

Virginia Western Community College

Botetourt County Focus Group Meeting

Greenfield Education and Training Center

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Participants:

Barry W. Baird, Avis Construction Company
Anthony Brads, Botetourt County Schools
Sam Camp, Ashley Plantation Golf Course
Stephen P. Clinton
John Conner, Valcom, Inc.
Kevin Costello, Botetourt County
Linda Cronise, Bank of Fincastle
Joyce Kessinger, Boxley Materials Company
Ken Lanford, Lanford Brothers Company
Wayne Markert, Hollins University
Susan Mason, Homespun Legacy
Ned McElwaine, Botetourt County
Pete McKnight, Developer
Thomas Moore, Botetourt County
Dan Naff, Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce
Ron Spangler, Lawrence Transportation Systems, Inc.
Chip Sullivan, Ashley Plantation Golf Course

Other Attendees:

Moderator – Stanard F. Lanford, VWCC Educational Foundation
Recorder – Katherine F. Strickland, VWCC Educational Foundation
Ruth Hendrick, VWCC Workforce Development

Question 1

From your perspective, tell us what have been the most significant economic development changes in our community in the last five years?

Response

- Housing boom
- More participants in economic development process
- Scarcity of employees with job skills
- Brutal competition for industries – tax incentives, infrastructure
- Was agricultural based – now manufacturing and more tourism and service based
- Stress on roads because of increased traffic
- 80% of County cannot get internet
- Infrastructure needs – sewer, etc.
- Increased diversity, but not as much as other areas
- Schools more crowded; choices to go to James River because of peer groups mainly
- Lack of affordable housing for younger families
- Feel school administration and the school board work well for growth
- 2.0% annual growth rate

Question 2

Rank these changes by the impact each has had on the community. Has the change been positive or negative?

Response - Positive

1. Increased population
2. Managing growth because of good tools
3. Scarcity of employees with job skills / well-trained for specific skills
4. County doesn't have population for these skills
5. Need to offer more motivation for skills like plumbing, truck driving, etc.; too focused on four-year university education

Question 3

Over the next five years, what do you think will be the key areas of change in our community?

Response

- Education too expensive
- Growth not going to continue because we will not have employees for service industries
- Need to continue encouraging manufacturers to our area
- Make sure manufacturers in region will carry into the future
- Will attract people who will want to work at home
- Innovative ways to offer education
- Aging population
- Need to look at how to offer continuing education for non-traditional population
- Medical care – huge demand for rescue services, fire services
- Interest and assessment in our youth to keep them on track for a career/higher education; let them know multiple choices

Top three (3) Changes:

School system largest employer in Botetourt County – we can help with teacher recertification; pre-education major needs to be promoted; bookkeeping, accounting training needed; have at Greenfield

Question 4

A. What, in your opinion, are community colleges best known for?

Response

- Cost
- Good quality of education
- Perception of it being 13th grade actually good because it teaches time management, etc.
- Opened up opportunity for those who did not have before
- Base in growth of career ability to work with businesses to tailor training
- Not well known yet about the quality programs offered
- Adds credibility because of certified training
- Current statistics prove students at VWCC graduate well-prepared
- Ability to pinpoint education requirements
- Ability to take just what you need
- Array of programs
- “community” effectively describes it

C. If you were to hire a VWCC Grad (or a community college graduate in general)...

Response

- Knowledge of the latest technology
- Education more focused
- More drive because they are on their own – motivated
- Stay in Valley
- Industries are interested in ability of local community college to provide training

Question 5

Thinking back over what we discussed earlier about economic development changes in the past five years and those projected for the next five years, what role can Virginia Western play in our region's future?

Response

- Community college needs to communicate better what they are doing
- Don't offer just training, offer education about how to start business; add a curriculum statement that gives students a full list of what they need to take to run a business
- Work with Chamber and other organizations to put together the fall program
- Start educating students in 11th and 12th grade about opportunities and value of community college (Tech school in Botetourt does a good job)
- Internships
- Distance learning
- VWCC has image problem
- Parents have an education perception of children going to four-year institutions to get a good job – do not see skill (plumbing, etc.) as a good start
- Need to promote vocation training as a viable solution
- Do a billboard/ad campaign highlighting successful plumbers, etc.
- Internship shadowing – student can see the benefits of job
- Invite a class to see usage of machines
- Package as a post-graduate (after four-year) facility
- Promote technical jobs
- Apprenticeships
- Price point great
- Faculty should be recruiting
- Culinary arts program – expand to tourism and hospitality
- Need to interact more with visits to the actual facility – pay a personal visit to the employer
- Need to get better message out that we have a career center
- College very responsive to business needs
- Doing very well with training
- Need to continue strengthening what we offer
- Look at how to help educate Spanish community