

Virginia Western Community College

Roanoke Focus Group Meeting

Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Participants:

Mr. Daniel Barchi, Carilion Biomedical Institute
Mrs. Elizabeth Doughty, Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Katherine Elam, Junior Achievement
Mr. Roger Elkin, Hall Associates, Inc.
Ms. Donna Fisher, Norfolk Southern Corporation
Mr. Edwin C. Hall, Hall Associates, Inc.
Mr. Barry L. Henderson, SunTrust Bank
Mr. Jim Lee, Brown, Edwards & Company, LLP
Dr. Thomas McKeon, Roanoke Higher Education Center
Mr. Charles L. Robbins, III, BB&T
Dr. James C. Sears, Center in the Square
Dr. Carol M. Seavor, Jefferson College of Health Sciences
Mr. Adam T. Shore, NewVa Connects
Mr. Phillip F. Sparks, Roanoke Valley Economic Development Partnership
Mr. Wayne Strickland, Roanoke Valley - Alleghany Regional Commission
Ms. Susan Williams, League of Older Americans
Mr. Barton J. Wilner, Entre Computer Center
Ms. Lisa Link, Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce

Other Attendees:

Moderator – Russell H. Ellis, VWCC Educational Foundation
Recorder – Katherine F. Strickland, VWCC Educational Foundation
Recorder – Erik W. Williams, VWCC Educational Foundation

Question 1

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

Response

- Medical school
- Art Museum
- How students choose where they work
- Manufacturing declining
- Roanoke Area becoming a Retirement area
- College students in region
- Increase in foreign related companies
- Focus on downtown living
- SML development
- Upturn in population growth
- Partnership between Carilion and VT
- Increase in baby boomers who will change how they work
- VT in ACC
- Growth in VT Research Park
- Number of young professional groups that have formed

- Lack of entry level employees
- Continued departure of young employees to NVA
- Increase 25-45 age group
- What happened yesterday at VT will have an effect
- Problems with City schools
- Business has had to have an economic development mindset change
- Focus on quality of life (greenway, etc.)
- Focus on growth of population
- Shift of political power to NVA
- Mix of jobs has shifted; lost white collar jobs/added call centered jobs
- The way business is done – internet, wireless; changes how political polls are done
- Disabled must be factor of quality of life

B. After looking at all the changes you have identified, what has been the impact of these changes in our community?

- Lot of energy in community – growth of young professional groups
- Higher Education Center
- Polls now deal with quality of life
- Movement to prevent urban sprawl
- We are looking at ourselves in broader context
- We start things, but have trouble continuing project
- Region not willing to change
- Truth is we have limited growth
- Most change has been perpetuated by business community

Question 2

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

Response

1. Positive

- Medical school
- Carilion Biomedical Institute
- Clinic healthcare model

Negative

- Nearly 50.0% of high school students dropping out

2. Positive

- Growth in VT Research
- VT in ACC

Negative

- Continued departure of young employees to NVA

3. Positive

- Art Museum
- Focus on quality of life

Negative

- Loss of and decrease in funding for other cultural institutions

Additional comments:

- Medical school and research biggest promise
- Need to change environment to attract needed employees
- Pay is lower here than other places
- We have not had major layoffs like other communities

Question 3

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

Response

- VWCC helps raise educational attainment in our region
- VWCC is affordable
- Roanoke is more “small business” enterprise; we don’t attract major businesses; don’t see much change in 5 years
- Manufacturing is disappearing forever; employees can’t find comparable jobs to their lost manufacturing jobs
- Huge growth in Franklin County; those citizens will come to Roanoke to shop
- More separation in community (medical employees vs. citizens with poor education)
- Two brand new high schools; we need to have in place the leadership to do it right
- Need more affordable childcare
- Better transportation system
- Students need to know more about economics in their elementary and secondary education

Question 4

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

Response

- Where you go if you can’t go somewhere else
- Perception is changing rapidly; considered a stigma in the past; legislation to permit transfer has helped improve perception
- Leg-up to 4-year institutions
- Affordable
- Dual enrollment (this is changing the nature of high school)
- Students at risk have a different opportunity
- Center for career and technical education; not sure VWCC is seen as offering this
- VWCC has two missions really – those seeking 4-year and those who need career/technical education
- Another stigma is for a student to remain in town to go to school
- Need to promote access, affordability; VWCC is 1st step on higher education ladder
- VWCC has reputation for transfer
- Community needs to raise respect for technical, HVAC, plumbing jobs

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

- Continuing education
- Offering more "leisure" education for older citizens and young professionals
- Spanish
- Technical side – we can be flexible and change our offerings to meet the employer needs; we can be nimble
- Dialogue should continue with directors of curriculum in high schools and college; can help predict gaps in employment
- Total community needs to deal with 50% drop out rate
- Satellite campuses in our regions (SML)
- Need to get to the students in middle and high schools about the opportunities
- VWCC is only "regional system"—VWCC should declare a leadership position for the region
- Can also bring in business support
- Target GED area
- Highlight linkages with secondary students
- VT and VWCC working in partnership with City schools to focus on changing values to look at education; VWCC should stay connected
- Build strengths (cost effectiveness is strength)
- VWCC should be in on the teacher certification, etc.

Additional Question

Should VWCC drop "community" from name?

Response

- Feel Virginia Western could be the region's state college that is just focused on this region and dropping "community" from the title could have a positive effect