

Regional Strategic Action Plan Steering Committee

Kick-Off Meeting

November 1, 2006 Meeting Notes

SEDA-COG Board Room

6:30 p.m.

Attendance: Wes Fahringer (PA DCNR), Kate Fairweather (Governor's Action Team), Anna Griffith (Discovery Machine, Inc.), Betsy Hack (Montour County Planning Commission), Chris Kerwin (CSIU), Jim King (Northumberland County Industrial Development Corp.), David Kurecian (Columbia-Montour Visitors Bureau), Shawn McLaughlin (Union County Planning), Cindy Mengel Bower (Rose Valley/Mill Creek Watershed), Andrew Miller (Susquehanna Valley Visitors Bureau), Tom Oyler (PA Department of Agriculture), Charles Pollock (Bucknell University), Rob Postal (Mifflin County Industrial Development Corporation), Joan Sattler (DEP), Mike Schrey (AgChoice Farm Credit), Rachel Smith (Central PA Workforce), Wayne Smutz (Penn State), Kevin Staschiak (Snyder County Planning), Dan Vilello (DEP), Jerry Walls (Lycoming County Planning), Skip Wieder (Geisinger Health Systems), Jim Szymborski (Tri County Regional Planning Commission)

SEDA-COG Staff Present: Kim Wheeler (CRC), Brian Auman (CRC), Betsy Lockwood (ED), Steve Herman (TP), Ryan Unger (Admin), Kristen Moyer (ED), Jerry Bohinski (ED), Dennis Robinson (Admin), Joe Dewalle (GIS), Mandy Burbage (CRC)

Introductions

- Kim welcomed the new steering committee of the SEDA-COG Strategic Action Plan and introduced SEDA-COG staff and state agency representatives.
- Each steering committee member introduced themselves and explained what they do and where they are employed.
- Kim invited the Steering Committee to suggest other members of the regional community that may be a good fit for this committee who may not have already been invited.

Project Background

- Kim reviewed the project background with the Steering Committee (see soon-to-be-launched project website for details).

The SEDA-COG Plan

- Kim reviewed the project goals, SEDA-COG's sub-regional approach, and the project timeline.
- Kim asked if the map and the sub-region breakout seemed logical to the steering committee.

- Kate Fairweather of the Governor's Action Team (GAT) responded by saying that Lock Haven seems to more aligned with Williamsport, not State College as indicated on the Sub-Region Map.
 - Jerry Walls, Lycoming County Planning Commission agreed by saying there seems to be a greater connectivity with Williamsport and the West Branch in the form of employment and commuting patterns.
 - Dan Vilello, DEP disagreed and felt Lock Haven seemed to align more with State College. In terms of orientation, Dan felt more people from Lock Haven would say they are close to State College, not Williamsport.
 - Shawn McLaughlin, Union County Planning Commission, stated that Clinton County is experiencing a decline in industry and that trend seems to follow more along the lines of Williamsport rather than State College.
 - Rob Postal stated that Mifflin County or at least parts of Mifflin County more identify with the Central Valleys Region, not the Juniata Valley region as indicated on the Sub Region Map. He went on to say there is also a Harrisburg influence in terms of commuting patterns.
 - Jerry Walls thinks the Sub Region map should not be published but rather used as a frame of reference when setting up the Focus Group meetings. At the Focus Group meetings, we should be asking the participants: Where do you work? Where do you play? Where do you live?
- Kim agreed, the map should not be published but should be used for our own informational purposes as a way to initially begin to administer and the program and provide public outreach.
 - Regarding the Timeline: Kim indicated that she would like to complete the focus group meetings in December 2006 and January 2007. the next two Steering Committee meetings were suggested to be held on February 8th and April 17th. Kim will be asking the Steering Committee members to attend at least 1 of the 5 sub-regional outreach meetings which will take place in June/July/August 2007.
 - Shawn McLaughlin mentioned that April 17th conflicts with the National American Planning Association conference in Harrisburg that will be attended by a lot of the planners in the region. It was decided that **April 10th** might be a better day to hold the April Steering Committee meeting.
 - Wes Fahringer of DCNR asked when SEDA-COG will be getting the word out on the sub-region meetings including the date and location of the meetings. Kim said she hoped to get a better idea on that later tonight.
 - Mike Schrey of Ag Choice Farm Credit said it might be hard to get people to come to the meetings in December due to the holidays. Kim agreed and said they will re-evaluate when the sub-regional focus group meetings will be held. They may try to hold all of the focus group meetings in January.
 - Kim mentioned that the SEDA-COG plan is to not compete but rather form partnerships with other community/county/regional organizations to help enhance what everyone is doing in their area.

- Mandy Burbage asked the Steering Committee to take a look at the handout titled, “Regional Land Use, Transportation, & Economic Development Plans in the SEDA-COG Region,” and let us know if we are missing any significant planning documents.
 - Jerry Walls mentioned that SEDA-COG should take a look at the sewage facility and water supply plans as they are just as critical and important as the county comprehensive plans. Mandy agreed and said she wasn’t sure how accessible those sewage facility and water supply plans are and that locating them may be a logistical hurdle they will have to overcome. She went on to say that SEDA-COG shouldn’t overlook the comprehensive plans on infrastructure in our region and they will do their best to locate them.
 - Wes from DCNR asked if we wanted to also include, on the list, smaller regional project plans that have been or are in the process of being completed, such as the Warrior Run Pathways Project. Kim/Mandy answered yes. He went on to ask if we would be interested in reviewing targeted watershed plans. Kim/Mandy answered yes. Wes stated there are good, progressive ideas happening with these plans and they generally involve several communities working together which is difficult to find in this region.

Facts from Around the Region and the Commonwealth

- Brian Auman gave a snapshot of date for the region. He started off by talking about the Brookings Report, *Back to Prosperity – A Competitive Agenda for Renewing PA*, and said there were a lot of generalizations made in the study that applied to more urban areas and they did not take into account the rural nature of our region. However, the study was good because it got people talking.
- A detailed report was provided by Brian on the statewide perspective on planning and relevant facts from around the region. Please see (soon-to-be-launched) project website for details on Brian’s discussion.
- Jerry Walls stated that SEDA-COG should take a look at the State Planning Board’s report for recommendations on governance that was just recently released.

Review of Central Region Objectives

- Kim noted that the previous action plans that have been created for the region were just a beginning point and that they were not done through a comprehensive or consensus-based process. She pointed to the yellow document in everyone’s packet and reviewed the vision and primary objectives developed for the Central Region at the May 2005 conference in Williamsport. Kim explained that this is the base information that the focus groups participants will be asked to verify and modify.
- Anna Griffith from Discovery Machine, Inc. asked who would be invited to the focus groups and whether the discussion will be fruitful with general citizenry. Kim said these focus groups would not be opened to the public, the steering committee will help select the most appropriate people to have this discussion with.
- Wes of DCNR asked how we intend to reach or get buy-in from the municipalities/communities on the new statewide processes. Kim responded by saying we will help

to educate community leaders throughout the strategic planning process and thereafter as to the new culture of how the state agencies would like to do business, ie. grants to regional projects after comprehensive planning is done. The reality of getting projects implemented in this way is difficult at best in rural areas like the SEDA-COG region, since more often than not, municipal leaders and advisory councils don't have the professional expertise to think comprehensively about how decisions on such things as land use, zoning, economic development, and transportation impact one another.

- Kim asked for at least one person to volunteer from each sub-region to assist with coordinating outreach meetings, such as the focus groups in January. These volunteers will assist with collecting and suggesting names of individuals to invite to the focus groups and help to locate space for holding meetings. The following people agreed to be points of contact:
 - Middle Susquehanna – Anna Griffith
 - Central Valleys – Dan Vilello
 - Mountain Top Region – Cindy Bower & Jerry Walls
 - Coal Region – Jim King
 - Juniata Valley – Bob Postal

Closing Comments

- Jerry Walls asked for a copy of the PowerPoint presentation that was used tonight. Kim said she will email the presentation to all of the steering committee members.
- Kim also said that she will look into the possibility of creating a Strategic Plan webpage off of the SEDA-COG website.
- At the end of the meeting, steering committee members were asked to voice their opinions on what they would like to see come out of the strategic action planning process. The following list was generated:
 - ▶ Regional plan efforts should have legislative impact at the state level
 - ▶ Regional/ local partnerships looked upon favorably by state funding agencies
 - ▶ We need to take a regional approach to marketing and promoting ourselves (what are we already marketing about the region?)
 - ▶ Do not ignore the importance of tourism as an economic driver in our region
 - ▶ The process should seek a candid assessment of the barriers and liabilities to regional coordination and develop consensus on how these barriers can be overcome.
 - ▶ Our region's assets are not just physical – they are natural & cultural (what are the things that bring people to our region?)
 - ▶ We need to understand where we are starting from with respect to regional thinking. Not everyone in the region is at the same level of thinking.
 - ▶ Growth is not just expansion – we need to characterize regional growth in terms of sustainability.
 - ▶ Change is needed at all levels of government – local, county, region, state.
 - ▶ We should consider the role that technology can play (and is already playing) in bringing growth to the region.

- ▶ Small businesses are integral to sustaining regional economic growth. It's not just about industry!
- ▶ The process must educate and involve local officials (PSATs rep to serve on steering committee?)
- ▶ Do we have the infrastructure to support the people we have and bring to the region?
- ▶ Plan should account for changing energy costs/ availability
- ▶ Plan should not ignore the importance of ag & supporting industries to the region's economy and employment
- ▶ The new International Building Code presents a challenge to new development – need to educate the development community & streamline the local process for addressing IBC to overcome these barriers.
- ▶ Engage the development community in the process.

Next Steering Committee Meetings:

Thursday, February 8th – 6:30 p.m. - SEDA-COG (unless informed otherwise)

Tuesday, April 10th, 2007 – 6:30 p.m. - SEDA-COG (unless informed otherwise)