

Jasper County Comprehensive Plan - Business Focus Group

September 30, 2019

Small Group Discussion Questions and Responses
(15 attendees – businesses and government rep)



Business Development & Resources

1. In the countywide survey, Economic Development was chosen at the most important thing for the County to focus its attention. Why do you think that is?
 - It's needed. Business growth is essential. It is the reason people leave small towns.
2. What business resources have you used in the past?
 - Small business admin
 - SBDC (Small Business Development Corporation)
 - Easy access to small loans
 - Chamber (Newton) and their affiliation with the Greater DSM Partnership
3. What business resources are you aware of, but haven't used?
 - (Blank)
4. What additional business resources are needed?
 - Small business start-up loans.
 - County workshops for small business needs (taxes, marketing, legal aid, etc.)
5. What are the current business attraction and retention efforts in the county?
 - a. Can any of the existing entities be expanded to provide that service?
 - None that we are aware of
6. How can the county support an innovation culture that leads to entrepreneurship and business growth?
 - Support free resources like libraries.
 - Offering workshops or supporting those entities that do.
 - Networking opportunities through volunteering
 - Offer any county-level business collaboration opportunities
 - JEDCO – support existing businesses
 - JEDCO – should have the resources to do that

7. What type of incentives would assist with attracting investment?
 - People/customers to be able to sustain businesses
 - Tax abatements or grants
 - Elimination of hurdles to bringing businesses here.
8. What do we need to prepare for in the future?
 - a. What trends are likely to impact the economy in the next 10-20 years?
 - Grow the educational opportunities for job placement
 - Education – business partnerships
 - Focus not only on large businesses but also your entrepreneurs
 - Telecommuting is growing
 - Fiber

Business Development & Workforce

9. Where are the current jobs (industry & geography)?
 - a. What are the typical wages?
 - Manufacturing – TPI, Trinity, Gates, Cline Tool, Thomberts
 - Healthcare facilities
 - County workers
 - Retailers (Walmart, Hy-Vee)
 - Farming/Ag-Rel.
10. How can we attract talent to the county?
 - Improve Quality of Life
 - Amenities
 - Curb appeal
 - Parks & recreation
 - Safety (crime is an issue)
 - Schools
11. How do we build an employer-ready workforce?
12. How should we manage existing talent and workforce skills?
13. What do we need to prepare for in the future?
 - a. How can we help our workforce be “future ready”?
 - College/trades – how do we get youth interested in skilled trades?
 - Guide youth
 - Mentorship program

Quality of life issues:

- Offer hip social areas
- Good examples - Monroe/Prairie City/Baxter
- Colfax – housing issues
- east end development issues

Business Development & Infrastructure

14. Where are the most desired locations for additional economic development (new development or revitalization)?
15. What physical infrastructure is needed and where (e.g. roads, water, sewer, fiber, etc.)?
16. Have local zoning regulations or review and approval process ever presented an unreasonable barrier to business development?
 - a. How could the process have been improved to be more reasonable?
17. Has the lack of regulations or review processes ever allowed for the development of a nuisance property or use (e.g. pollution, noise, aesthetics, traffic, etc.)?
 - a. How could the process be improved to ensure that this doesn't happen again?
18. What other local issues do businesses take into consideration when making decisions to start or expand their business (e.g. housing, quality of life, schools, entertainment, etc.)?

Small Group Discussion:

- Workforce availability (training at DMACC?)
- Cooperation with incorporated areas
 - Sewer, water, etc.
 - Fringe area agreements
- Communication between cities and county
- At an advantage with rural water available
- Attract small business in rural county
 - Internet is key (rural broadband)
 - Empower Rural Iowa
- Incentives to attract small businesses
 - Younger generation
- Investment from public sector to encourage expansion from private sector
- Grow existing small businesses
- Proximity to major arteries that lead to metro as an advantage
- County marketing strategy (lack thereof)

Large Group Discussion

County Regulations

- Road paving requirements – when should a new development be responsible for paving the accessing the development? Rules need to be consistent and reasonable.
- Home-based businesses
 - Concern about business promotion/signage
 - Hobbyist movement
- Impacts of confinement operations on other businesses
 - State regulation of agriculture
 - Self-contained
 - Landscape buffering

Other Topics

- Future farming grant (young farmers)
- Co-working space for small business/start-ups
- Business development network – consisting of classes, mentoring, etc.
- Local Resources: Jasper County Economic Development; Young Professionals of Jasper County
- State resources: Iowa Economic Development Authority, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Sourcelink, Future Ready Iowa (Employer Innovation Fund,” Earn and Learn
 - how do make these locally known and accessible
- Trail development can lead to economic development along trail system
- Success of Hometown Pride can be a model for other successes – brings people together to have discussions and creates a network of support