



Evansville Economic Development Project

Focus Groups Report



Prepared by:

Whalen & Associates, Inc.
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www.whalen.com
judy@whalen.com
608-455-2090



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Five Focus Groups were conducted on August 27-28, 2007 as the first phase of the Evansville Economic Development Project. The purpose for conducting the focus groups was:

- To gather information that would provide a preliminary insight into the major issues facing the City in regards to economic development.
- To create awareness of the City's commitment to economic development.
- To gather ideas and assess interest in an Economic Development Summit.

A list of invitees was developed by a planning team consisting of Mayor Sandy Decker, City Administrator Dan Wietecha, Chamber Promotional Director Bridgit Larsen, and Judy Whalen, Project Facilitator. The team first identified five major categories of business that are in the greater Evansville area. The categories include: Agribusiness, Construction/Development, Retail, Manufacturing and Service. Then individuals representing each category were identified. Developing diversity in each category was a top priority. The Mayor sent a letter to each of the 60 people on the list. Of the 60 invitees, 39 responded YES, they would participate. Sixteen people responded NO, they were unable to participate. However, four indicated they were willing to be interviewed by phone. And five did not respond.

A total of 26 people actually showed up to participate in the focus groups. Unforeseen work conflicts and weather-related issues prevented others from attending. The strong YES response from 39 of the invitees to the Mayor's invitation is an indication that economic development is a top priority for the individuals who were invited.

Each focus group was asked the same set of questions. The questions include:

1. How do you define economic development?
2. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Evansville attract?
 - a. What new businesses does your business need in order to grow?
 - b. What new businesses do you personally want to see in Evansville and why?

3. What can the City or the Chamber do to facilitate the growth of your business?
4. What resources would you look for when selecting a community for your business or what resources do you need to make your business successful?
5. Is there a trend in your industry that the City or Chamber should know about to take advantage of or be prepared to address?
6. We are planning to get input from the community by sponsoring a community-wide summit for the development of the overall Economic Development Plan. It will be a facilitated session. The purpose of the summit is to draw out ideas and comments from the participants and identify key elements to be considered in the development of the overall Economic Development Plan
 - a. If you were charged with planning the event, what factors should be considered and what ideas would you like to offer?
 - b. Who should be invited? ex. City Council, Townships Chairs, County reps, residents, all business people, farming community
 - c. Would you attend the Summit? YES NO
7. Are there other roadblocks to the growth of your business that the City or Chamber could help you address, such as lack of a skilled workforce?

KEY FINDINGS

While each focus group was conducted individually, there are common themes that were voiced in two or more groups. These include:

- **Workforce Development**
 - More highly skilled workforce: There is a need for workers who have sound technical training and good math, reading and interpersonal skills. Specialized manufacturing equipment needs people who can not only operate the equipment effectively, but also participate in the metrics measurements that play a significant role in quality, efficiency and on-time deliveries. Example of skills needed: Lab skills, mechanical controls, etc.
 - Work ethic: There is a need for workers who have the “right attitude” and are willing to work and who consistently report for work.
- **Promotion of Evansville**
 - Marketing, PR, Advertising: There is a need to promote:

1. The businesses that are already in Evansville.
2. Evansville as a good place to locate/conduct business.
3. Existing businesses to each other (B2B).
4. Existing businesses to the residents.
5. Evansville to the greater area.

■ **Better Communication, Collaboration and Cooperation**

- Better communication, collaboration and cooperation are needed throughout the area. Specific areas identified include:
 1. Existing businesses and City Hall.
 2. The City with the surrounding townships boards.
 3. Businesses exploring Evansville as a possible site.
 4. Businesses to each other.
 5. Businesses and residents especially regarding the impact of local businesses on the local economy and school district and the need for residents to support local businesses.
 6. Keep the process of communication/interaction simple.
- An awareness of the economic impact that local businesses have on the community and the volume of their financial contributions to support the efforts of community organizations and the school district.

■ **Balance**

- A respect for and understanding of the need to balance the responsibilities of local government for public health, safety and welfare of the residents with the needs of local businesses that provide an economic vitality for the community.

■ **Definition of Economic Development**

- Economic development is creating the right environment that:
 1. Keeps the current businesses strong.
 2. Makes Evansville and the surrounding area an attractive location for new businesses.
 3. Creates new jobs so people can make a livable wage within the community.
 4. Provides for the needs of the residents and businesses.
 5. Draws non-residents to the area

- **Become a Destination**
 - The Evansville area needs to determine how to become a “destination” so non-residents travel to it for its unique offerings. Potential “destination” draws could be: specialty shops such as arts, crafts, and unique restaurants or outdoor recreational activities that attract users in both summer and winter, ex. toboggan/tubing hill that charges admission, golf, and ATV course.
- **Develop an inventory of current business**
 - Gain a thorough understanding of the current businesses, the type of vendors they use and the needs they have. Analyze the network of businesses and their vendors to identify opportunities to attract needed businesses to support existing businesses.
- **Major Priority**
 - Bring industry and businesses to the area that are able to create jobs that pay a livable wage so people can work and shop here.
 - Avoid becoming a bedroom community.
- **Immediate Needs**
 - Support of local residents to shop locally.
 - Meeting rooms that can accommodate 20-40 people or more for offsite training, meetings, etc.
 - Hotel to house vendors, sales forces, etc.
- **Overall Interest in the Summit.**
 - There is resounding interest in participation in an Economic Development Summit. The focus group participants were grateful that the Economic Development Committee and the City are focusing on economic development.

FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

The following items are the personal observations of the facilitator and are offered to provide an insight into the participants’ interaction and reactions.

- **Delighted to be invited:** The participants were please to have been invited and pleased the Economic Development Committee, the City Council and

Mayor approved the project. They are encouraged to see the commitment to explore the topic and develop an economic development plan.

- Participants in each focus group did not know one another. Considering the size of Evansville, this is surprising. It is also an indication that there have not been opportunities for business owners to get together, build relationships and explore how they could help each others' businesses grow.
- Synergies developed almost spontaneously: As focus group participants explained the different facets of their businesses, other participants began to make connections of how their businesses could interact and benefit each other. At least eight new opportunities surfaced for participants simply by exchanging information about their businesses needs and services.

FOCUS GROUPS

FOCUS GROUP: AGRIBUSINESS

Date: August 27, 2007

Individuals attending: Ed Larson, Gordy Andrew, John Gishnock, Steve Pincus, Ken Reese

1. How do you define economic development?

- To get more product with the same amount of effort and also manage more complexity.
- Diversify to meet more needs, and look for new venues and new market opportunities. Don't let a community or business stagnate
- Realizing that a community needs to change with the times.
- Make more revenue/acre as well as thinking about the future.
- Work with others to increase production and resources to help each other.

2. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Evansville attract?

a. What new businesses does your business need in order to grow?

- Landline-based fast Internet service
- Cheaper and more satellite internet service
- Soybean crusher and biodiesel plant will be beneficial to the economics
- Always need to have good local vets, feed and fertilizer suppliers
- Always need a good local hardware store in a community
- Need a good compost company/supplier
- Farmers need a disposal system for manure
- A motel for business people who are visiting local businesses
- More restaurants
- Two additional types of agri-related businesses – an ethanol plant and cellulose ethanol plant. The soybean crusher plant could also provide several types of products: oil, meal and glycerin. These types of interrelated industries could add jobs and create more economic development opportunities for Evansville in the future.

b. What new businesses do you personally want to see in Evansville and why?

- The New York Times – no place to buy a copy every day.
- Retail stores on the west side of Evansville - grocery, drug store, gas station, convenience mart.
- Farm and Fleet type of store
- More leisure-related businesses

- The biodiesel industry will have real growth implications for the community
- Indoor swimming pool facility and/or perhaps a bowling alley
- Indoor ice skating rink

3. What can the City or the Chamber do to facilitate the growth of your business?

- Provide a package of information to help a new business find services they need as they start up such as: names of attorneys, accountants, printers, Internet services, and local suppliers for their particular business needs, office supplies.
- More public relations to promote agribusinesses to each other and in the area.
- Promote Evansville as a place with good schools because that will bring in new people and businesses.
- Produce and place articles in the paper by farmers that help people understand their business and the “farmer’s calendar” for crop plantings, reaping, etc.
- Create new special days to highlight and feature the farming community – Farm Day or CSA Days
- Need more classes in high school related to farming, organic farming, etc.

4. What resources would you look for when selecting a community for your business or what resources do you need to make your business successful?

- Good schools
- Friendly ordinances to help new business growth. Now there is too much obstruction
- to new dairy farms. Ex. – new dairy start-ups were stopped and stonewalled because of tree-huggers who stood in the way of farms with 30-50 cows and others who are against any farms with 300-400 cows, even though large scale operations is the trend in agribusiness.
- Stop small, nuisance complaints from new people who create a problem because they don’t understand the bigger issues and needs of agribusiness.
- Help new people who want the rural atmosphere understand the role of farming in this rural environment.
- More and better communication between all people – farmers and newcomers.

NOTE: An economic development plan should address: zoning, regulations and annexation issues (as well as better communication and education methods.)

5. Is there a trend in your industry that the City or the Chamber should know about to take advantage of or be prepared to address?

- Local schools are beginning to use more locally grown produce and that will affect keeping business money in the area.
- More organic produce and natural plants – using no herbicides
- Interest in starting a local food co-op in town
- The town could help teach about farmland preservation or develop an awareness campaign
- Begin addressing the extra-territorial powers and what that means to get people to cooperate in surrounding townships.
- Need to establish ways to cluster housing vs. farm land, re: Town of Dunn – “development rights.”

Note: Evansville is looking at economic development while townships around here want to stop growth – needs to be addressed.

6. We are planning to get input from the community by sponsoring a summit. It will be a facilitated session. The purpose of the summit is to draw out ideas and comments from the participants and identify key elements to be considered in the development of the overall Economic Development Plan:

- a. If you were charged with planning the event, what factors should be considered and what ideas would you like to offer?**
- Advertising of all kinds – posters, ads, banner, notices in the paper
 - Food
 - Need a catchy title that makes everyone want to come because it’s the “in thing” to do.
 - Need an interesting and exciting speaker/celebrity at the event to draw audience to the event.
 - A structure for the event to get everyone involved – small groups where they can speak out about what they would like to see changed and be comfortable doing so
 - Select topics so people could choose the group discussion they want to be in.
 - Select topics could include: A. What ways does Evansville need to grow? B. What kinds of businesses do I need personally?
 - Township Boards around Evansville need to be invited.

- Need to publish a summary of the results from the Summit.
 - Call it Evansville Regional Summit to show it's a regional event.
 - Maybe one group could be for people who don't want any change – they could tell everyone why and what really worries them about change in the community.
 - The redevelopment of central Evansville needs to be addressed. Many empty buildings and we need to get things jump started.
 - Parking is an issue that needs to be discussed.
 - We need a “theme” for the redevelopment of Evansville. We need to make it a place to want to visit to shop. We need to become a “destination” to draw in visitors and provide more economic opportunities for shop owners too.
- b. Who should be invited?**
- Everyone in Evansville and surrounding Townships
- c. Would you attend the Summit? YES 4+ No: 1**
- Depends upon schedule
- 7. Are there other roadblocks to the growth of your business that the City or Chamber could help you address, such as lack of a skilled workforce?**
- We need to have a broader view of the area around here to be developed. There needs to be a more organized way to develop the area.
 - We need to make sure that in development of land that farmers get a fair price for their property. Should be a way to have “development rights” factored in.
 - The City Council and Township Boards need to change their way of thinking.
 - Need more grassroots groundswell to push politicians to get the crusher plant - letter campaign to the Governor and Senators would help.

FOCUS GROUP: CONSTRUCTION

Date: August 27, 2007 4 – 6 p.m.

Individuals attending: Todd Kaehler, Mike Klassy, Lori Allen, Corey Schwenn, Rick Heacox, John Morning, Rich Modaff, Tim Magee

1. How do you define economic development?

- Growing the total of what is produced and services for consumers -- growing the total value in the area.
- Business growth and offering jobs to the community overall.

- Business, commercial, residential interests are intertwined and interdependent. They need to work together and collaborate to improve the quality of life for residents and the business environment.

2. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Evansville attract?

a. What new businesses does your business need in order to grow?

- A new gym open 24/7. Something the residents will like but will also bring in construction jobs.
- Value added businesses that can pay well, export products, bring knowledge-base to the community and can also provide construction jobs.
- Manufacturing businesses that bring in new people who buy new homes and buy products from retail.
- Businesses like machine-tool companies, bio-tech and high tech. In addition, large wholesaler and distributors are good employers.
- New hotel.
- New banks and retail stores.
- Develop thriving trades businesses that restore and redo old buildings downtown.
- Creative arts businesses.
- Find companion businesses that supply or work with the businesses we already have here and then solicit them to move here.
- Some big employers.

b. What new businesses do you personally want to see in Evansville and why?

(Incorporated in other answers)

3. What can the City or the Chamber do to facilitate the growth of your business?

- Determine who is going to be the front persons to draw in more businesses because the first contacts are very important in attracting new businesses.
- Inventory what businesses we have in Evansville and then determine what we need and why we need them. Then go after those businesses to fill the holes.
- Add to the industrial and commercial base because they help reduce taxes.
- City Hall can try NOT to kill deals and turn off new business ventures. They often just give potential businesses a form and tell them to show up for a meeting. That is no way to welcome and bring new businesses to the City.
- Need a committee outside of government who works on an Economic Development plan, solicits new businesses to move to Evansville, helps

them work through local regulations and then welcomes them and provides resources as members of the business community.

- The City Administrator needs to be strong on development of the town and its business community.
- The Economic Development Committee and the City should be offering all kinds of incentives because there is plenty of competition out there with other towns/cities.
- Important to have a strong Economic Development Plan and good people involved because it's a hard thing to do.
- Find out what Evansville is "outsourcing" to other places in the state and region and try to get it done here in Evansville instead. This would keep dollars here and bring in more jobs and help our economy grow.
- We need to improve market penetration and do more business locally rather than in some other town where our people work.
- Chamber should help by doing a marketing campaign.
- Chamber members could be doing more to welcome in other businesses too. Right now only 25% of the members participate in a welcome package.
- Help change the way residents do business. People move to town because they like some of the attributes they find in this town. Find and recognize these attributes but also add to the residents' awareness of what is in town and why Evansville is special.
- Help keep businesses successful because they contribute to the tax base which can keep taxes lower for the residents.
- New residents who move here because of the schools need to understand that the businesses also support their schools and they should help support the businesses in return.
- We're aware it takes years to change the attitudes and business climate.

4. What resources would you look for when selecting a community for your business or what resources do you need to make your business successful?

- The banking business looks for good growth in a community – commercial and residential. We don't export or import anything. We want to capture a fair share of the potential customers in the community. We also look for a good infrastructure – water, electricity, gas, rail service, and proximity to highways – everything that industries will be interested in. We work to keep the customers we have and also try to capture a piece of the market share.
- New growth/new construction has to be there to stay successful.
- More people in new construction rather than into repairs/remodels.
- Available lots and space to build and low interest rates

- Good infrastructure.
- Any kind of growth is going to have a positive impact on other parts of the economy. It has a ripple affect across the community.

Question by facilitator – If we create more new jobs will there be housing available in Evansville?

- Government plays a big part -- it tends to be restrictive. We need them to be more flexible with building houses when they're needed.
- Since we now have about 60% of the residents who commute out of here every day, available housing is not an issue at this point.
- Market forces will move the market demand for houses and we have lots available in town.
- Yes, if people can handle the taxes -- it's a big factor.

5. Is there a trend in your industry that the City or the Chamber should know about to take advantage of or be prepared to address?

- High property taxes in town are causing potential buyers to look elsewhere.
- Regulation on size of homes might be smart – we don't need great big houses.
- There is a demand for the entry level homes, so don't restrict or stop # of building permits.
- City doesn't need 20% of homes to be handicapped accessible. Ridiculous idea.
- City needs to make sure there are a variety of home sizes and types of businesses to provide services to residents and keep their dollars here in Evansville.

NOTE: - City Council needs to take into account the various kinds of businesses that may be needed by a variety of residents (ages, # in households, etc.) and their specific needs.

6. We are planning to get input from the community by sponsoring a summit. It will be a facilitated session. The purpose of the summit is to draw out ideas and comments from the participants and identify key elements to be considered in the development of the overall Economic Development Plan:

- a. If you were charged with planning the event, what factors should be considered and what ideas would you like to offer?**
 - Before a summit -- find out the inventory of what businesses we have in town to use that information at the summit.

- Determine available property/areas that you can offer for economic development.
- Show the facts about the real contribution of what businesses provide to the community – including salaries and taxes, types of products and services, all revenue.
- Help residents and others understand the big economic engine and the impact that businesses have on Evansville as a whole.
- Help create business opportunities internally by helping each other.
- Find out who is important in town that you do business with and make sure you find ways to keep them here.
- Break out the Summit attendees into small groups so people get a chance to talk.
- Provide attendees a packet of information about the basic economics about Evansville ahead of time so that residents can review and think about them and prepare questions.
- Chamber can provide some statistics that could be used.
- Post information on city Web site, and send out information online.
- Don't rush the process of doing a summit.
- People need to feel it was well worth their time and energy to come to the summit, that they are part of the process, and are helping make important decisions for their future.
- People need to be well informed ahead of time.
- Find out how big is the economic engine here in Evansville and the economic footprint already here in Evansville. Then try to determine what it would take to grow it even just 10%.
- Creating more business growth and money on deposit in local banks in Evansville are necessities in helping the City grow.
- Have to do this summit right the first time. May want to move the date back to early next year.
- Get more people involved in the planning and implementation process rather than just 3-4 people and the Mayor.
- Get businesses together first in a summit instead of going right out to the community. Maybe not 6 hours in a summit either. That's too long.
- Maybe the first hour or so should be devoted to providing information about the current economic situation in Evansville. You could then provide some ideas about ways to help change the situation and ask the attendees to break out into smaller groups and brainstorm methods to help make change happen.

NOTE: Common vision and common goal needs to be developed for people who live here.

NOTE: JW to the group -- The Mayor wants business people talking to each other to get synergy going and generate some of their own economic growth internally here in Evansville.

- b. Who should be invited?** Construction people, developers, agriculture, retail, services. All business people in the area.
 - c. Would you attend the Summit?** YES: All
- 7. Are there other roadblocks to the growth of your business that the City or Chamber could help you address, such as lack of a skilled workforce?**
- Skilled trades people
 - Available land

FOCUS GROUP: MANUFACTURERS

Date: August 28, 2007

Individuals attending: Otto Knottnerus, Sandy Sayarath, Ken Wahlin, Mike Robinson

1. How do you define economic development?

- An environment that is conducive to running a business. Not a lot of regulatory roadblocks and a helpful attitude from people who provide the services.
- Creating an environment that produces a value-added proposition.
- A labor pool that has good math, reading, and interpersonal skills is extremely useful in economic development. We need an educated workforce.
- Need good work ethics and attitudes.
- Need more dedicated employees.
- The geography is a factor – the proximity to other industries and communities.
- Good infrastructure (3 phase power) helps economic development
- Logistics is a big part – good roads and being near a railroad system.

Note: Encourage WI Southern to come to Evansville to help biodiesel and other businesses here to transport and receive products.

2. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Evansville attract?

a. What new businesses does your business need in order to grow?

- Heating and air conditioning businesses
- Tool and die shops with reasonably skilled people (have to go to Beloit now).
- Hotel – for business people and sales reps. Also need conference rooms for meetings.
- Employment agency for entry level/skilled people (like Janesville and Madison).
- Unique types of business(s) that bring in and attract people to Evansville.
- Expansion of some of the businesses we already have – more hardware stores, auto parts, grocery stores.

b. What new businesses do you personally want to see in Evansville and why?

- Needs a feed store close by and ag implement dealer.
- Reception hall for parties, weddings, etc.
- Build a toboggan hill and activity area near the lake in Evansville.

3. What can the City or the Chamber do to facilitate the growth of your business?

- They should come up with a “new business” package. Information that helps new businesses, i.e. information about City Hall regulations and other useful information about doing business in the City.
- Provide good access to people in City Hall to potential businesses. Maybe use TIF districts more to encourage new businesses to come to Evansville. (It was the “key” for the biodiesel business to decide to come to Evansville.)
- Need to actively solicit new businesses to come to Evansville. Other towns are soliciting our businesses all the time.
- Help change the tax climate and regulatory climate -- not very conducive to business.
- Evansville needs to expand their sewer and waste water services before they are maxed out and new businesses will be discouraged from coming here.
- Chamber should bring in speakers with unique and specialty experience to help local businesses grow. Subjects such as Web development, HR, networking, financing, etc. might be helpful.
- The Chamber could help bring in people to teach computer skills to employers and employees.
- Help get local people trained to become better and future leaders in the community.
- Keep the business process simple with the City.
- Keep the business community involved in local tax and regulatory issues so they are not surprised.

4. What resources would you look for when selecting a community for your business or what resources do you need to make your business successful?

- We need good logistics and infrastructure (railroad) to make our company successful. Offering a TIF is also important. A large labor pool is not necessary for their company.
- Good roads and access to major highways is important.
- Skilled workforce, roads, and close proximity to suppliers and customer base.
- Phone and Internet service to people around the globe.
- Workforce, roads, centrally located to their customers.
- Good police protection.

5. Is there a trend in your industry that the City or the Chamber should know about to take advantage of or be prepared to address?

- Need more highly skilled employees.

- Educate our students and young people about good work ethics. (Don't think the schools and parents are doing a good job.)
 - Need more technically skilled labor such as workers for labs, controls, chemical and electrical jobs.
 - Evansville might look at opening a satellite facility from Blackhawk Tech for training skilled workers
- 6. We are planning to get input from the community by sponsoring a summit. It will be a facilitated session. The purpose of the summit is to draw out ideas and comments from the participants and identify key elements to be considered in the development of the overall Economic Development Plan.**
- a. If you were charged with planning the event, what factors should be considered and what ideas would you like to offer?**
- Get the right people. Need a good mix of people with positive and constructive attitudes, not just whining people who complain about everything.
 - Determine the end goal -- is it to create a vision or roll out a vision? Then figure out how best to get buy-in from the business and residential communities.
 - Have small groups come up with the vision statement, present to a larger group for their feedback.
 - Since there is already some positive sentiment and support for economic development (part of the Smart Growth Plan) then this should be billed as part of that Plan to the community.
 - Since the biodiesel business fits right into Evansville's Smart Growth Plan it really facilitated locating that new business in Evansville. Therefore the City was very open to the biodiesel business. (NOTE: Could be used as an example at the Summit?).
 - Determine first the kinds of businesses that relate to the Smart Growth Plan and illustrate that information at the summit.
 - Explain how new types of business will also bring in families who will live, shop and work here in Evansville and provide the town with various types of skilled workforce and better tax base.
 - Get people to consider the size and types of businesses that might work here in Evansville, such as: smaller companies, rather than a Mayo Clinic, light mfg., biotech, high tech. Also should talk about how a soybean crusher plant would help the farming community and a co-generating power facility and a glycerin production business would be good companion companies.
 - Should find ways to try to get people (accountants, lawyers) who live in Madison to start a business in Evansville.

- Find a way to have people write down their ideas. Keep the groups in order
- Provide information ahead of time to the attendees.
- Be prepared and don't fashion the agenda at the Summit.
- These focus groups should help put the plan together for the summit and start presenting information and getting buy-in from the residents.

NOTE: Also put together several resident-only focus groups now to help put together a comprehensive plan of Economic Development. Want constructive ideas and initial Economic Development planning to come out of the Summit

- b. Who should be invited?** It should be only businesses, after residents have been heard from in surveys and/focus groups.
- c. Would you attend the Summit?** YES: 3 NO: 1

7. Are there other roadblocks to the growth of your business that the City or Chamber could help you address, such as lack of a skilled workforce?

- The construction has been a problem for many businesses.
- The simpler the better when interfacing with the government. We need clear and concise language, information, and good treatment/service by staff to business owners.
- More resources and help by the City staff – i.e. they had an oil drum to dispose of and the city staff had no idea what to do or where to send them for assistance, even the waste people had no idea. Finally the local co-op helped them.
- Lack of good communication between the City and businesses.

FOCUS GROUP: RETAILERS

Date: August 28, 2007

Individuals attending: Dave Warren, Shelly Meredith, Jane Pierce, Ben Ladick, Brad Goodspeed,

1. How do you define economic development?

- Have a plan for the future
- A balance between government and entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs try to make money while government has to make sure things run smoothly -- it's a balancing act between the two.
- Determining what the community needs/wants and then developing a strategy to get those businesses and activities into the community.
- A way to bring in more business to add to those already here. Right now there is no real reason to come to Evansville to shop or do

business. No real draw here. The 70's party on July 4th brought in some visitors, but on Labor Day weekend everyone leaves town. People need a real reason to come here.

- Many residents work in Madison/Janesville and have gotten into the habit of shopping there instead of shopping here and supporting the local businesses. We need to find a way to get our residents to do business in town.
- The Chamber has always discussed this problem and how it affects every business in town but hasn't been able to change it.
- Not just maintain a business – be able to grow it! For 20 years I've just maintained my business. The City's growth has helped me to maintain, but not to grow my business.
- Provide various ways to promote businesses besides just advertising in the local paper.
- Get people to read their local papers, walk the streets, shop in the local stores – not shop where they work and then come home and only mow their lawns.

Note: The % of people moving in is larger than the rate of business growth. And residents seem to have habits that are hard to change. They continue to buy products and use services closer to where they work during the day and also because Evansville doesn't have a lot of things to offer.

2. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Evansville attract?

a. What new businesses does your business need in order to grow?

- More specialty and home décor shops.
- Use the history of Evansville as a way to draw in visitors.
- People want to see something unique here in downtown Evansville.
-

b. What new businesses do you personally want to see in Evansville and why?

- Specialty and unique shops
- Health care facilities or other businesses that bring in women workers who shop at our stores during the day and after work.
- A bridal shop might draw people.
- More good restaurants.
- An ATV business. This would be something different and people would spend a lot of money to come here and play. It would bring in money and more business to the town. The ATV business in Green County brought in \$11 million last year to the county. ATV people often spend \$20/\$30 per person, rather than bicyclists who spend money for a bottle of water. The Lake Leota area has a path and it would also give riders access to other businesses in town and the park

store. Money could be used to help restore the lake. (Unfortunately, the tree huggers would probably be against it.)

- A campground -- like around Milton.
- A movie theater and/or a place for community plays.
- Something unique that draws people and gets them to go to shops and restaurants while they're here.

NOTE: We need to become a summer/fall/winter “destination” to bring in visitors interested in a unique experience that only Evansville can offer them.

3. What can the City or the Chamber do to facilitate the growth of your business?

- The city needs to help keep the present businesses strong. (The city allowed many others to obtain a liquor/beer license which diluted his business after he spent a lot of money to support his license.).
- The City Council is awful to business people. They think that businesses can also fund all kinds of things to help the residents when the businesses are really struggling.
- Understand that the bigger businesses don't have a lot of money – they have employees, overhead and many expenses too to just stay in business.
- Maybe the people from these other factions need to meet with the Chamber members and hear their issues.
- The City can stop demanding that businesses add things around their buildings that are ridiculous and expensive for the business owner and in most cases don't really add to the environment or anything else.
- The city needs to be more “business friendly” and really understand what it takes to run a business and the taxes that a business creates for the good of the community.
- The city needs to do what's good for business owners and help them build their business in various ways.
- Understand that many businesses are barely staying afloat and not making any profit.
- Have some business people on the City Council who understand what it takes to run a business.
- Business people should be encouraged to participate on the City Council, instead of being treated negatively or risking a decline in their business.
- The City council doesn't listen to businesses. They have their own agenda, which is to keep this a sleepy little town, and they also have the power to run you out of business.
- The City needs to stop mandating the amount of “green space” around companies.

- Not demand that costly curb and gutters be put in the middle of a parking lot and build sidewalks that go nowhere. Their rules are often unnecessary and difficult for businesses to pay for.

NOTE: Group said they are looking forward to end of the construction around town so people will come back to town to shop more. They think the City Council really needs to better understand the economic impact of every decision they make related to businesses.

Question by facilitator: Will the new brick street and appearance of the new street bring something special to the town?

- After it's done, maybe some other retailers will open up. It will create some quaintness.
- Hope that businesses will be allowed to have new and bigger signage – that's a real problem downtown. Most signage now is way too small.
- It's a real balancing act -- think some of the residents want the downtown to blend in and not really show there are viable, active businesses. They don't want change or visitors. They want to stay a sleepy town.

Question – Is there a way for business owners to have their own special group?

- The Chamber is supposed to be the spokesperson for all businesses in the area.

4. What resources would you look for when selecting a community for your business or what resources do you need to make your business successful?

- When there is long-term construction it's too tough to start a new business, to buy inventory and rent shops, so that probably has deterred new retail shops from opening here.
- There needs to be some real incentives for retailers to open a shop or start up a business in this town.
- A traffic pattern that goes through downtown instead of bypassing it.
- We need to give people a reason(s) to stop in our town. Provide a unique experience or theme to draw people to our town.

5. Is there a trend in your industry that the City or the Chamber should know about to take advantage of or be prepared to address?

- If we don't start getting more customers soon, we won't be able to exist.

- We are evolving more and more into a bedroom community. People want to keep this a quaint town with just residents and a few businesses and she doesn't like how it's evolving.
 - Residential growth will be stopped too if the City mandates the 20% handicap housing regulation. It's totally ridiculous and expensive.
 - The City Council should be going out and talking to people and business owners and learning what is really happening and needed in Evansville. The City Council members don't have an economic development background or business experience.
 - The City Council has been instrumental in closing down businesses or causing others not to open.
 - Our other business location is supporting the Evansville facility.
 - The school district and staff should also be encouraged to do business in town since a lot of money from the business community is given to support their activities.
- 6. We are planning to get input from the community by sponsoring a summit. It will be a facilitated session. The purpose of the summit is to draw out ideas and comments from the participants and identify key elements to be considered in the development of the overall Economic Development Plan.**
- a. If you were charged with planning the event, what factors should be considered and what ideas would you like to offer?**
- Offer food
 - Really inspire people to come and give them some hope and reassurance that something will happen afterwards. Need to convey that what they say will be taken seriously.
 - City Council people HAVE to be there and really listen. Leave their agendas at the door and come with open minds.
 - People have to be reassured that what they say can be done privately.
 - Send out or do surveys and talk to people when they come out of stores.
 - Offer child care.
 - Maybe do more one-on-ones instead of a large group.
 - Inform the residents that the businesses are really having a tough time. They need to be educated about what it's like to try and do business in this town. They need to better understand business problems and issues.
 - Town people need to understand that the taxes that businesses provide support the town as a whole.
 - Find other ways to promote the Summit since advertising in local paper isn't very effective.

NOTE: Other ways to promote what's going on in Evansville and invite people to the Summit might include: sending information through the utility bills, maybe a directly personalized mailing from the Mayor to everyone, use the City's and Towns' Web sites and promote that, etc. In the future, possibly use a local access TV channel to spread information to all residents and businesses.

- b. Who should be invited? Everyone**
- c. Would you attend the Summit? YES: All**

7. Are there other roadblocks to the growth of your business that the City or Chamber could help you address, such as lack of a skilled workforce?

- The biggest thing is to change the attitude that is pervasive in this town. We're not a sleepy little town. We have some new companies coming into town and we need to step up and out.
- We don't know everyone anymore. Need better networking and communication.
- People love the houses, but not the taxes which are way too high.
- Need larger tax base spread across businesses and residents so we can be a viable and healthy community – to live and to work in.

FOCUS GROUP: SERVICE

Date: August 28, 2007

Individuals attending: Cliff Woolever, PJ Spears, Rebecca DeMarb, Alex Tort, Jane McGuire

1. How do you define economic development?

- To make the right changes to make the business community even better: For example: the brick street to match the buildings. Action like that helps economic development in the long run. Keep your traditions but modernize and integrate images and the look of the downtown.
- A bustling downtown with shops/retail/restaurants and other types of businesses to make it viable and exciting.
- Look at the needs of the community and determine where there are gaps. Make wise decisions to fill those gaps. Look at Smart Growth plan, but also determine whether or not you have the number and types of businesses to keep your community economically healthy.
- Provide enough services to the residents.
- Evansville is projected to grow more than Stoughton in next 5 years so there is a lot of planning that needs to be done so it's done right.

- Evansville is known as a nice town to raise kids and it has good schools. People and kids feel safer here than in other cities around here.

2. What kinds of businesses would you like to see Evansville attract?

a. What new businesses does your business need in order to grow?

- We could use more families, older residents since we're in the nursing and assisted care business.
- More assisted care and in-home services, and Hospice.
- Incorporate senior center into other needs here in the community – like a community center perhaps.
- Any kind of business is good business for us. A couple more institutional clients like the nursing home would be great.

b. What new businesses do you personally want to see in Evansville and why?

- Classes to take my young child to – like tumbling, dance, an inside pool, a branch of the Y
- More restaurants and shops
- Banquet facilities and meeting rooms
- Senior Center and Community Center
- Business and job opportunities for employees' spouses
- Adult classes
- Ways to strengthen the bond between the schools and businesses
- Health care education for parents, children and seniors
- Some retail stores that sell clothing
- Wine store
- Good butcher and baker
- Theater
- Venues that can offer live music and entertainment to residents and visitors
- More activities for youth, particularly 12-15 yr olds who have little to do. Ideas might include indoor ice skating, arcade, a community center to provide kids activities during the day and adults at night.
- Need a place to offer lessons in music, art, dance, theater, etc. Local artists could give lessons to children and adults.

3. What can the City or the Chamber do to facilitate the growth of your business?

- Do more advertising by Chamber to promote businesses around this area.

- 4. What resources would you look for when selecting a community for your business or what resources do you need to make your business successful?**

- 5. Is there a trend in your industry that the City or the Chamber should know about to take advantage of or be prepared to address?**
 - Be preparing and planning for the needs of the baby boomers. They will need and want resources of all kinds: more surgeons, living accommodations, athletic facilities, health education, personal services, etc.
 - Adult (senior) housing has to relate to the economics in a community.
 - Realize the difference that people pay for services here vs. in Madison for the same service, i.e., haircutting, etc. We need to change the appearance that services done in Evansville are by less experienced people.
 - Finding niches for our business so we can offer a different set of services than our competition.
 - By providing high quality product and service he hopes to bring in business from around the area based on word of mouth reputation. Doesn't do much advertising because it keeps his prices down for his customers.
 - Wellness programs are getting to be huge. Insurance companies are really looking at how employers are taking care of their employees.
 - Provide healthy outdoor activities to make the community healthier overall.
 - Ex. Stoughton is looking at a business/healthcare/community coalition to make healthy programs more prevalent and the new athletic center in Stoughton is providing indoor walking paths for all ages and free for seniors.

- 6. We are planning to get input from the community by sponsoring a summit. It will be a facilitated session. The purpose of the summit is to draw out ideas and comments from the participants and identify key elements to be considered in the development of the overall Economic Development Plan:**
 - a. If you were charged with planning the event, what factors should be considered and what ideas would you like to offer?**
 - Growth of certain industries and how that could be helpful in planning.
 - Providing more services in town so residents and workers don't have to shop out of town all the time.
 - Develop better communication between city and business groups.
 - Bring in resources from universities and Blackhawk Tech to help with programming and economic development planning.

- Provide better communication methods to everyone beyond the local paper – i.e., use Shoppers, an insert in there about business or from Chamber. Multi-faceted: Web site, direct mail, inserts in utility bills, etc.
 - Develop local cable channel to get out news each week.
 - Need all city leaders, county reps and townships boards to be there.
 - Need to put together and present what people want (residents and businesses).
 - Do a survey ahead of time – use online, telephone and direct mail. (Smart Growth plan should have a survey that can provide some information that might be helpful too.)
 - Need to make the summit as positive as possible. Let people know there is real potential to change attitudes and mindsets in this town.
 - Since Evansville is projected to grow so much in the next 5 years – it’s exciting that the Mayor and others are planning on doing this to develop more opportunities for their residents and businesses and develop a viable economic development plan.
- b. **Who should be invited? Community civic groups, business leaders, some public input,**
- c. **Would you attend the Summit? YES: 4 NO: 1**

NOTE: If certain parts of the summit pertain to specific types of industry/services – then participants can come for part of the time to participate in those specific topics.

7. **Are there other roadblocks to the growth of your business that the City or Chamber could help you address, such as lack of a skilled workforce?**
- Workforce