

Virginia Western Community College

Focus Group Meeting

Franklin County Workforce Development Consortium

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Participants:

Jennifer Braaten, Ferrum College
Samuel Campbell, Helping Hands
P.D. Hambrick, Franklin County Schools
Debbie Hamrick, Franklin County Workforce Development Consortium
Kathy Hodges, Franklin County Workforce Development Consortium
Richard E. Huff, II, County of Franklin
Ken Klinger, Mod-U-Kraf Homes, LLC
Wayne Slate, MW Manufacturers, Inc.
Janet Stockton, Franklin County Schools

Other Attendees:

Moderator – Katherine F. Strickland, VWCC Educational Foundation
Recorder – Sandra McMinnis, VWCC
Mike Greer, VWCC

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

- Growth at Smith Mountain Lake
- Loss of industry (textiles, etc.)
- Ferrum College
- New workforce center
- New retail growth – affordability
- New manufacturing growth – 200 new jobs at MW Manufacturing and continued growth
- Revitalization of downtown – library
- New revitalization uptown
- Outstanding school system – fully accredited
- New school – Windy Gap Elementary
- Commitment to economic growth
- Varied economic drivers, tourism, etc.

Question 2

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

Response - Positive

1. Growth at the Lake
2. Education and training excellence
3. Revitalization efforts
4. Commitment to economic growth

Question 3

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

Response

- Workforce challenges
- Need for good employees
- Partner with education for locating and training new employees
- Keep young people in the area
- More service industries
- Tourism and technology
- Planned and managed growth
- In the Middle school need increased coaching and educating students and parents about careers – target skill sets
- Continued need to keep well-trained workforce (trades, etc)
- Will need access to additional healthcare

Top three (3) Changes:

1. Workforce challenges
2. More wealth

Question 4

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

Response

- Lower costs
- Convenient – students can work and go to school
- Flexible – number of programs, plus core
- Industry needs addressed
- First step – good start
- Multi-faceted step – new directions, new careers
- Distance learning

B. What do you feel Virginia Western is best known for in our community?

Response

- Bring programs to localities
- Committed students
- Collaborative partnerships
- Transfer programs to four-year schools
- Partner with locality to meet needs – teamwork
- Assessment (asking for community input) is very important
- A cohesive message to citizens – community does not know all we offer; the message needs to be gotten out
- Get message out to the workforce – community needs to know they can ask for training that is customized (large numbers; new methods to reach workers; overcome the perception of fear)

C. Have you/would you hire a VWCC Grad (or a community college graduate in general)? Why or why not?

Response

- Yes, of course
- More healthcare needed; more access to healthcare

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

- VWCC needs to do a better job of working to get more programs into the community
- One day seminars
- Distance learning
- Life-long learning
- Add more service industry job training in our programs – trucking, diesel, car body work
- Specific needed programs – plumbing, masonry, electricians, electronics, welding, all forms of technology, career coaches, work ethics/career focus
- Training needed in “soft skills” or work ethic skills (attendance, conflict resolution, teamwork, reliability, dependability); ways to train for these skills – internships, experiential learning, volunteer opportunities, focus on adult learners (18 to 25 years old) through internships (example: HVAC)
- Make the process easier and provide more assistance at the high school level
- Recruit more – reach out
- More video conference classes, live and archived (class can be viewed at any time)
- Web conference classes – take to customers
- More Spanish
- Need to let employers know that they can ask for training that suits their specific needs
- Need to better inform high school counselors –
 - Counselors are more positive about community colleges today
 - Increase focus on certificate programs
 - Aptitude test needs to be brought to the locality or high school
 - More high school student involvement