

Bedford Economic Development Commission

Summary of Business Outreach Forum Comments

September 21, 2009

1) *How do you see an economic development function benefitting your business? What support would you expect?*

There are many different variations of an economic development function that were discussed during each of the forums. Each function has positives as well as negatives. The possibility of a full-time economic development director was discussed at virtually every forum. Those in favor of this approach argued that it would provide the most accountability for economic development. The other end of the spectrum is recruiting a volunteer to implement the wishes of a standing economic development commission. Other specific suggestions were mentioned that would be grouped somewhere between both of these extremes such as an ambassador program, regional partnerships, commission based, and a part-time employee. However, nobody suggested that the function should be performed through the town manager and town planner as it is currently which means they are generally not satisfied with the way Bedford currently conducts Economic Development. The function should be a cheerleader, quarterback, and advocate for Bedford businesses. Likewise, the function should be a salesperson, communicator, and advocate for the town.

2) *What are the most important issues that you currently face that an economic development function might be able to assist with?*

Communication was a major theme that was mentioned at every forum. Whatever the function that is to be employed, it should ensure that adequate communication is upheld between all stakeholders. A constant information exchange through e-mail newsletters and website communication need to be employed. An ongoing business directory would help with this.

Town Identity was a concern that was brought up by more than one individual at each of the forums. They felt that there was no real "town center" to attract people. There really is no economic identity that is unique to Bedford such as being a town where businesses go for office space. Selling a reputation is crucial for creating a town identity. Bedford should be specific about what caliber of business that it should attract.

Incentives should be used in order to attract specific types of businesses.

Airport Access Road is a fantastic opportunity for economic development. What should go here? Hotels and restaurants may feed into the airport clientele as well as provide helpful tax revenue. These businesses should appeal to the airport consumer. Bedford should get the best "bang for their buck" here.

Keeping businesses from relocating is just as important as economic development. 80% of businesses come from within. Therefore, the economic development function should not forget about businesses once they are up and running.

Infrastructure Needs such as water and sewer and other utilities on route 101 were mentioned multiple times. A clear infrastructure plan would give businesses a direction as to where they should develop.

3) *How do you see the business climate in Bedford compared to surrounding areas?*

Location is Bedford's major strength because of major roads & highways such as 101, 293, 3, etc.

People in the community are also a major strength compared to other communities. While they are unique and progressive in nature they are also *apathetic* when it comes to volunteering for positions and attending public meetings.

The planning process has been improved greatly since Bedford's hiring of our Planning Director. However, the development process should continue to be improved and more business friendly. The planning board should act more cohesively perhaps by authoring a mission statement and lessening the time and delay's in the process. More autonomy should be given to the town council to make change to ordinances more efficient. Overall, the process is too time consuming.

Signage compared to other town is a weakness of Bedford. Many find the signage ordinances to be far too restrictive. However, they also mentioned the need to maintain Bedford's character so it does not evolve into a South Willow Street.