

OIL CITY COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2025

ADOPTED MARCH 23, 2017

DEVELOPED ON BEHALF OF THE OIL CITY COUNCIL:

MAYOR WILLIAM P. MOON, JR.

RON GUSTAFSON

MICHAEL POFF

ISAIAH DUNHAM

DALE MASSIE

BY THE OIL CITY PLANNING COMMISSION:

MICHAEL MORRISON, CHAIR

DAVID MAYER

DICK BAKER

JASON BIDISH

ERIC GRAHAM

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

MARK ANDREAS

KATHY BAILEY

MARGARET BROSTROM

JERI BROWN

PAUL BROWN

SUFANA CHOWDHURY

GEORGE COOLEY

KEVIN CULBERTSON

TRACY DELMONICO

JOE FADDEN

HOWARD FAUNCE

TERRI FELMLEE

DAN FLAHERTY

MARIO

FONTANAZZA

JASON HERMAN

STEVE HINDS

GRETCHEN

JOHNSON

VENICE LEWIS

DEB LUTZ

MALACHY McMAHON

JOE PAPANONE

JAN RUDITIS

ALAN SCHILLER

DEBBIE SOBINA

CHRIS SPORER

JOHN STILLER

JOANN WHEELER

SUSAN WILLIAMS

HILLARY WISNIEWSKI

FACILITATED BY:

KRISTIN ARENDASH
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
(814) 678-3018

INTRODUCTION

Community-wide Strategic Planning allows for communities to prioritize goals in line with funding, to be proactive in decision making, and to continue progress beyond leadership changes. The Strategic Planning process followed by the Oil City Planning Commission has provided for broad community and public input. The process helps to assess the best outcomes of current and future environmental forces, builds a comprehensive course of interrelated actions that are integrated into budget realities and establishes measurements to gauge long term success.

This is a “Community Plan”. The intent is to provide guidance for various groups and organizations to assist them in project development and activities that will work together with others and move the entire community forward, reducing duplication and maximizing impact.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

In early 2014, a group of local government representatives, professionals, and community leaders came together to discuss the economic development needs of the City. Meeting monthly for almost a year, the group developed recommendations and tools to help guide the City in further development (ATTACHMENT A). One of the recommendations was the development of a community strategic plan to create collaborative goals and provide paths for cooperation.

The Oil City Planning Commission approached the City Council in January 2015 and asked for their blessing to take on the task of developing a community strategic plan. Approval for the task was granted and the process began in February 2015 with a public meeting which was attended by more than 40 people. Volunteers from this meeting and other community groups and businesses formed a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). Through discussion, the SPC determined a set of core values and a vision statement, performed a SWOT Analysis, reviewed environmental factors, and set goals, objectives and tasks to be incorporated into the plan. The Planning Commission participated in the SPC discussions and evaluated and structured each piece as it was developed.

The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed market and census data as well as the many other studies and plans that have been conducted in the recent past. Goals and objectives delineated in those plans may be referenced here, but are not included in their entirety. This Strategic Plan is not intended to replace the other studies and plans, but to augment them and use them as reference for increased collaboration and cooperation among groups and organizations working to improve the city. The plans and studies of pertinence to this Strategic Plan include:

- Oil City Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan, 2001
- Venango County Comprehensive Development Plan, 2004
- Downtown Economic Development Strategy (The Shepstone Study), 2005
- Routes 8 & 62 Corridor Evaluation, 2005
- Northwest PA Greenways Plan, Venango County, 2009
- Report on the Housing Market in Venango County, 2009
- Route 62 Smart Transportation Study, 2010
- Northern Venango County Multi Municipal Comprehensive Plan, 2010
- Oil City Comprehensive Waterways Plan, 2011
- Oil City Main Street Strategy, 2011
- Oil City Capital Improvement Plan, 2014
- Oil City Three Year Community Development Plan, 2015

CORE VALUES AND VISION

The Strategic Planning Committee began the process with a discussion of Core Values and Vision. They determined that the core values of the Oil City Community are:

Pride in History and Place
Culture and Education
Constant Growth and Improvement
New People and Possibilities

The Vision for the Oil City Community is:

Oil City is a welcoming, vibrant community;
building a collaborative, resourceful and sustainable future.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The Committee then began the process of analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the community (ATTACHMENT B). Upon review of the SWOT Analysis, the Planning Commission determined there were five main focus sectors: Housing, Community Engagement, Economic Development, Tourism, and “Stayism”. The term Stayism was coined by the group to refer to the retention of current citizens and attraction of new residents.

The Strategic Planning Committee broke into small groups which met over the course of the summer, each focused on one of the sectors. Their task was to examine the current situation, establish an overall goal for the sector and determine objectives and tasks to reach that goal. Once these were developed, the Planning Commission reviewed and organized each group’s work, looking for duplication and common themes.

OVERALL GOAL 1: COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING CAMPAIGN

The largest common factor identified among the sectors was the need for outreach, marketing and branding. There is an obvious need to develop a positive image for Oil City and to reach out beyond the immediate area to recruit businesses, new residents, and visitors.

This many-pronged marketing campaign should be comprehensive in nature, in that the same (or slightly tweaked) message is being sent out to developers, tourists, families, current residents, entrepreneurs, government officials, etc. Promotion should include the high quality of life, low cost of living, available commercial space, arts, recreation opportunities, incentives, and friendliness of the community. City Council approved a new City slogan in 2014: “Renowned, Rugged & Refined” which should be incorporated into the marketing campaign.

Specific marketing objectives are identified in the individual sector sections below.

OVERALL GOAL 2: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

Many of the sector groups identified the need to build or use databases for tracking and research purposes. Use of public surveys to gather information was also mentioned in a few groups. The need also exists for a vibrant, interactive website that can provide up to date information about the community and be used as a marketing tool.

Specific IT objectives are identified in the individual sector sections below.

HOUSING SECTOR

GOAL: 100% OCCUPANCY OF ALL HOUSING UNITS BY 2025

Objective 1: Increase home ownership

Task 1.1: Implement a 1st Time Home Owner program – series of workshops/classes that might include budgeting, home repair, Habitat-for-Humanity, etc.

Task 1.2: Market affordable, high quality of life potential to areas that are having housing shortages

Task 1.3: Create/Identify creative financing options, tax incentives, etc.

Task 1.4: Offer blighted houses for a token sum plus a 5-year commitment to improve/rehab

Suggested Partners: Real Estate Agents, Banks, Redevelopment Authority, Blighted Property Review Committee

Objective 2: Promote “Second Home” Concept

Task 2.1 Market available properties & vacant lots to other areas for purchase as vacation homes/second homes.

Task 2.2 Identify potential river front lots that could be redeveloped into vacation homes

Task 2.3 Have high-speed internet access available to all residential areas to promote home-office and work-from-home opportunities

Suggested Partners: Real Estate Agents, Redevelopment Authority, Blighted Property Review Committee

Objective 3: Historic District Opportunities

Task 3.1 Create a decline management plan for the Northside Historic District

Task 3.2 Educate Homeowners within the Historic Districts about the importance of their properties and potential incentives/benefits.

Task 3.3 Investigate “non-traditional” use of residential properties for office use, bed & breakfast, etc.

Suggested Partners: Blighted Property Review Committee, Oil Region Alliance National Heritage Area, Redevelopment Authority

Objective 4: Improve the quality of rental housing

Task 4.1 Increase code enforcement for rental properties (Rental Property Ordinance)

Task 4.2 Redevelop upper-story commercial buildings for downtown housing, live/work spaces, etc.

Task 4.3 Develop high quality assisted living and/or retirement housing units (condos, apartments)

Suggested Partners: City Code Enforcement Office, Private Landlords, Developers

Objective 5: Establish a Housing Coordination/Facilitation Roundtable

Ideally, a staff position would be created to focus on housing and the housing programs suggested here. The realization is that the City’s current financial situation will not allow this to happen. An alternative would be to create a Housing Roundtable that would include housing officials, city officials, real estate professionals, etc. that would serve as a touchstone/advisory panel for the individuals/organizations tasked to implement the projects listed in this plan and other programs that work toward the goal of 100% occupied housing. The Housing Roundtable would work toward saving troubled houses, marketing, and identifying problem areas and programs/funding that could assist.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SECTOR

GOAL: TO INCREASE THE SATISFACTION AND INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITY RESIDENTS.

Objective 1: Identify barriers and motivations for community engagement

Task 1.1: Establish a survey that will assess community engagement barriers and motivations of citizens.

- Identify entity to develop survey.
- Survey should be accessible online and in a paper format. Paper surveys can be distributed by groups such as AmeriCorps and also housed at convenient locations such as city hall, the library, neighborhood hot spots, etc.

- Task 1.2: Host several forums to assess barriers and motivations.
- Forums can be held at the public library, places of worship, and neighborhood hot spots.
 - Forums can be hosted by groups such as the Neighborhood Associations.

- Task 1.3: Compile data/information gathered from surveys and meetings.
- Identify entity to compile data (perhaps this can be completed by AmeriCorps volunteers or a class at Vo-Tech/Venango College).

- Task 1.4: Utilize data to direct ongoing community engagement projects and volunteer recruitment.
- Data can be provided to various groups/organizations to assist them with planning activities and events.

Suggested Partners: Take Pride in Oil City, Main Street Program, Neighborhood Associations, City Community Development Department.

Objective 2: Develop methods to increase and promote positive morale

- Task 2.1: Establish media campaigns to feature positive aspects of Oil City.
- Media outlets include local group/business Facebook pages, websites, and publications, radio stations, newspapers (E.g. Chamber of Commerce, KQW, Arts Council, The Derrick).
- Task 2.2: Create a citizen group to act as ambassadors for the community, prospective business, and existing businesses and organizations.
- Recruitment for this group can be completed by accepting letters of interest and experience from community members. Facilitator will need to be identified.
- Task 2.3: Develop a “Community Improvement Project” contest.
- This type of contest can be opened to community members and can also be something that the school district can encourage of the students. A grand prize can be solicited from local businesses.

Objective 3: Identify and recognize community engagers

- Task 3.1: Establish a directory of local groups and volunteer organizations.
- Task 3.2: Research information related to successful volunteer recruitment strategies.
- Task 3.3: Develop a volunteer recruitment initiative.
- Task 3.4: Develop a list of project/volunteer needs as reported by local organizations/groups.
- Task 3.5: Identify existing groups/organizations/business that may assist and sponsor an annual community engager recognition event.
- Task 3.6: Organize annual community engager recognition event.

Objective 4: Increase engagement between city government and the general public

Task 4.1: Develop a more interactive and accessible City of Oil City website

- This task would be completed by the appropriate city officials in conjunction with their IT staff.

Task 2: Facilitate several events to educate the public about local government departments, functions, participatory action, and related matters.

- This task will need to be addressed by local city government department leaders, council members, and other appropriate individuals.

Task 3: Engage city hall employees in customer service and workplace communication skill trainings.

- This task would need to be carried out by a contracted trainer who has developed quality trainings that address the above mentioned areas. In addition to this, appropriate trainings delivered via use of DVD or other media may also be appropriate.

Task 4: Utilize market research in order to determine customer satisfaction with city hall services.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

GOAL: TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED COMMERCE IN OIL CITY THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS AND A BUSINESS-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT.

Objective 1: Create expanded business incentive package/"toolbox"

Task 1.1: Inventory and review current available incentives

Task 1.2: Research new incentives from other communities, discuss with City leaders to determine feasibility.

Task 1.3: Present to Council for approval/resolution/adoption.

Task 1.4: Incorporate into Business Resource Guide and/or recruitment package

Suggested Partners: City of Oil City, Main Street, Oil Region Alliance, County of Venango

Resources: Business Resource Guide (Main Street), PNC Charitable Trusts, Northwest Commission, Trail Town Program, local banks (community reinvestment act), federal/state historic tax credits

Objective 2: Develop comprehensive database of vacant/underutilized buildings/property

Task 2.1: Research property database systems/tools in other communities

Task 2.2: Create spreadsheet/list of all commercial/industrial property, parcel by parcel.

Task 2.3: Create “sell sheet” for each property or connect to agent/broker’s form

Task 2.4: Load all into database and link to City and Main Street websites

Suggested Partners: City of Oil City, Main Street, Redevelopment Authority; Planning Commissions

Resources: Pennsylvania Downtown Center, NW Commission, National Main Street Center, local realtors/brokers, Venango County GIS & Parcel Viewer

Objective 3: Increase sharing of information between economic development groups.

Task 3.1: Expand/enhance existing Business Resource Guide by September 2016. (City, Main Street, Planning Commission, Redevelopment Authority, Oil Region Alliance)

Task 3.2: Develop an Economic Development Forum (periodic meeting of economic development groups/stakeholders).

Task 3.3: Develop system for information sharing with neighboring communities (“collaborating beyond borders”)

Responsibility: City, Main Street, Redevelopment Authority, Planning Commission, Oil Region Alliance, Northwest Commission, ARTS Oil City

Objective 4: Create marketing plan to attract new businesses.

Task 4.1: Develop Business Marketing Package

- Community Profile: quality of life, education, recreation/tourism, testimonials
- Business Resource Guide w/Incentive Package
- Available real estate: buildings/parcels
- Available work force

Task 4.2: Identify/contact qualified developers

Task 4.3: Identify/contact target niche businesses i.e. trail-related, arts-related, etc.

Task 4.4: Identify target industries i.e. biosciences, shale/gas, etc.

Task 4.5: Identify telecommuting fields and/or “creative class” fields where workers can live and work from home.

Task 4.6: Continue to market to artists through the Artist Relocation Program.

Task 4.7: Research other communities for successful methods of attracting target businesses/industries.

Task 4.8: Establish methods and timeframe.

Suggested Partners: City, Main Street, business owners, NWPAs Greenways, Trail Town Program, Redevelopment Authority, Northwest Commission, Oil Region Alliance, ARTS Oil City, Northwest Commission, Clarion University-Venango College

Objective 5: Develop/recruit and retain/sustain a qualified workforce.

Task 5.1: Identify current and projected local workforce needs, and current and projected skill levels of local workforce.

Task 5.2: Create articulation agreements between providers of education that encourage stackable credentials in specific areas and align with projected local workforce needs.

Task 5.3: Create physical centers for credentialing & experiential learning

- Identify suitable property i.e. brownfield, downtown building, etc. for redevelopment
- Develop business plan for sustainable operations among multiple education partners

Task 5.4: Promote the benefits of internships/apprenticeships to employers and students.

Task 5.5: Create “ambassador program” to assist employers in recruitment efforts (assemble volunteer ambassadors, organize “welcome tour”, etc.)

Suggested Partners: Venango HR Group/School Industry Task Force, Venango Technology Center, Clarion University-Venango College, Dubois Business College, OCASD, Venango Catholic HS, Keystone Community Education Council, Career Link

Resources: Northwest Commission studies/skill gap analysis

Objective 6: Address “lack of parking” perceptions/concerns.

Task 6.1: Review existing parking ordinances; identify areas in need of improvement.

Task 6.2: Research parking methods/solutions/incentives from other communities

Task 6.3: Educate business owners/employees why to use off-street lots, not on-street spaces.

- Create flyer/marketing piece to promote cost savings, health benefits (# calories burned vs # of steps, etc.), and overall benefits to the business district. Include testimonials from “role model” business representatives.
- Distribute to all business owners & downtown workers via hand-delivery, email blasts, social media, newspaper, etc.

Task 6.4: Promote available parking and health benefits of walking to the general public via user-friendly “parking guide” – newspaper, social media, email blasts, etc.

Task 6.5: Continue all efforts to make walking enjoyable (attractive storefronts/window displays, etc.)

Suggested Partners: OCPD, Oil City Council, Oil City Engineering Dept., Main Street, Venango Area Chamber of Commerce, business owners

Objective 7: Improve technology in Oil City (fiber-optic line)

Task 7.1: Verify the timetable, route and access points of the fiber optic line; cost/process for utilization

Task 7.2: Develop communication tool to share information with businesses (cost/process for utilization)

Task 7.3: Identify/inventory existing technology assets

Suggested Partners: City of Oil City, County of Venango, telecommunication providers

Objective 8: Pursue opportunities to become “walk friendly” “bike friendly”

Task 8.1: Develop plan for street paving

- Research funding/grant opportunities and timeframes
- Create list of target/priority areas and timeline
- Calculate project cost estimates, apply for available funding
- Implement paving projects

Task 8.2: Develop plan for sidewalk replacement

- Research funding/grant opportunities and timeframes
- Create list of target/priority areas and timeline
- Calculate project cost estimates, apply for available funding
- Implement paving projects

Task 8.3: Develop plan for replacing street signs

- Research funding/grant opportunities and timeframes
- Inventory all street signs and condition
- Calculate project cost estimates, apply for available funding
- Implement sign replacement project

Task 8.4: Develop comprehensive wayfinding signage to help visitors navigate through areas of town.

- Research funding/grant opportunities and timeframes
- Identify landmarks, points of interest, districts/neighborhoods, etc.
- Work with professional wayfinding system provider to proceed with project

Task 8.5: Apply for “Walk Friendly” and “Bike Friendly” status

- Engage students from Clarion University, Venango College to assist with application process
- Submit application(s)
- Promote achievement of status via local/regional press opportunities, City & Main Street websites, and with walking/biking events in town.

Suggested Partners: City (Engineers' Office, Public Works, Police Dept.), Main Street, Oil Region Alliance, Clarion University-Venango College

Resources: NWPA Greenways, Trail Town Program, NW Commission

Objective 9: Continue and increase all downtown revitalization efforts.

Task 9.1: Improve aesthetics through façade improvements, window displays, flowering planters, cleanliness/litter control, streetscape projects and other beautification projects.

Task 9.2: Attract people to downtown with special events, concerts, art shows, retailer promotions, trail-friendly events, and marketing efforts.

Task 9.3: Monitor/develop existing business mix and find new economic uses for vacant or underutilized buildings.

Task 9.4: Organize efforts for program management, volunteer recruitment, fundraising, partnerships, sustainability and community support.

Suggested Partners: Main Street, City of Oil City, ARTS Oil City, Oil City Arts & Cultural Commission, Take Pride in Oil City, Oil City Garden Club, Oil City Planning Commission, Redevelopment Authority of Oil City

Resources: Pennsylvania Downtown Center, National Main Street Center, Oil Region Alliance, Clarion University, Trail Town Program

TOURISM SECTOR

GOAL: TO INCREASE AND PROMOTE LOCAL AND REGIONAL RECREATION/TOURISM/CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Objective 1: To Identify and Recruit Marketing Champion for Oil City

Task 1.1: Create a job description for the Oil City marketing personnel, (O C staff in consultation with other area marketing personnel, Oil City Arts Council & the Redevelopment Authority)

- It may be possible to roll this marketing function into the Main Street Manager position, rather than create another position that we will not be able to sustain and or fund in the future.

Task 1.2: Create a financial budget and funding timeline for marketing personnel (OC Council, City Manager and Oil City Arts Council.)

Task 1.3: Recruit and hire marketing personnel. (OC Council and Manager)

Task 1.4: Build & Develop City Marketing Committee - to advise and partner with the Champion – Suggested Partners: Community Development personnel, Venango Area Chamber, Venango College and others

Suggested Timeline for Implementation: Develop a job description for Marketing Champion and subsequently develop a plan to hire the Marketing Champion, including a plan for sustainability.

Objective 2: Develop a Regional Recreation/Tourism Asset Inventory

Develop a recreation-asset based flowchart and inventory so that all stakeholders are aware of what is available in the region.

Task 2.1: Develop a recreation/tourism/cultural (history) assets/resources questionnaire asking: who are our target markets? (Planning Commission, City Manager, city marketing committee, Susan Williams, Kevin Culbertson)

Task 2.2: Mail/distribute questionnaire to local and regional agencies and consider message on tax bills regarding the survey. (Community Development Office)

Task 2.3: Receive, tabulate, develop and redistribute inventories to all local and regional agencies. (Community Development Office, possibly intern, Marketing Champion, Susan Williams, Kevin Culbertson.)

Task 2.4: Identify gaps and establish future goals as well as keep the inventory up to date (Marketing Champion and Committee.)

Task 2.5: Promote inventory results on the City's website, mobile app, rack cards, marketing champion, etc. (Marketing Champion and Committee.)

Objective 3: To Promote Local and Regional Historical and Architectural Resources

Task 3.1: Develop event(s) in conjunction with the Oil Heritage Festival –Oil City Heritage Society & Venango Museum and community volunteers

Task 3.2: Develop audio or multi-media walking, biking, driving historical tours. (Local Historic Groups)

Objective 4: Promote/Enhance Outdoor Recreational Opportunities

Task 4.1: Reach out to other areas (i.e. Roanoke, Virginia) for best practices they use for marketing their recreational assets.

Task 4.2: Identify a volunteer group that would be willing to maintain and monitor those portions of the trails that are 'offstreet' in Oil City. Adopt a Trail concept.

- Task 4.3: Create and Promote Bicycle Friendly Communities - Marketing Champion and Ad Hoc Committee, Oil City Police Personnel
- Task 4.4: Create and Promote Pedestrian Friendly Communities – Marketing Champion and Ad Hoc Committee, Oil City Police Personnel
- Task 4.5: Create More Events that Take advantage of all year round recreational opportunities - Marketing Champion and Ad Hoc Committee (Friends of the OC Trails)
- Task 4.6: Educate youth and others on bicycle safety via League of American Bicyclists (Kevin Culbertson)
- Task 4.7: Develop Mini Recreational Festival as part of the Oil Heritage Festival (for 2016 Festival) – Community volunteers/organizations/Venango Chamber
- Task 4.8: Implement Projects within the Marina Master Plan Update - OC Community Development Department
- Task 4.9: Promotion of activities for use within Hasson Park – Marketing Champion
- Task 4.10: Develop waterways activities from Allegheny River borders and incorporating Oil Creek – Ad Hoc Committee (Adopt a Trail) and Marketing Champion
- Task 4.11: Develop a master plan for pedestrian and cyclists pushing waterway projects
- Task 4.12: Designate Marketing Champion as Oil City’s Trail Town Coordinator.

Objective 5: Design & Implement Signage for Historic & Recreation Opportunities

- Task 5.1: Use tourism/recreation inventory to identify existing signage and standards - (city personnel, EPT Alliance, Friends of the OC Trails)
- Task 5.2: Assess quality, location and quantity of existing signage - (O C Staff/Marketing Personnel Friends of the Trail)
- Task 5.3: Develop budget for new and improved signage - (Community Development Office and OC Council)
- Task 5.4: Purchase new signage - (O C Council, local trusts and agencies)
 - Coordinate colors for signage that depicts certain things (wayfinding signage)
 - Install signage (Public Works Department)

Objective 6: Create an ‘Experience’ for our visitors - Be a Destination for People

- Task 6.1: Develop a consistent identity for Oil City
Include the new slogan: Renowned, Rugged and Refined in all Mailings, etc.
- Task 6.2: Create and Promote Bicycle Friendly Communities

- Task 6.3: Create and Promote Pedestrian Friendly Communities
- Task 6.4: Create More Events That Take Advantage of All Recreational Opportunities including parks, swimming pools, playgrounds, tennis courts, deck hockey etc. (See Task 4.5)
- Task 6.5: Create and Develop Year-Round Activities incorporating Task 6.4
- Task 6.6: Develop 'Hospitality' Committee' - (City Council members need to be integral in this) to Welcome & Engage New Residents/Businesses into Our Communities
 - Look back at previous efforts and other good models
 - Implement Committee
- Task 6.7: Educate key contacts within reachable businesses, (City Government, Venango Chamber, ORA, Venango Museum, OC& T and provide orientation for new council members) about the assets we have first and then filter down from there.

Objective 7: Enhance Arts and Culture Environment and Opportunities

- Task 7.1: Support using music, arts, classes, community theatre group (Arts Council, public schools, Venango College, Venango Chorus)
- Task 7.2: Reinforce the strategic plan being developed by the Arts Council
- Task 7.3: Encourage cultural events in the city's parks (See Task 4.9)
- Task 7.4: Encourage collaboration between arts and recreation/tourism/history projects Keeping in mind the slogan: Renowned, Rugged and Refined

STAYISM SECTOR (RESIDENT RETENTION AND ATTRACTION)

GOAL: TO INCREASE RECRUITMENT AND IMPROVE RETENTION OF RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES

Objective 1: Develop and implement a uniform approach to informing residents of community opportunities

Lack of information and knowledge of where to get information about community resources and initiatives can lead to the perception that nothing is going on and nothing is being done. A uniform approach to information delivery available in all media and reaching all demographics will minimize duplication of efforts, bring likeminded efforts together, and make it easy for all to get involved in the community. We don't want to see people leaving the area because they didn't know or found out too late the wealth of opportunities we offer.

- Task 1.1: Identify community organizations (Chamber, Bridge Builders Community Foundation) and ask them to provide brochures/rack cards/promotional materials and deliver them to City Hall for distribution (City - Utility Department)
- Task 1.2: Designate a point of contact for organizational participation, both physical (Utility Department) and digital (City webpage)
- Task 1.3: Designate ways of disseminating materials (home delivery by Boy Scouts or other volunteer group; packets left at Library, Chamber, City Hall, Realtors, Welcome Wagon; packets given to new residents when they come to turn on their utilities, etc.)
- Task 1.4: Link to all the community organizations' web/facebook pages on the city website (City webpage)

Objective 2: Identify positives and negatives of why people move here, stay or decide to leave

If we know what attracts people and what makes them want to leave, resources can be allocated accordingly. This information is also valuable for marketing the city to appropriate demographics and businesses.

- Task 2.1: Form a welcome wagon effort for new residents (neighborhood associations, Chamber of Commerce?) and visitors (employers, Venango College students).
- Task 2.2: Locate/identify new residents (Utilities Office, Realtors)
- Task 2.3: Make and maintain contact with newcomers (volunteers from neighborhood associations, churches)
- Task 2.4: Develop surveys for newcomers and longtime residents to give input on what drew them to OC, what their experience has been, and what the community lacks (arts revitalization has the largest pool of newcomers to draw on)
- Task 2.5: Place suggestion boxes at designated locations (City Hall, Library, etc.) for people to leave ideas, suggestions, complaints, and when there is follow-up, publicize that. Sites deliver contents to Community Development monthly, where suggestions are reviewed and recorded and distributed to appropriate entities. This avoids negative online flame wars but gives people a chance to have input.
- Task 2.6: Update Wikipedia to reflect the many positives about OC (Main Street/ORAs)
- Task 2.7: Make the city webpage more marketable (intern, School senior project)

Objective 3: Use info from Objective 2 to develop and implement a coherent recruitment plan to attract new residents and businesses

There is no current coherent plan for recruitment of people or businesses. Oil City is losing population, tax base and business. Bringing in new residents and businesses will counteract this. However, targeted marketing to demographics and businesses that can succeed here is important. If we attract businesses, we must target those for which we already have an adequate workforce.

- Task 3.1: Create and disseminate a general marketing piece (brochure or rack card) marketing OC to potential relocaters (City, Chamber, ORA) and put this piece on the city website as a pdf (City website)
- Task 3.2: Encourage posting of positive videos on youtube about all aspects of life in OC and cross link to these on various city and community websites – perhaps even compile clips into an “Our Town” feature (FLEXers, communications majors, OCASD projects, Library)
- Task 3.3: Identify and target other niche businesses using the arts program as a model and matching available workforce education to the industries we try to attract (Chamber, ORA, Vo-Tech, Venango College, Keystone Ed Council)

Objective 4: Routinely inform people of progress on plans, studies, and projects

Celebrating successes creates optimism, positive momentum, and a wish to get involved. Reinforcing progress can bring new volunteers into ongoing efforts, raise morale and prevent the negativity that often bogs down community efforts.

- Task 4.1: Issue press releases to mark milestones and post on city website (organizations which are implementing projects, add to job description)
- Task 4.2: Conduct public forums (some are required by funders – community input and celebration by lead organizations, Take Pride)
- Task 4.3: Make sure plans are available on the city website and post updates (City website)
- Task 4.4: Use events, speeches, council meetings as opportunities to cross promote progress (one individual – City cheerleader?)

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AD-HOC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (2014)

1. A chart linking the various economic development organizations and outlining various responsibilities, involvement and opportunities that should be adopted as a working document to aid in coordination and to maximize opportunities.
2. An inventory of buildings and commercial spaces that are available for sale or rent throughout the City
3. The Oil City Department of Community and Economic Development should serve as the coordinating entity, ensuring regular and direct communications among the DCD, Main Street, Arts Revitalization, Redevelopment Authority, the Oil Region Alliance, and other organizations as needed.
4. The City should work to increasingly empower the Redevelopment Authority, providing staffing and related support to the extent possible with the intent of growing the Authority to serve as a “lead” economic development agency within the City with it’s own full time staff.
5. A cooperative and coordinated effort needs to be maintained to ensure continuation of the Main Street Program and providing for its financial security beyond the end of state funding.
6. There needs to be ongoing support for the Arts Revitalization program and bringing it into closer relationship with the other economic development entities.
7. Specific Projects/Issues
 - a. Demolition of the Parking Ramp
 - b. Address parking issues on the northside
 - c. Find and market to retail businesses that are likely to succeed in Oil City
 - d. Conduct a realistic assessment of the adaptive reuse possibilities of the larger downtown buildings
8. Development of a strategic plan to provide community wide goals and assist in cooperation and coordination for economic development projects.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young, Trainable Labor 2. Low wage expectation 3. Housing architecture 4. Utopian location (trails, 4 seasons, remote, close to nature, hills, river) 5. Clean water and air 6. Available commercial space (vintage, historic) 7. Safe place to live 8. Low cost of living and housing 9. Low traffic density 10. Thriving arts community 11. Local pride 12. History 13. Quality of life 14. Proximity to major cities 15. Local ER/Fire/Police services 16. Infrastructure 17. Work from home opportunities 18. Walkable 19. Active Main Street program 20. Strong faith community 21. Community engagement 22. Social Service Network 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of coordination and collaboration 2. Inadequate access to the interstate 3. Lack of affordable housing for seniors 4. Blighted community/negligent landlords 5. Recycling facilities 6. Lack of cohesiveness among community groups 7. Lack of specialist medical care 8. Declining population 9. Lack of pride 10. Lack of diverse community volunteers 11. Declining income 12. Declining economy 13. Lack of sustainable jobs 14. Poor school system 15. Inadequate parking in downtown area 16. Public transportation system (inside and out of the city) 17. Lack of age diversity (high median age) 18. Underutilized waterways 19. Infrastructure is old 20. Divided downtown 21. Strong social service network draws lower income individuals 22. Broken parking meters

SWOT ANALYSIS

Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. River and waterways 2. “Best place to retire” 3. Some business incentives (LERTA) 4. Tourism 5. Start up businesses 6. County fiber network 7. Walkability 8. History 9. Good location for R&D 10. Trails/Trail Town 11. Low cost of real estate 12. Niche business opportunities 13. Development of existing buildings 14. VoTech and Venango College 15. Outdoor recreation 16. Arts program main Street downtown development 17. Parks (state, county, local) 18. Transitional housing for seniors 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continued job losses 2. Federal/State/Local Regulations 3. Lack of follow through on plans 4. Natural resources/regulations 5. Declining population 6. Excess housing stock (aging/condition) 7. Workforce unprepared and unmotivated 8. Attitude and mindset / apathy 9. Global instability 10. Not letting go of the past 11. Economic competition 12. Lack of diversity 13. Poor Education system 14. Drugs 15. Lack of competition for essential services (ie. Cable, internet) 16. % of rentals vs. owner occupied