance the safety of our Community for all homeowners and residents by implementation of community based crime prevention, awareness, and reduction programs.
- *Land Use and Zoning*
Contribute as an effective communication tool between Government agencies and advocate for the community in the area of land use and zoning issues.
- *Collective Infrastructure*
Advocate for providing the most effective solutions in both cost and purpose regarding our “collective infrastructure” that all community members share.
- *Community Revitalization*
Initiate neighborhood and community revitalization through education and economic development activities.

Today's Situation

- Crime, especially violent crime, drug distribution and juvenile offenders is at an unacceptable level.
- There is no comprehensive plan for the land use and zoning requirements for the City.
- The cost of local governmental services, utilities, and healthcare exceed the average Citizen's ability to pay.
- Significant areas of our City are blighted and devoid of economic activity.
- Community is polarized along socio-economic indicators. There is no middle class.

How Did We Get Here?

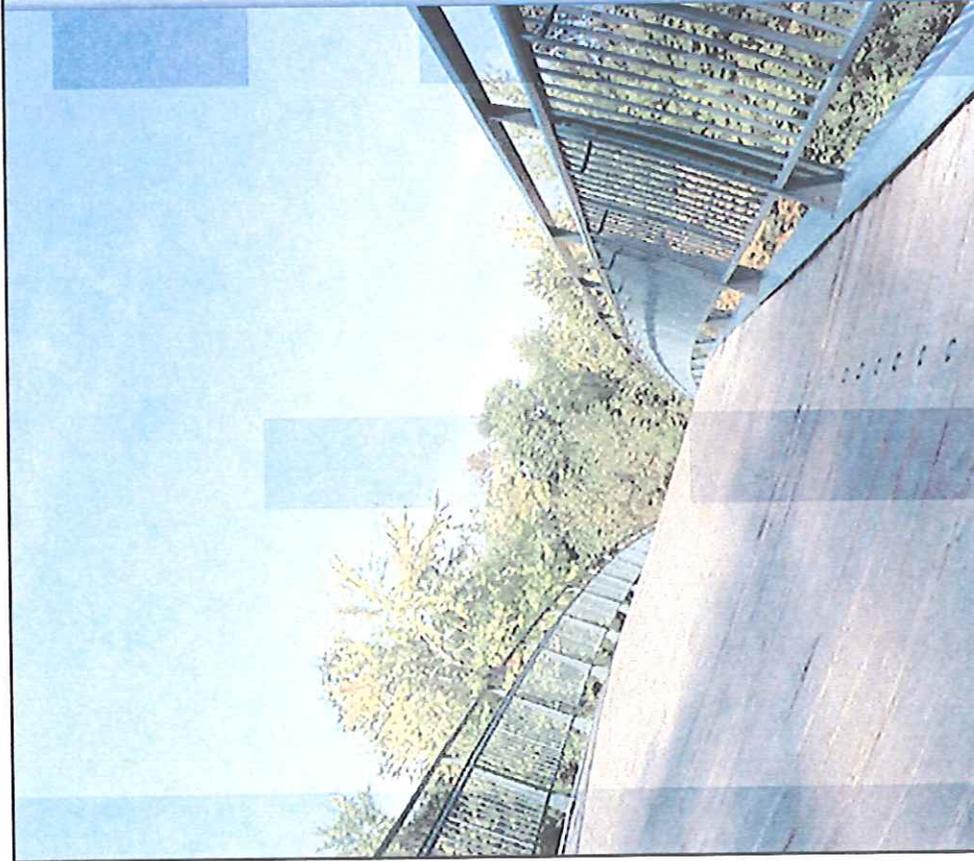
- Citizens have not been organized in a formal way to present their ideas/desires or defend their interests or property
- Local government is motivated to preserve & maintain itself, not re-invent itself
- Utilities are driven by dividends to shareholders, not the communities they serve (stakeholders)
- Original assumptions that are no longer valid
 - Elected Officials or Law Enforcement will take care of it
 - Citizens have the financial resources to absorb
 - Our economy is insulated from the global economy
 - Government has the resources to address

Available Options

- Continue with the “status quo”
- Enact Metro Government within Mercer County
- Employ “Best Management Practices” to our City Government
- Encourage & Promote Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) doctrine
- Implement Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) and other Citizen Corp Programs
- Develop a comprehensive plan for the community
- Compel our local government to create an environment that encourages private investment in business or property and voluntary compliance through economic incentives
- Co-own the infrastructure and consolidate essential services with all residents of the Greater Bluefield Valley
- State the alternative strategies
- Advantages & disadvantages of each
- Cost of each option

Recommendations

- Best Management Practices for Local Government
- Full implementation of COPS and VIPS programs
- Comprehensive Plan for the City
- Co-own infrastructure
- Perform tax code analysis and make recommendations for implementation
- Summarize the results if things go as proposed
 - Lower tax burden on business and residents
 - Lower or stabilize utility costs
 - Create proactive business environment
 - Amortize costs for essential services across a wider customer base, eliminating duplicate services
- What to do next
 - Develop BMP Manual or Plan
 - Form For-Profit Co-operative and develop Business Plan
 - Develop Comprehensive Plan and Submit to City for codification
 - Hold series of Public Hearings for Public Input
 - Communicate with State Elected Officials
- Identify action items



VISION

Bluefield "Renaissance"

A Vision for Our Community's Revitalization

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What the City of Bluefield Needs

- Job Retention
- Job Creation
- Increase in Discretionary Income
- Pro-Growth Environment
- Infrastructure Enhancement & Replacement
- Population increase, especially 18 to 39 year old demographic
- Cash Flow Reversal



How do we address needs

- Implement Community-based Economic Development (CED) strategy
- Builds upon existing community assets
- Encourages local entrepreneurship
- Provides access to capital, both human and financial
- Leverages available resources
- Coordinates effort of the total community along a single vision



What Assets Types are Needed

- Educational – Provides access to human capital
- Financial – Provides access to financial capital
- Transportation Infrastructure – Provides access to international markets for goods and services produced locally
- Real Property – Provides housing for new residents and businesses
- Social – Provides community safety net



Asset-Based Planning

- **Educational Assets**
 - Bluefield State College
 - Concord University
 - Bluefield College
 - New River Community & Technical College
- **Financial Assets**
 - Local Financial Institutions
 - Grant Making Institutions
 - Federal and State Economic Assistance
 - O³ Collaborative, Inc. (local Venture Capital Fund and Business Management Company)



Asset-Based Planning (cont.)

- **Transportation Assets**
 - Norfolk Southern Railroad
 - US Route 460, US Route 52, US 19
 - I73/I74 High Priority Corridor (King Coal Highway)
 - Mercer County Airport
 - Broadband access
- **Real Property Assets**
 - Bluestone Technology Park
 - Cumberland Industrial Park
 - Bluefield Downtown Historic District
 - John Nash Boulevard and Key Dam Watershed
- **Social Assets**



Goals/Objectives to be Met by CED Implementation

- Increase Existing Business Base and corresponding cash flow
- Diversification of Local Economic Base by New Business Creation
- Retention/Recruitment of Younger Demographic
- Increase Local Government Tax Base for Essential Infrastructure Projects
- More Discretionary Income
- Stabilize/Lower Percentage of Household Income allocated for Essential Services
- Reduce Burden on social asset base
- Increase population and economic opportunity
- Reverse the community cash flow position from “out of the City” to “into the City”



CED Implementation Process

- Establish and Fund O³ Collaborative
- Develop Business Plan for each Target Market Business Prototype
- Establish the Prototype Organization
- Secure start-up funding
- Update critical paths and timelines
- Commence Operations
- Establish formal reporting procedures for community



Target Market Areas for CED Implementation

- Transportation Related Services
- Information Technology Services
- Green Technology Construction & Renovation Services
- Coal Bed Methane (CBM) Processing
- Green Technology Light Manufacturing Services
- Tourism

Transportation Target Market Prototype



- Create the Bluefield Intermodal Terminal adjacent to Norfolk Southern Railway
- Provides a gateway for intermodal traffic along the Heartland Corridor
- Alleviate truck traffic on I-81 Corridor
- Reduces transportation costs for 3800 tractor-trailer operators in Bluefield metropolitan area
- Helps create logistic management ancillary businesses, particularly package delivery, shipment tracking
- Projected sustainable employment level of 950 direct skilled labor jobs within 5 years
- Projected addition tax revenue of \$7M per year within 5 years
- Private funding sources have been contacted

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Information Technology Target Market Prototype



- Digitize and archive historical records of Coal industry contained in Craft Memorial Library
- Place digitized records in on-line retrieval system that can be accessed by subscription (revenue generator)
- Create corporate capability in data warehousing and large data mining applications, both IT growth segments
- Provides local economic demand for full scale large broadband deployment which enables strategic partnerships with Telecommunication companies
- Technical expertise that is developed can be leveraged into logistic management, education, legal documents, medical records markets
- Projected sustainable employment increase of 250 jobs within 5 years
- Projected additional tax revenues of \$3M per year within five years

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Green Technology Construction and Renovation Target Market Prototype



- Over 5,000 structures in Bluefield are in need of weatherization and upgrades due to existing building codes and advances in construction techniques
- Demand side energy solutions are on the increase nationwide and are beginning to be addressed at state regulatory bodies
- Ancillary training academy can be established to train other skilled labor entities and provide additional revenue stream
- 7 out of 10 employment opportunities are for skilled labor, not professional services in the American market
- Collaboration with union tradesmen or employee retraining organizations can be utilized to help defray start-up costs
- Projected Bluefield utility consumption reduction is 40% within 5 years
- Projected sustainable employment is 150 jobs within 5 years
- Projected tax revenue increase is \$2.5M per year within 5 years
- Projected real dollar savings is 20% reduction under 2009 costs

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Coal Bed Methane (CBM) Processing Target Market Prototype



- CBM can be used as a transportation fuel, electricity generation, heating and cooking, and a medium for fuel cells
- Current costs for CBM extraction are in the \$3 to \$5 per MCF range regionally
- Technology exists to transport and store methane in a compressed (CNG) or liquefied state (LNG) via intermodal
- A local processing and storage facility can be developed to sell approximately 1M MCF at cost to our community and excess can be sold at market values or stored for future use.
- Projected sustained employment is 75 full time positions within 5 years
- Projected additional tax revenue is between .5 and 1.5 million dollars per year within 5 years

"Green" Light Manufacturing

Target Market Prototype



- Develop solar panel manufacturing facility with dual capability in fuel cell technology using methane medium
- Solar panel demand is greatest in Europe, can utilize Heartland Corridor to ship panels cost effectively
- Solar panels can be installed on existing rooftops with southern exposure and used as electric generators or water heaters
- Off-grid or On-grid applications with net metering are allowed under current West Virginia regulation
- Solar and Fuel Cell technology can be used in remote or portable applications
- Manufacturing process is eco-friendly, little environmental impact
- Projected sustainable employment should reach 125 employees within 5 years
- Projected tax revenue increase of \$2.5M per year within 5 years

Tourism Based Target Market Prototype



- Propose building Aquatic Theme Park and Therapeutic Spa Center
- Projected costs to build <20M
- Greater target customer base than other tourist based options
- Ancillary businesses in hospitality industries, particularly bed and breakfast
- Bluefield becomes "vacation" destination driving entertainment industry development
- Projected sustainable employment creation of 150 full time positions within 5 years
- Projected tax revenue increase of \$2M per year within 5 years



Bluefield Renaissance Conclusions

- Each of the projects would be unique to our community
- Projected median household income would increase by 15 to 20%
- Projected sustainable employment within 5 years is 1700 jobs
- Projected additional tax revenues within 5 years is \$17.5 million dollars

O³ (Operating Our Own) Cooperative Concept Paper

Introduction

For many years, various community leaders and citizens have recognized that something should be done to move the economy of our community in a more positive direction. *What can be done and how should we do this?* In this concept paper, we will suggest that the City of Bluefield, WV become a model for the application of a community-based economic development (CED) effort to be developed. This is an attempt to adequately address the economic reality for the 21st Century American economy and more specifically, West Virginia border communities. A brief, candid synopsis of our current community condition accentuates this need.

For decades, our City has been economically stagnant and is now at a crucial crossroads in its history. Our population base has significantly declined. As to quantity of contributors, our business tax base has been eroding. Our household median income is significantly lower than the state and national averages. Our former retail and light manufacturing sectors have relocated to other areas, specifically our neighbors. Our youth and young adult populations have very limited economic opportunity which has led to diminished human capital. Our middle class has evaporated leaving a much smaller customer base with very limited discretionary income. Our current economic condition significantly contributes to poor personal choices being made in order to simply survive.

Statistical data also reveals that our citizen base is polarized along most socio-economic indicators. Most of our citizens can be grouped by these indices in the extremes and fewer still grouped by the middle of the indices. Denial of these conditions and a refusal to acknowledge helps no one. We must begin to address these issues in a collaborative, cooperative, and comprehensive manner if we are to improve and revitalize this community.

To address these issues in a planned and professional manner, we will propose that adoption of a community economic development (CED) strategy and its resultant creation of a community economic development organization (CEDO) that employs citizen based enterprise techniques is our best chance of success. Given our current reality and the near-term national economic projections, these tasks should be immediately commenced. Time is not on our side today and we can begin to make the difference now. Hence, we will explore the creation of the O³ Cooperative, a non-profit organization that is solely designed, developed, and implemented for one purpose; the social and economic revitalization of the City of Bluefield, WV.

What is Community Economic Development (CED)?

CED is not a matter of focusing on one or another community-building project, or on a limited strategy such as industrial recruitment. *It is a comprehensive system for development that is intended for on-going implementation over at least a decade or two, usually more.* This strategy is intended to empower the community to handle its own destiny; it neither is nor focused on growth as such, but on capacity to handle economic and social change for the local benefit.

CED is not merely an organized strategy of selected substantive development tools like business creation, housing development, credit arrangements, etc., each of which requires specialized

thought and effort. CED is a *working process performed collaboratively*, which requires its own set of tools: organizing the lead group (the CEDO), strategic planning, data collection on local business, creating partnerships, etc. So this class of CED tools also requires its own set of specialized effort and thought. Previous CEDOs that have evolved the best practices in CED have created specific and effective means for putting the elements of Planning, Research, and Advocacy into place. It is from this body of knowledge that we can provide the basis to develop a comprehensive and customized program for our community.

CED in its most effective format embodies the following features:

- A multi-functional, comprehensive strategy or development system of on-going activities, in contrast to any individual economic development project or isolated attempt at community betterment;
- An integration or merging of economic and social goals to make a more powerful impact for community revitalization;
- A base of operating principles that empower the broad range of community residents for the governance both of their development organizations and their community as a whole;
- A process guided by strategic planning and analysis, in contrast to opportunistic and unsystematic tactics;
- A business-like financial management approach that builds both ownership of assets and a diverse range of financial and other partners and supporters; and finally,
- An organizational format that is non-profit, independent, and non-governmental, even though for-profit and governmental entities are linked to its work.

Considering the over-all perspective described above, one must carefully consider how one maintains a long-term, on-going process of development, and this on-going process will require, at a minimum a special organization for guiding the CED strategy. At its core, CED is both democratic and transparent in its implementation. Successful CED implementation requires the development of a lead organization that takes on the role of developing a procedure of getting the community to coalesce around a picture of the sort of future that they seek (community visioning). Next is the development of a strategic plan to get to that future. Finally the lead organization must take the responsibility to see that the CED strategy is carried out. We are proposing the O³ Cooperative as the organization to carry these objectives out as the primary Bluefield CEDO.

What is a CEDO?

A CEDO is itself the essential means for managing a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the local economy and social supports. Most CEDOs take the form of a community development corporation (CDC), but the form or legal structure is not key. What is key is that it is broadly representative and focused on a multi-function, multi-faceted, comprehensive program for economic development – that is, a program that is not restricted to any one type of activity, say, business development, but includes promoting whatever the community needs and seeks for its own enhancement.

Because a strategy for CED implies so many different activities, carried on simultaneously, the CEDO must be the one entity to take responsibility and see that all the balls are kept in the air at once – and that the trade-offs among the different parts of the program are properly managed.

That is the primary function of the CEDO. This will require that the governing board of the CEDO contain members from all stakeholders in the community; social service, business, labor, local government, and civic representatives.

A full fledged CEDO is recognized by the following activities:

- It builds equity assets in its own enterprises as well as others in the community.
- It fosters access to credit and sometimes equity capital for local businesses, sometimes through its own capital and lending programs.
- It strengthens the human resources of its community – those skills needed for either income-earning activities (jobs or successful business management) or for the leadership of its own organization and the community in general.
- It carries out the planning, research, and advocacy work.

However, the CEDO entity may not – and indeed usually does not – engage in all the necessary activities by itself. Instead the CEDO will make sure that there are community partners to cover all the necessary objectives and those are adequately linked for the common purpose of community resilience. Thus the work of establishing partnerships is crucial. The point is that CED is not a project or just a set of projects. It is a *system for development* that is lead by the local CEDO.

Finally, the CED strategy to be developed by the CEDO must be asset based. The most empowering of community building programs start from concentrating on assets and existing capability, not on problems or needs. The past perceptions or failures should not be the driving force for moving a community forward. Every community has some assets in which to build upon. Our community is fortunate and unique in that it has most everything needed for successful CED implementation already in place such as healthcare institutions, education institutions, affordable housing, social service agencies, mass transit system, adequate transportation infrastructure, financial institutions, and access to international markets via the Internet. The primary task will be to coordinate these diverse entities into a collaborative strategic program that supports the collective vision of the community at large, from the least advantaged member to the most. Subsequent sections will explore the justification and effort required creating such an entity and its tasks to be performed for the successful implementation of a CED program by the Bluefield CEDO.

Why implement a CED/CEDO programmatic approach?

Our analysis has concluded that while there are many approaches to growing our economic base and enhancing our community's quality of life, there are very few that approach these objectives comprehensively, systematically, and programmatically. Individual organizations, from social service, fraternal, social, business-based or civic, to local and state government agencies are often defined, and, in many cases, regulated to their specific mission/vision statements or organizational charter definitions. *It is therefore logical to conclude that the flexibility that will be required to rapidly move in a positive direction and become innovative with proposed solutions could be significantly restricted or even prohibited if these existing organizations where to undertake a program like the one described herein.*

Our analysis has also concluded that many of the aforementioned *existing community entities do not have the human or financial resources at their disposal to fully implement a program* that is strategically driven, comprehensive by design, collaborative in its approach, and built upon its own base of unique community assets. There exists a lack of organizational awareness and inter-organizational communication between these divergent groups. The situation can and does lead to duplication of effort. *Every community, and ours, in particular, has limited resources.* The existing awareness and communication aspects of our community have not demonstrated that they are currently conducive to effective strategic resource allocation of all community assets. Any approach should educate and communicate to the entire community as to who does what, what are their limitations or restrictions, and how does one access these community based assets, whether for human or financial capital requirements. A separate organization that collects and disseminates this information in a central database is essential to this effort.

Given the current recessionary direction of the national economic outlook and our own prolonged local economic stagnation, *there is a clear need to minimize and manage risk to the community in terms of resource allocation and community need.* One can identify and manage these risks through the implementation of a formal reporting and benchmarking process. The CED process provides the mechanism to accomplish this important task and the CEDO will be the responsible, accountable party to execute it. Clarity of vision, enhanced communication, and transparency in action can provide the community with the benchmark data and quality assurance that this community will change for the better. We must commit to a better quality of life for all our citizens. Our community must make the case to stand up and say, “Yes, citizens of Bluefield, you will be able to stay and raise your families. If you have left, we will welcome you home”. Our community must diversify not only its economic base, but its talent base as well, for its growth, survival, and progression.

Implementation of this kind of activity must be a community based, long-term commitment to the process. Therefore program sustainability, in both financial and human capital terms, needs to be addressed from the outset. While various grants and grant making organizations have been identified for potential program implementation, every effort should be made to provide for the financial growth and sustainability of the organization through equity positions in the for-profit ventures it creates or supports, or to providing professional services at reduced cost to businesses that have been incubated under the program. *It is important to note that a non-profit legal structure does not prohibit an organization from earning revenues from activities, equity positions, and/or services that can be provided.* These funds can be built up over time as a trust, to sustain the organization in the long term. Grants, investors, or public contributions can be secured to provide the seed capital and begin the program more immediately.

In our 21st Century economy, *speed and efficiency in bringing products and/or services to market are paramount. It often means the difference between success and failure.* For every hour saved in research, be it market demographics, transportation and logistics of products, market competition, and business viability, more time and effort is available for the productive employment of human capital; i.e. activities which produce profit. Our analysis concludes that an organization which contains the various types of this comprehensive data for itself or its partners is at a competitive advantage. It can move rapidly and strategically to implement the best solutions for its clients and operate its business more profitably.

In conclusion, our analysis indicates that our community, the City of Bluefield, contains most all of the necessary components for successful implementation for this kind of program. *It only*

lacks a detailed comprehensive plan and responsible party to carry them out. We are blessed with efficient transportation corridors, access to natural resources or raw materials, and possess adequate, affordable residential or commercial property. We have quality educational institutions for workforce training, social service organizations that provide the community a social safety net, and financial institutions for access to venture capital. There are existing federal, state, and county government programs for community based economic development. We have healthcare institutions that provide services based upon our existing demographics. *The one thing that has been missing is an organization that can define and coordinate this diverse asset base into a strategic, competitive advantage for our community.* It may not be the only approach, however, we have concluded that this type of program stands the best chance of demonstrating measurable successes in the near term and offers a legitimate, systematic foundation of economic diversity in the long term for our collective economic viability.

How will the O³ Cooperative operate?

As previously mentioned, the main tasks of the CEDO can be defined into the following major categories, planning, research, and advocacy. Each category can be performed by the CEDO or in conjunction with one of its partner organizations. There is no need to re-invent the wheel, especially when one examines the existing asset base of the City of Bluefield and the Four Seasons region in general. Our analysis and corporate experience has indicated that implementation of a matrix business management model, as opposed to a hierarchal, would be most effective in time, cost, and purpose.

The author of this concept paper, the SBNA, has in its history successfully demonstrated this type of collaborative effort. For example, the South Bluefield Neighborhood Association (SBNA) is a civic organization that concentrates its efforts on advocacy for its members in four objective areas; crime prevention and reduction, land use and zoning, collective infrastructure, and community revitalization. Many SBNA projects, such as Neighborhood Watch, Utility Rate Participation, Keep Kids Alive – Drive 25, Local Government Liaison, Neighbors in Need, and Friends of the Parks, are on going, periodic, and supported by other organizations that provide labor, materials, and other such direct cost for there successful execution. We will now briefly give examples of the specific collaborative and cooperative endeavors that epitomize this approach.

To accomplish projects in the first three areas of the defined objective areas, the SBNA has teamed with many organizations such as CASE WV, COFY Coalition of Mercer County, DHHR, BRMC, Bluefield State College, Bluefield College, Greater Bluefield Community Center, and the Mercer County Board of Education on a project by project basis utilizing the various resources contained within these organizations to affect a positive outcome and successful execution. Through the collaborative efforts of our partners, the SBNA has been able to execute six Crime Prevention and Reduction projects, five Land Use and Zoning projects, seven Collective Infrastructure projects and three Community Revitalization projects over the past four years with minimal human and financial resources, thereby minimizing financial risk and maximizing resource allocation to the individual organizations as a whole.

This concept paper and the program defined herein should be considered as a proposal to implement another project under the fourth SBNA objectives, community revitalization. It is anticipated that the program must be focused and dedicated to the long-term community economic revitalization and as such probably needs to be a separate legal entity. The O³

Cooperative as herein defined will be one such on-going program that will need community commitment and participation. The SBNA can and will participate as a community partner as the required resources for such a program are currently beyond its current capability to provide primary support. The scope of this programmatic approach by definition will require multiple community partners and entities to be actively involved.

Primary Tasks for the O³ Cooperative Implementation

The following sections will explore the implementation steps to be executed in order to create a community based revitalization program as previously defined for the City of Bluefield. Please note that more specifics as to the type of projects that could be undertaken by the CEDO program are intended to be addressed by the CEDO and its governing body. This paper is conceptual and not meant to be all-encompassing or definitive. The process must be fluid, dynamic and based upon community asset definitions as well as the community visioning product. At the present time, these tasks have yet to be executed although some assumptions or potential scenarios can be made for explanation purposes.

Establishment of the CEDO

If you are reading this concept paper, you probably have been identified as being one of the potential participants in the establishment of the O3 Cooperative, most likely as a governing board member. The articles of incorporation and corporate bylaws are under legal review at this time. It is anticipated that the filing will take place with the West Virginia Secretary of State's office by the end of November 2008.

A projected business plan with pro-forma financial statements is being prepared and a Letter of Determination for IRS submission is projected to be completed and submitted by mid-December 2008, subject to initial funding. We project that the Cooperative will begin the fund raising and grant submittal processes almost immediately in the hopes that initial projects that have been approved by the prospective governing board can begin to be fielded not later than the second quarter of calendar year 2009. These potential projects will be discussed in further detail in the subsequent section titled Strategic Plan Development.

Preliminary discussions involving organizational constituents have resulted in the following relationships/commitments being made verbally, not formally, at the present time; CASE WV will act as the initial non-profit fiscal agent; the SBNA has and is providing the preliminary planning and management expertise; and several other representatives from the community; such as the local chapter of the NAACP, a City of Bluefield representative, non-profit social service organizations, educational institutions, and various business owners, have been approached. As previously stated, the CED program and the CEDO must be representative of the entire community. Each representative must play an active role if our community hopes to achieve success.

Finally, an executive director and staff must be identified and selected from the Cooperative members as this will be a full time, salaried position that will be responsible for the creation and implementation of this program. He/she will report to the governing board and will be responsible for the daily operation of the CEDO. The candidate should have experience in business management with a discipline in operations, job or project cost financial reporting, corporate marketing, strong communication skills, and liaison with government or regulatory

agencies. The governing board will make this decision, however it should be noted that these positions are key to implementation.

Community Visioning

This is probably the first tool that our community should use when it begins to address, in a systematic manner, our social and economic future. In fact, visioning is an effort to describe a positive future and the path to that future. Thus, community-wide visioning is both the means to get to the vision and the final result; the vision itself. The vision, however, is not merely a dream; it is also based on real facts and an analysis of where the community is today. The vision is a positive view of the future, but it recognizes and acknowledges the problems that must be surmounted to get to that future.

Everyone in our community, naturally, has a stake in the future, whether they perceive this to be true or not. So with this tool, everyone must feel that, if not they themselves, then people like them are helping to shape that future. "Community-wide" visioning means that all sectors of the community are engaged in the process of assessing the current situation and figuring out how to move into a better future. That does not mean that every individual gets involved, but that everyone will, at least, feel that he/she could have been involved and that his or her general interests and needs have somehow been considered along the way.

Community-wide participation is absolutely essential for very practical reasons, not just because it is good to get people involved. It is essential because the task involves very complex issues and no one organization or government unit has the jurisdiction or the capacity to accomplish all that is needed for a positive future. If this were so, we could merely pass a law or ordinance making it so. Done deal. It is also essential because so many interests are involved, and because the resources to achieve a positive future are always very limited, and as such, they must be used with broad-based carefulness.

A major benefit of this tasking is that it will provide our community with a vision of the future that will act as an overall guide for our approach and resilience. The chosen tools will have a greater chance of success because all sectors of the community have helped portray the vision. Full participation lends credibility to the effort, so that all sectors will be behind it. With a common vision, our community can field a team that really has a chance to get all the way to the final goal. However, just achieving a common vision in itself can be exhilarating for this community. The polarization in our community that has occurred must be overcome. This visioning process and its corresponding product should be a cause for local celebration, before taking the next concrete steps of strategic planning and action.

The major challenge will be to make this effort a truly community wide affair. It is usually difficult to enlist the full range of community sectors, because in the past certain groups have felt left out of important decisions and they wonder whether they truly will have a chance this time to participate substantially. So they hold back. Or there are traditions of rivalry that make a particular group wary of engaging in a collaborative process with an old rival. Finally, there may be other issues, such as transportation, that will inhibit participation. However, the process must be open for inclusion.

Finally, the National Civic League, a long standing community improvement organization, has found that a successful visioning process will require, among other conditions:

- strong leadership from all sectors and interests;
- traditional power brokers genuinely seeking peer relationships with all participants;
- trust, understanding, and respect to breakdown the old economic, ethnic and social barriers;
- And continuing commitment and participation of all sectors despite times of frustration.

All of these make for a tall order, but the fact remains that successful communities achieve the aforementioned conditions for community visioning, planning, and implementation regardless of the odds or obstacles.

Inventory and Mapping of Community/Regional Assets

This task is not simply compiling a list of businesses or organizations within the community. It is a detailed mapping as to size; type by SIC classification, capability, functionality, number of full/part time /seasonal employees, and existing skill sets within the community. The task will result in a baseline of data from which analysis can be performed and progress can be measured. It will identify potential partners or expertise at the local level that could be applied to a potential community economic development initiative. It will also identify potential deficiencies in the community human capital asset base, which can then be addressed through our educational partners or various workforce training programs.

In addition, data should be gathered that reflects infrastructure capability that could be utilized for revenue producing activity. We have a railroad and transportation infrastructure that can transport goods. We have access to the national power grid with the 750MW line that runs over East River Mountain. We have two colleges and a community college, each of which has unique programs and capabilities that should be expanded into research and development projects or applied technology programs. We have plenty of water; a commodity that national projections indicate will be in increasing demand throughout the remainder of this century. We are centrally located to coalbed methane sources, another increasing demand commodity. We will explore these items in greater detail under the Strategic Plan Development section of this paper.

The inventory can be accomplished through one on one interview, surveys, focus groups and the like. Local college students, through work study programs, can be utilized to help collect and enter the data. The type and breadth of this inventory should contain the following categories:

- Inventory of Businesses
- Inventory of Organizations
- Inventory of Skills
- Mapping Consumer Expenditures

In conclusion, the inventory and mapping task of community assets identifies the foundations from which a new, more vibrant, diversified economic base can be built for our community. It will indicate where we need to improve our community human capital asset base to support new business enterprises. It can identify the actual dollars flowing out of our community and will provide a baseline of where we are today and what steps we need to take to get to our future successfully.

Strategic Plan Development & Update

It is not enough to just pick up opportunities for community betterment as they appear on the horizon. A systematic campaign is required for effectively building community resilience and capacity. That means that the community must plan carefully – and strategically. It means creating the opportunities, not just waiting for them. In a “strategic” plan the available or expected resources (people, finances, infrastructure, etc.) are matched and integrated with intermediate objectives, timetables, and techniques to attain a set of overall or ultimate goals or vision. Also, each part is adjusted to the needs for achieving the other parts of the plan.

To construct a realistic plan, information is first gathered that is considered significant for community transformation. These data elements, which were previously identified in the Inventory and Mapping section, will provide the information base from which a plan can be developed. The ultimate objective is to have a good idea of the key dimensions of local resilience in the face of change and how they are represented in our community today. The information thus gathered underlies and makes reasonable the vision of a positive future that the community has portrayed. The plan will then merge the vision and the information to chart a practical path to the future.

The process for laying out a strategic plan for CED is just as important as the plan itself. It is that process that builds the strong foundations for community approval and for the commitment of all community sectors to achieving the goals. While planning is a complex task that cannot be done in public meetings, the general interest and needs of all sectors have to be recognized and accommodated by the group that actually works out the plan details.

If the initial Community Visioning process has been successful, those interests will have been recognized and represented in the makeup and operations of the planning group, as well as in the ideas to be implemented. Good planning must involve widespread citizen participation.

The ultimate product, the plan itself, is the guide to action that the O³ Cooperative will use over a period of years. Yet because opportunities appear and disappear, resources shift, and time changes all things, the plan cannot be unchangeable itself. It will require periodic updating; a good plan *plans* for that updating attention.

As implied, the chief payoff for a strategic plan is that it greatly increases the likelihood that our community will get to where we aim to get. It offers a standard by which everyone can gauge how successful the CEDO, and our community, has been in its efforts. And it provides an understandable rationale and the criteria for allocating community resources. It may even help guide decision making by other local organizations besides the CEDO.

Liaison with Government Officials/Agencies

Liaison, in its most powerful form, means establishing on-going relations with specific officials in relevant agencies. There are many funding opportunities available in both the public and private sectors that fall under the heading of economic development. This would be a primary focus of this task. However, it will also require monitoring various changes in the funding requirements and try to match those requirements to the best fit in the existing community asset base.

In addition, the CEDO must play a role in advocating for progressive changes in the tax and regulatory business environment, ensuring that the projects or companies that it has helped develop are not adversely affected by proposed changes in law or regulation. Many times the “law of unintended consequences” should at least be explored prior to legislative changes. An example of this is the Americans with Disabilities Act, which has actually led to fewer jobs being created for people with disabilities than what was intended.

Finally, the CEDO must be an active communicator of its mission and programs throughout the community. Residents of Bluefield must be aware that there is an organization they can turn to for assistance in creating a new business venture that will be located here and employ local people. Existing business organizations need to know that there is an organization that can help them find capital for expansion or bridge financing.

Conclusions

As initially stated in this concept paper, there are many different approaches that could be employed for changing the direction of the City of Bluefield in a more positive direction. In this paper we have explored the CED/CEDO concepts of community revitalization. We believe that this approach and its corresponding benefits will provide the best chance of correcting the following local issues:

- Job creation of a life sustaining wage level
- Reconstruction of an aged infrastructure
- Expansion and diversification of our local economic base
- Elimination of the exodus of dollars outside our community
- Enhancement of Economic Opportunity for all residents
- Attract new citizens and businesses
- Expansion of our middle class, thereby reducing socio-economic polarization

In conclusion, I must acknowledge the many authors of CED and CEDO concepts. I did not think this stuff up all by myself, but this paper is the culmination of a significant amount of research via the Internet and various organizations committed to CED. Without their body of knowledge and effort to document the same, I may never have become aware of this progressive opportunity. As always, I look forward to discussion on these issues or concepts with all who have read this paper. Nothing is written in granite and we must move forward if we are to gain the upper hand. Time is of the essence. Thanking you in advance for your time and consideration, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Blaine A. Braithwaite
Executive Director
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