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The
Upper
Delaware
River
Corridor

A FORUM
ON THE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
OF THE
DELAWARE RIVER
CORRIDOR

Wrap-Up

APRIL 12, 2002

CENTRAL HOUSE,
BEACH LAKE, PA

Presented by THE RIVER REPORTER,
Narrowsburg, NY

TWO STATES, THREE COUNTIES, FIFTEEN COMMUNITIES
AND ONE RIVER

Chant sees the need for joint marketing of the area

BY TOM KANE

BEACH LAKE — The third discussion that was held at the forum began with a focus on the possibility of jointly marketing the area.

Davis Chant of Davis R Chant Realty who led the discussion with Paul Meagher, President of Wayne County WIDCO, had strong ideas on the subject.

Chant spoke of his trip to Lenox, Massachusetts a few years back and discussed how much that area was changed by the Tanglewood Music Festival.

“I visited the tax assessor of the area who showed me that property values went up 35 percent because of the festival,” he said.

“Whenever the Boston Symphony is performing, every hotel for miles around is booked and every restaurant has long lines,” he said.

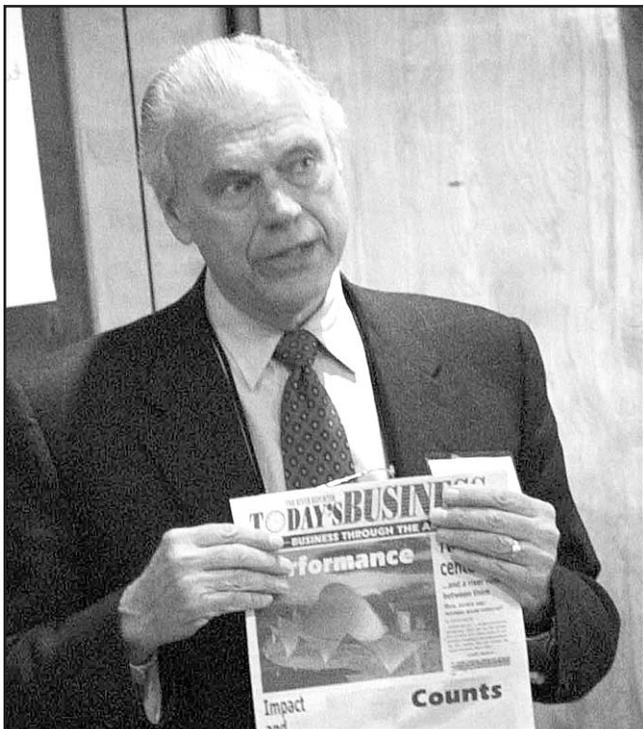
Chant also related how he met a retired man in Florida who built a home in Lenox just so he could volunteer to work for the festival.

“We are going to see this kind of thing around these two performing arts festivals,” Chant said. “It’s an enormous opportunity. We need to package it.”

Chant suggested that cooperative advertising be placed in the New York Metropolitan Area’s newspapers and magazines highlighting the river and the festivals when they get going.

Paul Meagher praised the organizers of the forum and urged that the process continue. “There has been tremendous pressures on local real estate people since the tragedy of September 11,” he said. “More people want to move out of New York City and they’re looking our way.”

Meagher urged that the river corridor be considered one area that we all have in common.



Davis R. Chant

He was especially concerned with the issue of preserving the quality of life we enjoy now.

“The key word is balance,” he said. Balance between the tendency to have business growth and prosperity and at the same time respecting the environment.

During the discussion that followed, speakers ranged over a whole gamut of ideas and issues. Many affirmed Meagher’s insistence on preserving the environment.

Jennifer Canfield who owns several businesses along the river urged that there was no real conflict between business and the environment.

“The environment is economic development,” she said. “The natural beauty of the area is what draws people here. It’s our greatest asset.”

Grace DeFina, a local activist, said the trend towards what is being called “sustainable growth” or “sustainable communities” should be studied and studied here. She urged the creation environmental advisory councils for better dialogue with various groups that may see things differently.

“We must avoid unrestrained growth that has ruined many other communities around us,” she said.

Others urged that the dialogue should be between governmental agencies within counties, like county boards and town and township boards and between counties. It may be difficult to pull off but it must be tried.

Another discussion turned to the need for training and education of workers.

“If we know the specific needs of incoming industries beforehand, we can get funding for work force development,” said John Butler, Verizon regional manager based in White Plains, NY.

Distance learning was also a new trend where employees can get trained in their spare time. Many are now utilizing it.

Others turned to the need to set priorities and set a vision.

“Before we start joint marketing, we have to know what kind of community we want to be,” said Dick Snyder of Milford Enhancement Committee. “We have a good product already. We need to develop an icon of our communities. We need a brand that tells everyone clearly what we are.”

The river is a unifying force,” said Bob Ugucconi, Executive Director of the Pocono Mountain Visitors Bureau. “We should develop an icon or motto like “A River Runs Through It” or something like that.

It’s going to be difficult to accomplish any of this through government only, someone said. Businesses should be leagued with government through things like this forum.

The session ended on a final note emphasizing 1) quality of life and 2) high cultural development.

The natural beauty of the area is what draws people here. It’s our greatest asset.”

—Davis Chant

Business conditions are going to change drastically

BY TOM KANE

BEACH LAKE — The river valley is fast becoming “the suburbs of the suburbs” according to Thomas Shepstone, a municipal planning advisor and the major presenter at the forum.

Up until now, the area has had a large number of second homes owned by people living in the New York City Metropolitan Area. That’s changing, he said.

“What we are seeing now is a trend where people with second homes are moving up here permanently,” Shepstone said.

We are right in the middle of perhaps the biggest market in America with 15 million people within a two-hour drive, he said. “It’s a tremendous market.”

“We have a beautiful river, a national park, and soon two attractive performing arts centers that will act like magnets,” Shepstone said. “We are one of the few growing areas in the Northeast where growth has been somewhat defunct in recent years.”

Pike County is among the most active counties not only in the Northeast but in the nation, he added.

Shepstone displayed statistics on the growth that is happening now in the river valley especially to our south in Monroe County.

This is what’s happening now without these new projects that are on the horizon, he said.

The growing housing market began expanding from the city almost immediately after the events of September 11, he said. Single-family sales are up steeply in our area.

“In Pike, it’s exploding,” Shepstone said.

To give our market some perspective, Shepstone reminded the audience that parts of Long Island are further away from New York City than the Upper Delaware. The Bethel Performing Arts Center is only 12 miles from the Wayne County border. The casino at Kutsher’s, which is 40 minutes away from Wayne County will feature a 750-room hotel, 2500 jobs, seven restaurants, space for 5500 cars, with a billion dollars in revenue a year.

A thing that’s going to hinder our ability to control all this growth is the isolation of many municipalities and planning agencies from each other, he said.

“Many people on one side of the river never think of the other side. This divisive attitude doesn’t make sense today and in fact can do a lot of harm.”

—Tom Shepstone

“Many people on one side of the river never think of the other side,” he said. This divisive attitude doesn’t make sense today and in fact can do a lot of harm.

Some of the questions that will come out of this forum that must be answered are: what types of businesses do we want to come here? Light industry, tourist-related businesses, manufacturing, high-end services businesses?

“In many ways we can control this process if we plan now,” Shepstone said.

Other questions are how are we going to preserve our quality of life? Quality of life means a lot to people that live here and to the people who will come here. And we need to define what we mean by quality of life. To what degree do we wish to protect the environment?

Another question is how are we to avoid gentrification that has a tendency to price ordinary people out of the market. How do we avoid being only for the rich?

In other words, how do we achieve “balance” between economic development and the environment?

“How do we get some people to see opportunities where they now see threats?” he said.

How do we get political leaders to think beyond their own borders and begin talking to each other? This forum can begin to build communication between political and social groups that need to talk to each other, Shepstone said.

Finally, how do we avoid the “last man in the door” syndrome? I got mine now shut the door.



Tom Shepstone

Not if, but how change will come

BY DAVID HULSE

BEACH LAKE — “The issue is not if, but the form of new growth,” coming to the region, Sullivan County Planning Commissioner Alan Sorensen began, as he and Pike County Director of Planning Michael Mrozinski facilitated a planning segment during the April 12 visioning forum.

Known for his cautious approach to rapid development, Sorensen said directing the way in an orderly fashion will be paramount, as “the character of it will have a fundamental impact on our quality of life.” He added, “change that respects the character of our communities has the least impact on quality of life...can we accommodate that growth and what mechanisms can we put in place to protect our quality of life.”

Mrozinski first stated concerns were for keeping pace with changes in the housing market. The product of a second-home industry has begun to be converted into full-time homes and even smaller seasonal communities are starting to see more pressure from growth. He said pressures were infrastructural, including everything from sewage to highways to internet connections.

Still he saw Pike as a county ready for more. “Pike County still has room. There are residential lots available and the transportation system has not been severely tapped.” He said the county’s transportation pressures are still largely seasonal. “Wayne is in the same boat as Pike, there is room for growth.”

Both planners saw the two planned performing arts centers as tests for transportation systems.

“Our issue with these big programs is the impact of the centers on small roads. Public transportation is lacking. It’s something we’re going to be looking at for large audiences coming in for these performances,” Mrozinski said

Sorensen called for better cooperation between the state transportation departments given the likelihood of regional growth and the pressures that would be placed on local highways. In New York, he said, Sullivan County needs to “grapple” with

land use issues as direct impacts would come from not only the performing arts center in Bethel, but associated growth of new service related businesses. “Is there going to be uninterrupted strip development?... if so, every business curb cut is going to effect traffic circulation,” he said.

Their audience swung from one end of the development spectrum to the other. Sullivan Partnership president Michael Sullivan admitted he’s often in conflict with planners. “They say we’re taxing the infrastructure, while I look at development and job development. Where’s the balance.”

Replying to Sullivan, Mrozinski said “There needs to be a balance...and that’s the most difficult thing. We all know we need jobs... It’s a delicate balance...It may not be what the public or business like to see, but...” he said.

Some residential communities completely oppose any move away from rural values. In another discussion, Tusten Supervisor Richard Crandall explained that soliciting new development is not universally approved. “A lot of my constituents would be against this marketing effort,” he said.

“A lot of the infrastructure is 100 percent political,” said Skip Hillier, representing the Wayne County Historical Society. Hillier said communities lack good solid zoning and design. Residential and industrial needs get “blurred,” he said. He called for more “design if we’re going to have a diverse community, not just strictly residential or tourist.”

Sorensen agreed that piecemeal zoning changes frequently have occurred throughout the northeast. “You get a car wash next to a residence...It doesn’t all tie together. I don’t know that that’s the most effective use of our infrastructure.

Given the apparent need then, why has zoning and master planning, been so unpopular with so many people? While he said he favored planning Harold Roeder of the Town of Delaware said planners would have to take to avoid zoning restrictions that amount to takings of property rights. “They’ll fight you,” he said.

We must get ready for what’s coming

BY TOM KANE

BEACH LAKE — There’s going to be some exciting things coming our way from an economic development point of view within the next few years.

“For years, in Sullivan County our economy was stagnant and even worsening. That condition is quickly passing,” said Michael Sullivan, Executive Director of the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development. He was the first presenter at the Forum on Economic Development in the Delaware River Corridor.

Similar things were happening in Wayne and Pike Counties, he said.

The casinos are expected to generate 2,200 to 3,000 jobs each, he said. There will be two and maybe three of them.

Other economic development projects in the county either accomplished or in the making are: Schwanga Lodge, Eagle Nest Resort, Kohl’s Distribution Center, a virtual slot machine project at the Monticello Raceway. All these projects are expected to generate 8,000 to 10,000 jobs.

“In a county with only 32,000 jobs, that’s an enormous growth,” he said.

Sullivan County has 32,000 jobs at present and 47 percent

of them are part-time without any benefits attached (survey of Dec. 2000). This trend has to stop. Any new jobs must be higher paying with benefits.

“That’s our goal from now on,” Sullivan said.

It is estimated by planners that 5,400 new housing units will need to be developed in Sullivan County, he said. Property values are skyrocketing already. A few years ago a Korean company was looking for land that at the time cost \$15,000 an acre. They decided against it but later returned to reconsider it. Now the price has gone to \$30,000 an acre.

In New York, there is a new program to encourage business development or expansion that is called Empire Zones. The program brings low interest loans and even tax abatements for new businesses. In Pennsylvania a similar program is operating called Keystone Zones. These two programs alone, not considering all the other factors, will bring in new business, Sullivan said..

The two performing arts centers in Bethel and Pike County will attract many new ventures that will spin-off them.

“What’s becoming more and more clear is that we must prepare now for what’s coming,” Sullivan said. “This forum is a good start.”

Where will jobs and businesses come from

BY TOM KANE

BEACH LAKE — The forum topic of jobs and spin-off businesses prompted a wide-ranging discussion during the second session at the Forum on Economic Development in the Delaware River Valley.

John Riley, Executive Vice President of the First National Bank of Jeffersonville, who facilitated the discussion with Joe Murray, President of the Dime Bank, said that businesses will have to reposition themselves in the coming job market as business and population growth hits our area. Economically, Sullivan County has been going in the wrong direction—downward—for years. It's a good feeling to be in a room with people who are making that upward movement happen, Riley added.

"With the casinos paying well above minimum wage for new employees, companies like banks will have trouble getting qualified workers to fill teller positions, for example" Riley said. "This will be true for other businesses."

"How do we get the people in the townships and towns to work together to prepare for what's coming?" Joe Murray asked.

Participants felt a hopeful sign already happening is that a number of the area's most promising youths are returning. "We've had a serious brain drain in this area with our children settling in some other place after college," Murray said.

This returning trend must be continued with the encouragement of local higher education institutions to establish satellite divisions of the college to encourage local youths to get the

training they need to fill higher-paying jobs.

Dan O'Neill of Honesdale said that colleges like Lackawanna are moving to fill this gap.

One participant of the forum spoke of the trend in "long-distance learning" that can play a role in this movement since universities are somewhat remote for many in the area.

John Butler of Verizon spoke of the trend among employers to provide higher education programs to its employees. He also said that funding was available to employers through the Workforce Development Program to train employees and job candidates in the specific skills needed by employers.

The Delaware Valley (PA) school district has been bringing a university to the school for both teachers and students.

Local colleges on both sides of the river are beginning to develop entrepreneurial programs. This trend is to be encouraged.

Participants spoke of passenger rail service. Passenger rail has been beset by difficulties, including lack of public support from a population that is still enamored of its automobiles, but it must be pursued by all three counties, they agreed.

Errol Flynn of Honesdale felt that senior housing must be developed in the area, especially for the more affluent senior populations who are attracted to the performing arts centers and the casinos.

Jennifer Canfield of Calvert Realty spoke about the need to preserve the environment since the beauty of the river valley is the single most important thing that attracts visitors here, those who eventually become homeowners. Quality of life is something that is important to people and everything must be done to preserve it, she said.

"We must encourage a dialogue between the county and township boards to attempt to persuade them of the importance of these issues," she said. "We have to sell quality of life," Canfield said.



Bankers Joe Murray and John Riley



The forum room



Erroyl Flynn

Process should continue but no new organization

BY TOM KANE

BEACHLAKE — The summation that occurred in the last session of the forum discussed many things, but principal among them was the conviction that the process begun at this forum must continue and, second, that no new organization should be formed to carry it out.

Led by Shepstone, Sullivan and River Reporter publisher Laurie Stuart, the group universally accepted these two conclusions.

Another conclusion that seemed to be accepted by all was that the River Reporter should continue its role of catalyst. The paper can play a significant role here through forums and other activities to keep the process alive.

One participant suggested that the Upper Delaware Council might be another organization that can play a role in this process.

It was Sally Talaga of the Wayne County Historical Society who urged that no new organization be formed.

"We don't need another level of government or organization," she said. Her remark was seconded by others.

A discussion centered around the newly formed New York Scenic Byways program along Route 97 from Port Jervis to Hancock that looks at issues on both sides of the river. Alan Sorenson, the Sullivan County planner, said there might be a chance for cooperative programs among all communities on both sides of the river.

Communities should be in contact with this program where possible, he said.

The term "cottage industry" was mentioned in the context of what could happen around the two performing arts centers. Examples were cited in other art centers like Tanglewood which was mentioned by Davis Chant in an earlier session.

Cottage industries could be formed by entrepreneurs. This trend must be encouraged. The banks could play a significant role here. A trip to Lenox, Massachusetts where the Tanglewood Festival is held during the summer would show the group what kind of things are possible.

Someone said that it should not be assumed that jobs around the performing arts centers will be low-paying.

There can also be a cottage industry around senior com-

munities which has need of all types of medical and ancillary services: such as doctors, nurses, nutritionists, physical therapist and trainers, herbalist, wellness centers, tai chi trainers, yoga instructors, etc.

Concerns for the environment were reinforced and a number of people stated that a preserved environment is as much economic development as anything else. It's a major asset in our area where the river valley attracts thousands of people, visitors and possible residents.

Barbara Yeaman of the Delaware-Highlands Conservancy reminded participants that agriculture was still a healthy industry in all three counties and could be encouraged. We should promote agri-businesses with things like the creation of value-added products that can supplement milk production.

One individual got a lot of reaction to his remark that we can't address every issue in a forum of this size.

"We may need to get small groups together to discuss priorities and projects: real estate people, bankers, environmentalists, county and business planners, government groups, citizen's groups," Shepstone said. "Issues are complex."

A participant suggested that we should bring in municipal planning experts or representatives from communities that have succeeded in organizing themselves, places like Cooperstown, Lenox, Saratoga Springs or Cooperstown. We can learn from what others have learned.

Chris Kane of the Tri-State Chamber of Commerce suggested that we could survey the present audience to see what they thing we should do next. This could be included in the report sent out about the meeting.

A possible icon or identity we could take on could be to call our area The Highlands – The Upper Delaware Highlands.

There was a feeling in the group that there may be pockets of resistance from some constituencies to any change or move to a shared role. We've got to explain what's coming and the need to prepare for it.

A final thought was well expressed: our township and town boards along the river must get together to dialogue as we did today.

Meagher concluded by saying, "Start slow and build."

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