

PlanET Economy & Workforce Working Group Meeting #3

Tuesday, August 21, 2012

Knoxville Chamber, Market House Room, 7:30am – 9:30am

KEY FINDINGS

Mark Donaldson welcomed participants and provided context for the Economy and Workforce Working Group within the PlanET project. All 19 participants introduced themselves.

Vision Statement

Ken Poole, Project Facilitator, provided further context for the Working Group in the PlanET framework and shared a Vision Statement. The group reviewed the specific vision elements and provided the following feedback:

- The region should leverage investments such as education and skills
- The Vision document was lengthy, with some items that seemed to be more goal-oriented
- Low-skilled workers were not included in the vision
- The Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the river should be specifically mentioned

Strategies

Ken Poole asked participants to rate the seven identified goals on a scale of one to five. The Working Group reported back on which goals they found most and least important and discussed the following:

- Goal 6, “Strengthen the region’s workforce supply” should focus on quality rather than quantity
- Rural areas are important to focus on specifically
- The role of available land could be included in Goal 4
- Support services for existing businesses was not explicitly stated though included elsewhere
- A “Market Development” goal could be added, which would entail the concept of product ideation
- The goals become much clearer as you begin to look at the associated sub-bullets
- The goals could perhaps be redeveloped with a lens toward customer targets
- An unifying theme of competitiveness could be developed

Ken Poole asked the group what indicators would be best to monitor these goals. The brainstorming discussion led to the following suggestions:

- *Overall*: Job creation, job quality, income, firm productivity, in-migration
- *Entrepreneurship*: Number of new startups that survive over a period of time, number of new product lines
- *Workforce*: Number of positions difficult to fill, educational attainment, underemployment
- *Research and development*: Investments, number of new patents/licenses
- *Global market access*: Sales outside the region

Ken Poole asked the Working Group to review the sub-elements of the seven draft goals. The following items made up the subsequent discussion:

- Rural areas face different economic and workforce challenges within the region
- Technical training is needed for those who will not attend college
- Middle-skill technical jobs should be better promoted to students and workers in the region
- High school completion is a regional issue
- Education is not valued highly
- Mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities could be a worthwhile strategy, and most current programs require a high school diploma
- Tourism promotion through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and other recreational areas of local importance could be another worthwhile strategy
- Advocacy for a local \$35 million educational initiative under way might be considered