

*Advancing White County: Preserving the past while strategically planning for a promising future for all citizens through mutual trust, respect, and cooperation.*



**To:** *Advancing White County Steering Committee*  
**From:** Kelly Lyon, Advancing White County Project Manager  
**Date:** July 1, 2009  
**Re:** Town Hall Meeting Minutes

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### **I. Introductions**

At the Beebe and Bald Knob meetings, Judge Michael Lincoln provided opening remarks, and introduced himself and Searcy Mayor Belinda LaForce as the co-chairs for *Advancing White County*. At the Rose Bud meeting, Mayor LaForce opened the meeting and welcomed participants. The co-chairs emphasized aligning the county's planning efforts with the governor's focus on every county in Arkansas assessing itself and developing a plan. The facilitation team was introduced.

### **II. Overview of the Project**

Kelly Lyon, Director of the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) at the University of Central Arkansas introduced herself as the Project Manager. As Project Manager, Kelly will facilitate the planning process through each of its stages and serve as a resource for the county. Amy Whitehead of the CCED will assist Kelly in coordination of the project. Kelly gave an overview of each phase of the project. The project is currently in the initiation phase. The project has a short time frame, but this will keep momentum high and show other counties that it can be done quickly, and on a limited budget.

Though there are plenty of institutions of higher education in White County that could have served as facilitators for this process, UCA's CCED became engaged because it could serve as a neutral party who could bring an outsider's perspective. The county's educational institutions will be tapped throughout the process to assist with data gathering and analysis, where resources exist.

Advancing White County's strategic plan will allow for the county to actively plan for its future by creating a living document that addresses both economic development, but also quality of life and other community development issues. In today's operating environment, technology also has to be integrated into community and economic development, which will also be addressed in the plan.

### **III. Town Hall Participant Feedback**

The Town Hall Meeting participants split into small groups for a 30 minute discussion about the County's assets and barriers to success. Participants were also asked to discuss their top

10 wishes for White County's future. Each small group recorded their answers on a worksheet provided to them. A summary of these responses is available in the appendix.

Participants were also asked to vote on whether or not to continue the project, and if yes, which logo to use.

There were a combined total of 120 participants at the three town hall meetings. **At each meeting there was a unanimous vote to continue with *Advancing White County!***

The participants voted logo # 3 to be used for the project. The logo is included at the beginning of this document. The vote breakdown was as follows:

Logo #1 - 11  
Logo #2 - 16  
Logo #3 - 51  
Logo #4 - 22

Note: 3 individuals opted not to select any of the logo choices, expressing concern that they symbol of the court house was representative of Searcy and not the county as a whole or for other reasons.

#### **IV. Next Steps**

The next steps in the process will be to continue to expand the steering committee and begin the Discovery Phase. The consultant team will work with the Steering Committee to set monthly meetings. The Discovery Phase will consist of a combination of interviews, surveys, regional touring, and research and data collection.

### **Appendix**

#### **What are White County's assets or strengths?**

- Good public/private schools(14)
- Good higher education opportunities(10)
- Location (13)
- Internet Access
- Good financial infrastructure/ banks(4)
- Sense of community within individual cities(1)
- Safe environment/ Low Crime (1)
- Transportation system, Highway/ River/ Rail Access/ Airport(12)
- Available, educated workforce( 5)
- Abundance of natural resources (Gas, Timber, Water, Gas) (9)
- Available industrial sites-prospect ready(2)
- Medical facilities(11)
- Little Red/Greer's Ferry/other recreational & Outdoor opportunities(5)
- Stability of population
- Not much traffic due to not as much shopping
- Strong faith based(3)

- Family oriented
- Good People(6)
- Law enforcement(1)
- Good manufacturing base(3)
- Good restaurants
- Fayetteville Shale Play(5)
- County government
- Large County
- Retirement areas
- School Boards
- Chamber of Commerce
- Social Services
- High Revenue
- Strong housing available
- Conservative values

### **What are White County's barriers or weaknesses?**

- Lack of universal broadband access(4)
- Lack of recreational retail(3)
- Lack of marketing of local, retail-buying opportunities(4)
- Lack of county-specific, available economic incentives
- Lack of rail access (1)
- Water infrastructure problems (Beebe)(3)
- Lack of entertainment opportunities(3)
- Lack of college educated workforce
- Limited Health Insurance
- No County wide economic development coordinator
- Need more medical facilities/Specialty Care(2)
- Stability of population- need new people for new ideas
- Educated people don't stay
- Better community centers for youth but not overall population(2)
- Cultural amenities(1)
- Drugs (5)
- Racism
- Poverty
- Have to drive a distance to go to Wal-Mart or hospital(1)
- Hwy 67/167 North needs 4 lanes to I-40(1)
- Parks/ Receptions, need to promote healthy lifestyles
- Transportation or Mass transit(1)
- Economic Climate
- Beebe is a "bedroom" community
- Commute to work outside county
- Community development of smaller cities
- Available capital for community growth
- Include infrastructure to promote economic development
- Lack of industry (2)
- Lack of diversity
- Need for road improvements in some areas(8)
- Cost of living
- Minimum wage percentage
- Bridges(1)
- Lack of religion
- Adapting to recent oil and gas impact
- Lack of communication/cooperation between cities in county(5)
- Not spreading the amenities of fun things throughout the county
- Sports opportunities in small towns
- Lack of jobs (4)

- Not on an interstate
- High number of abuse cases
- Low college graduation
- Law Enforcement/Law Enforcement Training (2)
- Lack of drug education in our schools
- Slow to change
- Slow involvement
- Voting
- We need veteran services
- New administration for White County Hospital Heart Surgery
- NIMBY
- Dry County

**If you could have a magic wand to create anything for White County, what would it be?**

- Money for universal broadband access(3)
- More industry and local job opportunities (7)
- More community centers within the county(2)
- Better capitalize on recreational assets within the county(2)
- Funding to support economic development plan
- Hiring of Economic Coordinator
- Ongoing coordinator effort to unite all in county for economic development (2)
- Expand historic sites
- Quality movie theatre(1)
- Cool non-polluting industries with good jobs
- New hospital in another part of county
- 4 Lanes from overpass (64) to Hwy 31
- Additional overpass over rail road track
- Revitalization of downtown districts
- Diversified family oriented activities(2)
- Utilization of Red River
- ASU- Beebe a 4 year university
- Festivals
- Animal Shelter- county wide
- State would change funding additional funding
- Would be available to cities for maintenance of streets- infrastructure(1)
- Transit System for everyone needs
- Free clinic for health care
- Better infrastructure for the more rural/smaller communities in the county
- Create high-tech manufacturing jobs
- Public Swimming pools and parks(1)
- Steal HP from Faulkner County
- Better parental training
- More housing for rural cities(2)
- Affordable utilities
- After school programs
- Paved roads all though White County
- Improve roads
- Long-term funding for county-wide economic development
- Active council of government with common projects and objectives
- Cooperation between county and city government
- Water treatment facility for the gas companies

- Natural gas accessibility to county residents
- Level playing field for all communities

Please send comments or corrections to [abynum@uca.edu](mailto:abynum@uca.edu) or 501.269.9009 by July 15, 2009.