Economy Learning Community
Partners for a Prosperous Athens
April Meeting – 04/24/06

The April 24th meeting of the Economy Learning Community split into five discussion groups: (1) Economic Development (2) Entrepreneurship (3) Livable Wage, (4) Culture of Poverty, and (5) Regionalism.

[1]   Economic Development

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Legend:

- Discussion Points   + Solutions or ideas
= Notable Comments   --- Upstream/Data Inquiries
? Questions to look into

Definition of "Culture of Poverty"

  - It's a Generational Cycle that generally circles around a lack of hope.

  - Nobody chooses this path

  - Programs available but people cannot make it to them or do not believe they will help.

  + single point of contact to change their "hope"

  ? What traits are common in the individuals that may fall into this category?

  = Generational healthcare - "Momma said to go to the Health Department." Nobody has told them to do it a better way even if they have the insurance.

Education

- some do not have intellectual ability

- some do not have the time advance their education

- lack of life skills taught

= Lack of Discipline in education can lead to a lack of motivation and/or work ethic

= People in poverty frequently do not know how to manage their resources.

Jobs

- Plenty of Jobs in Athens, but the jobs may not provide enough to live on.

  - Businesses that offer jobs with a livable wage are harder to find than the "Lowes, Wal-Mart" and other businesses that only hire at a wage below poverty level.

- We need to aid existing companies to help them grow and hire more people. This is generally easier than recruiting a new business entirely. The structure is already in place, etc.

- Jobs are leaving Athens because of the lack of education in the workforce

  - Blue Collar Workers lack necessary skills

  - Advancement requires additional skills and/or training

    - Difficulty acquiring new skills because of child care, time requirements, available resources, etc.

- Recruiting Seniors to come to Athens

  - Develops potential for jobs, amenities, services, etc.

  -   Athens was recently listed in 3 national magazines in the top-10 "best places to retire"

= Business Recruitment brings Job Creation

--- Is Athens a friendly environment for businesses?

--- Why do companies NOT choose Athens? (Economic Development, SBDC, etc.)

--- How is the recruitment effort handled from within the companies and what are the results? (Power partners looking for workers, etc.)

Poverty Initiatives

? How can we assess the number of people who want to help themselves?

  - people cannot find jobs that pay enough

  - people cannot afford to live on their own

= One loss of a job for a few months can cause a descent into poverty very rapidly.

= Poverty issues cover more than just those on Welfare

= At some point, we need to come back to some kind of numbers. We are Economic Development and it is hard to measure progress without some kind of tangible data to tie to.

--- What is the participation rate of the various "poverty programs" in Athens?

--- What is currently being done to address poverty in Athens?

--- What groups are out there working on this issue?

--- What resources for impoverished individuals are out there?

   - Community connection 211

Other Thoughts

** What does our community want? Community Leaders need to specify what their vision of Athens is.

** The idea of a new subgroup to contact underemployed and/or working poor to gather personalized information was discussed. I imagine this will benefit all of the groups in the initiative. A representative member from each committee could form a new committee to contact underemployed and/or working poor for interviews or personal stories, etc. They would need to come up with a list of questions/topics also.

** We would like the list of the people on the subcommittee so we can stay in touch with each other and work on various ideas. Will separate lists be formed or separate pages on the website?

[2]   Entrepreneurship

- Culture of Poverty
  - Definition:
    - Generational
    - Lack of choice
    - No examples of success
    - Life skills training
    - Day to day > break cycle
    - Survival mode
    - Multiple barriers to success (racism, classism)

- Entrepreneurship
  - Communication of opportunity
  - Teaching entrepreneurship to children
  - Help Athenians see the possibilities of entrepreneurship
  - Obstacles for undocumented persons
  - Develop business to cure low grade housing
  - Provide training for entrepreneurs > technical & business
  - Access to capital
  - Reduce institutional barriers
  - Promote local purchasing
  - Promote partnerships
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - HED
  - HCDC – Hancock corridor
  - SBDC
  - East Athens Development Corporation
  - Resources:
    - Chicopee Complex, UGA
    - Entrepreneur-friendly community
    - Laurie Canterbury
  - We have to market the resources we find and create.
  - Generate grant money
  - Find business mentors

- Underlying Themes (overall theme)
  - Sustainable community development
  - Vision of tomorrow
  - Two-pronged approach:
    - Help people see they can be entrepreneurs
    - Help remove the institutional barriers preventing people from owning businesses (i.e., documentation, etc)

[3]   Livable Wage

- UGA temp workers > proposal to re-classify workers
- Other major employers – P/T and temp workforce (e.g. Temp agencies in ACC
- Distribution of income – inequality
- Poverty continues to increase since 1970's
- Dilemma
    - Need national policy!
    - State's roles in eliminating poverty
    - ACC – What can be done!?
- Unions – lost ground – Organizing
- Hold just the 5 largest local employers accountable for wages
- Request from Matt Bishop >
    - Need info on <u>numbers</u> involved in paying living wages: how much $$ are we talking about: cost to institutions > look at top 5 employers & ACC government

    - What percentage of the 28% would come out of property? But we're in a regional situation, meaning it's possible a UGA effort would do little for ACC.

- 65% of local households are working poor > this is a central fact for our committee
- Private sector gears wages to UGA's for a domino effect if we raise them?
- Working homeless!
- Regional issues – Oconee County? (Community Connection serves 13 counties)
- <u>Other states</u> – government services keep track of residence
- Knowledge and skills > Wealthy UGA need to connect <u>that</u> to the community. Reward faculty for service and outreach (as with research)
- Compare UGA wages to other GA state schools (e.g., Ga. Tech, Ga. State U.)
- ACC Library – big discrepancy between state and local librarians
- "A rising tide floats all boats" But much has changed – many boats have leaks
- Public costs of low wages:
  - List them….health care…what else?
  - Private sector's responsibility; public-state employers too
- ACC government has 2-tiered pay structure: primary & secondary (like library)

[4]   Culture of Poverty

<u>Separate Page</u>

- What is Culture of Poverty?
  - generational poverty

      - family dysfunctions
      - health issues can be catastrophic
      - inadequate resources
          - wages
          - transportation
          - healthcare
          - schooling > literacy
          - value orientation

- Lack of respect (from society) > blame
- Psychological issues
  - despair
  - hopelessness
- No social/economic mobility
- Gender – Sexism > Barrier
- Race – Racism > Barrier
- Poverty affects everyone

4 Continuous flip-chart pages

- Lack of education
- Lack of access to information
- No respect for the poor – oppression of middle class
- Circumstances > divorce, mental health, accidents, medical bills, substance abuse
- Continuation/perpetuation
- Welfare culture perception
- Things people just accept
- Penalities from the system
- Elimination of negative influences (e.g., inappropriate music lyrics)
- Predation of the poor > loan sharks, companies taking advantage of those who can't afford lawyers.
- Comparative issue – what should people be entitled to?
- How to use information
- No access to computers
- What is upbringing/background?
- Being branded by expectations
- Some born into poverty; others fall in
- Motivation
- Fear/shame of circumstances
- Self-esteem
- No quick fix – long-term solutions
- Drug issues
- Teenage mothers
- Community involvement/mentoring
- Inadequate child support
- Lack of good role models

- Empower community members to help community
- Bad decisions
- Crystal Meth
- Sometimes people don't want help
- No telephone
- No transportation
- Awareness of choices – how to give hope
- SPLOST – only for bricks and mortar, not operations
- Counseling
- Parents read to kids – to ensure education

[5]   Regionalism

- 41% of ACC workforce commutes in from outside ACC. What do we do?
  - Half the workforce doesn't pay ACC property taxes
  - They benefit from ACC jobs
  - Outgoing commuter tax

- How can we get commercial development in the surrounding counties?
- People have to come to ACC for services > hospitals, social services
- They have people > Labor
  - ACC has jobs (more than in surrounding area). Commuters may take the "better paying" jobs, leaving the "lower wage" jobs for residents. ** (page 6 of data summary) **
- "Culture of poverty" > Employers don't want to hire ACC residents because of <u>low educational attainment</u> and substance abuse.