

Virginia Western Community College
Salem – Roanoke County Focus Group Meeting

Salem Civic Center
Tuesday, April 24, 2007
7:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Participants:

Mr. Carey Harveycutter, Salem Civic Center
Ms. Meg Hibbert, Salem Times-Register
Mr. Curtis Hicks, Salem City Schools
Mr. Dan Hughes, Graham-White Manufacturing Company
Dr. Walter A. Hunt, Salem Educational Foundation
Mr. Forest G. Jones, City of Salem
Ms. Debbie Kavitz, Salam - Roanoke Valley Chamber of Commerce
Dr. Lorraine S. Lange, Roanoke County Schools
Ms. Jill B. Loope, County of Roanoke
Ms. Donna L. Mitchell, UBS Financial Services
Nancy H. Mitchell, FNB Salem Bank & Trust
Mr. Gerald M. Pace, Sr., Pace Management Systems, Inc.
The Honorable Howard C. Packett, City of Salem
Ms. Sally Southard, City of Salem School Board
Ms. Donna Tatum, Express Personal Services
Mr. James W. Thweatt, Jr., Lewis-Gale Medical Center
Ms. Doloris E. Vest, Western Virginia Workforce Development Board

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

- Expansion of Carilion
- Art Museum
- Bringing in new manufacturing
- Increase of technology firms
- Wireless access/open Wifi in downtown
- Emphasis/shift to human services – insurance companies, etc.; call centers growing faster
- Increase in locally grown businesses
- Development of sports marketing (new turfs on fields will favorably impact)
- Increase of commercial traffic – rail and road
- Sophistication of technology impacting
- Renovation of schools will help bring in businesses

- Working with VA Tech is helping us; medical school, high tech/incubator growth
- Young professional groups springing up
- Growth of downtown living helping to bring in young professionals
- Smart growth
- In last 5 years, citizen involvement has increased in economic development
- More regional projects than ever
- Because of sophisticated communication our “economic boundaries” have increased
- Increase in industrial certifications
- Not bringing in new businesses so we are concentrating on how to increase local business and our assets; need to promote what we have; growing our own businesses and expanding what we have (encourage new capital investments and increased employment opportunities)
- Still it is important to bring in new businesses

B. The changes that were determined to have the largest impact.

1. Not bringing in new businesses so we are concentrating on how to increase local business and our assets; need to promote what we have; growing our own businesses and expanding what we have (encourage new capital investments and increased employment opportunities)
2. Working with VA Tech is helping us; medical school, high tech/incubator growth
3. Health care industry growth including Jefferson College

Also deemed to be important:

- Because of sophisticated communication our “economic boundaries” have increased
- Way we communicate biggest impact – bridges everything

Question 2

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

Response

- Way we communicate biggest impact – bridges everything
- VWCC impacting our region because we train
- Reduction of government funding impacting programs
- Politics impacting negatively
- 9-11 and homeland security negative impact
- Impact of Smith Mountain Lake on businesses tremendous
- Inter-modal facility will greatly impact region
- Influx of non-English speaking cultures
- Lewis-Gale has really invested in our community; done a very good job with handling Lewis-Gale Clinic

Question 3

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

Response

- Healthcare industry growth including Jefferson College
- Higher Ed Center very positive
- Inter-modal facility big driver
- Big traffic jam in our area because of road travel/Salem traffic an issue

- Air quality issues
- Different cultures moving in; could stress school systems; state not doing their part to help; land area stressed
- Technology park developed – west Roanoke County
- Salem’s Elizabeth Campus development
- Baby boomer aging will impact; hurt medical providers; insurance will be negatively affected; our population is aging
- Political shift to Northern Virginia
- Airport transportation affects bringing in new businesses
- More redevelopment because no new land
- Challenge for cities to come up with new revenue to support programs; lack of tax base/revenue
- Wealthier people moving out (SML)
- Lack of skilled workers
- Jobs more skilled/specific; skills are a “mismatched market;” continued shift from manufacturing
- Parents’ mind-set is child needs 4-year university; emphasis on education instead of career
- Technology training important
- Need to start helping non-academic students focus on career training in middle school

Question 4

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

Response

- Career/technical/vocational training
- Cost-effective
- Segway to 4-year
- Dual enrollment – need to publicize “trade” classes in dual enrollment
- Refreshing skills
- Career change opportunities
- Lifelong learning
- Adult education
- Entertainment value
- VWCC is thought of as all the above descriptions – best kept secret
- Online instruction
- Transfer agreements
- Image not great – students sometimes say “just going to Western”
- Stigma there, but changing
- Cost factor helps
- Stigma attached to “community college” but changing
- No attachment to campus
- Skills – graphic design, healthcare, computer, hands-on, ethics, certifications
- Being “homegrown” – local a real plus!
- Public and industry don’t realize we have career placement resources

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

- Let go of rigidity of semester system; flexibility of academic scheduling (faculty are a roadblock to this)
- Keep a close association with businesses; look at their needs
- Increase more nursing educational opportunities
- Become facilitator of all schools in Valley to improve career technology opportunities (takes politics out of it); local schools are diluting the opportunities and VWCC could get them to better utilize resources
- Start in high schools to make career technology attractive
- Teach “teachers/trainers” about ethics so they can prepare the students
- Dual enrollment at earlier age (between 8-9 grade, i.e., before 10th grade); market to younger kids
- Look at what Central Virginia Community College is doing; structure is established using Region 2000 (workforce investment funds key to that success)
- Professional skills
- Training the parents about what their children need in the workplace (character, ethics)
- VWCC interface with school administration and board
- VWCC well positioned to fulfill need for changes in school system

Additional Question

Is “community college” positive?

Response

- Much more regional now – would be good
- Students want to get away from “community”
- Not a good name if you want to promote career technical
- “Community” does not help sell it
- Start using just VW and community college will drop away
- Need to do more advertising
- First figure out who you are trying to talk to; target market (different messages)
- Need to GO to the businesses
- Host Business After Hours at VWCC
- Treat VWCC like a business