

TIONESTA AREA

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

A workshop with approximately 30-35 Tionesta Area community stakeholders was held on May 17, 2005 in Tionesta Borough for the purpose of identifying economic development needs. The workshop was preceded by presentations from Peter Fairweather and Thomas Shepstone regarding the economic characteristics of the Tionesta area.

Following the presentations and a map exercise to pinpoint some of the area's strengths and weaknesses, participants were divided into two groups to focus more specifically on needs. The results of those discussions follow:

- 1) What are the most important economic assets of Tionesta?

Group 1

The area is replete with natural resources (River, Forest, dam, etc.)
Tionesta is an inexpensive place to start business
2nd home owners and the seasonal population offer a market
The workforce is honest, hardworking and loyal
High-speed internet service is generally available
Tionesta is a generous community
The low cost of living attract retirees and 2nd home conversions
Volunteer emergency services are strong
The timber industry is strong, sustainable and of historical value
The area has a strong Victorian heritage that can be marketed

Group 2

The area already attracts a great deal of tourism
The 2nd home industry provides a special marketing opportunity
The Allegheny River is a recognized outdoor attraction
The National Forest provides another major draw
Tionesta Lake is still another major attraction for tourists



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2) *What are the most important economic liabilities of Tionesta?*

Group 1

*Natural topography limits development potential
Government land ownership also limits development potential
There is no sewer or water infrastructure outside the Borough
Access to the interstate highway system is an hour away
There are relatively few local employment opportunities
There is insufficient government promotion of business
Tionesta lacks startup housing and public transportation
The economy is fragile - the loss of business to fire hurt a lot
The school system is losing its sense of community identification*

Group 2

*The burned out block has left a hole in downtown Tionesta
Small and rural Tionesta lacks real political influence at all levels
The area lacks good access and infrastructure
There is little or no cooperative marketing at any level
The area has too little lodging capacity*

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- 3) *What are the best opportunities for economic development in Tionesta?*

Group 1

Further develop the hardwood industry by marketing of area to secondary and tertiary wood processing industries

Market the area as a location for remote-office businesses and entrepreneurs already attracted to Tionesta's quality of life

Complete the Hunting and Fishing Museum

Develop a business to rent out 2nd homes during off-periods

Develop new recreational attractions for other family members to complement outdoor recreation offerings

Market Tionesta as the regional center where outdoor recreation tourists can stock up on needs

Develop additional restaurant and lodging offerings

Attract additional convenience and dry goods suppliers

Group 2

Create additional seasonal lodging opportunities for tourists

Attract additional food and restaurant businesses to create a greater variety of offerings locally

Develop additional specialty retail businesses of interest to tourists (e.g. outfitters)

Promote more boating activity

Market the area better as a fishing attraction

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- 4) *What are the highest priority actions Tionesta businesses and institutions could take to exploit those opportunities?*

Group 1

*Update the local business directory on a regular continuing basis
Develop a continuing and regular program of joint business promotions through a local business/merchants group
Reenergize the Tionesta Chamber of Commerce
Target market the 2nd home and campground communities
Pull existing businesses together to cooperatively market Tionesta as a shopping and dining location
Develop a sophisticated calendar of events for tourist use
Upgrade the Visitor Center as the focal point for welcoming tourists to Tionesta*

Group 2

*Develop a joint marketing program focused on potential customers within 150 miles
Create a more effective merchant group
Also involve non-profits in joint marketing as well as interested individuals and stakeholders*

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- 5) *What are the highest priority actions Tionesta Borough / Forest County government could take to exploit those opportunities?*

Group 1

Convince government to accept economic development as an important mission

Focus on attracting the State and Federal dollars required to launch the Hunting and Fishing Museum

Address infrastructure needs on a capital improvement basis

Develop plans and mission statements that offer a salable vision

Increase parking resources

Make a major new commitment to tourism promotion the current effort being very inadequate

Create more effective County/local cooperation using the Council of Governments approach

Group 2

Develop a Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance (LERTA) program locally to act as an incentive for business attraction and development (requires all governments to participate)

Develop and expand upon trail systems for tourists

Acknowledge that tourism is Tionesta's major industry and make it a priority for economic development efforts