

SUMMARY

The Nebraska Department of Economic Development offers a variety of services to assist local and regional economic development efforts. Meeting facilitation for the purposes of community, organizational, or LB840 strategic planning is one of these services. Facilitation of organizational or community meetings is designed to provide communities and economic development organizations the opportunity to hold such a meeting with a third party facilitator so that key stakeholders may participate in the process.

On March 17, 2016 the CRA of Benkelman had Ashley Rice-Gerlach, DED field staff; facilitate a planning meeting for their economic development/CRA board for the purpose of identifying community needs and identifying priorities for the next year.

Community Input Session

The session was held at the fitness center in Benkelman on March 17, 2016 at 6 p.m. MT. The session was advertised in the local newspaper, word of mouth, and through an event on Facebook. There were about 25 people who attended the session as the group worked through a **S.W.O.T** analysis.

Strengths

- School
- Hospital
- Fitness Center
- Nursing Home
 - Senior Center
 - Bus
- Picturesque
- Agriculturally-Oriented
- Foundations
 - Project Funding
- Social Amenities
 - Golf Course
 - Library
 - Pool
 - Churches
 - Restaurant
- Telecommunications
- Philanthropic
 - Movie Theatre
 - Community Fair
- Hospitality
- Community Oriented
- Infrastructure
 - Highways
 - Railroad
- Recreational
 - Lakes & Rivers
- EMT Services
- Business-Oriented

Weaknesses

- Family Housing
 - Rental
 - Dilapidated Housing
 - Pride of Property
 - Prices
 - No ideal places
 - No realtor
 - Absentee Homeowners
- Commercial Property
 - Not up-to-code (properties)
 - Unfulfilled opportunities (buildings)
- Store-Fronts; Downtown; Access
 - Attraction into the community
 - Business recruitment
 - Jobs
- Noise
 - Railroad Tracks
 - Whistles
 - Used to many times
 - Takes away from quality of life
- Resistance to Change
 - Fear of risk, "Can't Do attitude"
- Lack of community introduction
 - Hard to find information
- Lack of website for community
- No Laundromat
- More involvement necessary

Opportunities

- Laundromat
- Additional recycling
- Low Rental Housing
- Location
 - 3 hours to Denver
- Walking Path
- Ag opportunities
- Western History
- Photographic Opportunities
 - Skyline
 - Wildlife
- Fishing/Hunting
- Tourism
 - Housing for visitors
- Business
- Subdivision housing
- R-V park
- Demand for Labor
 - Contractors
 - Plumbers
 - Electricians
 - Coffee Shop
 - Breakfast Dining
- Art Projects
 - Downtown arts council

Threats

- Dwindling/ageing population
- Lack of graduate returning
- Lack of jobs
- Wage Creators
- Heavy agricultural dependency
- Water
 - Domestic
 - Agriculture
- Community Support
- Lack of Housing
- Lack of Clothing/Retail Stores

Priorities

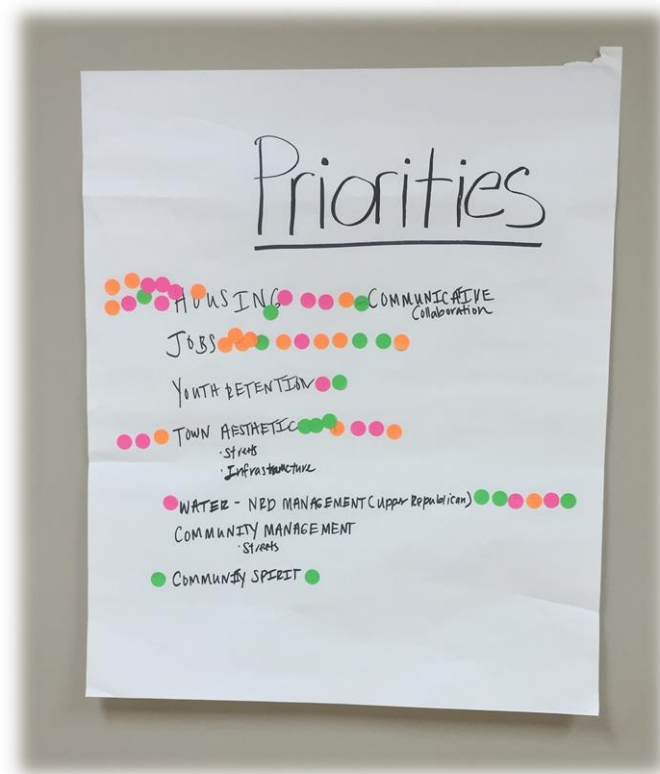
The participants were asked to brainstorm immediate needs or projects that need to be addressed in the next 1-3 years. Then the group voted on the top three of everything that was listed which included:

- **Housing**
- **Jobs**
- **Town Aesthetics**
- Youth Retention
- Water – NRD Management
- Community Management
- Community Spirit
- Communicative Collaboration

The group decided that the top priorities for the community/CRA/economic development should be to housing, jobs, and town aesthetics. Finally, the participated volunteered to champion the different priorities. Additional meetings will be scheduled to work on goals and objectives for each priority.

General Comments

The participants' comments and ideas during the session were very informative and should assist in having a productive 2016. As you move forward I would make sure that the committee chair is ready and willing to work and be involved. These chairpersons should be willing to report on progress to the CRA or when asked. I can assist whenever needed with upcoming meetings and ideas for the community as well as you begin making Benkelman and even greater place to live, work, and play. Just remember it is the community and a group of people wanting to create change that will make things happen.



For any questions or clarifications please contact:

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead