

Stakeholder Listening Sessions

Wednesday, June 13, 2018

Indiana County Technology Center

Indiana County Sustainable Economic Development Task Force



1. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Sherene Hess, Indiana County Commissioner & Chair, Indiana County Sustainable Economic Development Task Force

2. Project Overview

Ms. Sherene Hess, Indiana County Commissioner & Chair, Indiana County Sustainable Economic Development Task Force

3. Planning Process

Dr. Susan Boser, Professor, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

4. Big Ideas

Ms. Cindy Rogers, President, Evergreen Conservancy

5. Q&A / Discussion

Dr. Jeff Raykes, Deputy Director, Indiana County Office of Planning & Development

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

First and foremost, thank you for interest in the Indiana County Sustainable Economic Development Task Force. This collaborative effort would not have been possible without the dedication of various focus group team members and steering committee leaders. Throughout the past year, the steering committee and (4) focus groups have met once a month in a highly-participatory process to share ideas on how to move Indiana County toward a more sustainable economy.

Today's stakeholder meeting will present the big ideas and action items to 1) make attendees aware of the initiative and 2) to encourage attendees to be part of the efforts. The success of this plan depends on the knowledge and opinions of experts such as yourself, therefore we welcome and value any ideas you might have during the discussion period.



Established in May 2017 by the County Commissioners, on the heels of a strong showing at the Sustainable Economy Summit, the Sustainable Economic Development Task Force was launched to the public on September 27, 2017. The Task Force was charged with an important assignment: identify new opportunities in economic development, citizen education and job training in the renewable energy sector, in innovative agriculture, in sustainable building construction and renovation, and in restoration and wise use of the county's natural resources.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Mission Statement:

To identify new opportunities in economic development, education and job training (workforce development) in the renewable energy sector, agriculture, building construction, and environmental restoration and stewardship.

The County Commissioners appointed this Task Force in partnership with Evergreen Conservancy, the Center for Community Growth, and League of Women Voters of Indiana County. The Task Force also works with closely with the Borough of Indiana, Indiana University of PA, The Indiana County Conservation District, and the Indiana County Center for Economic Operations, which includes the Chamber of Commerce, Tourist Bureau, IUP, The Indiana County Commissioners, The Office of Planning & Development, and the Indiana County Development Corporation.

Purpose:

The purpose of this Task Force is to identify strategies and initiatives for local economic development that are grounded in sustainable economic development practice, and tailored to Indiana County. To do this, the Task Force conducted a one-year participatory process of engaging local stakeholders, including local businesses, grass root organizations, and educators, in a research and planning process using four focus groups of local stakeholders in each of the following substantive topics:

1. Sustainable Agriculture
2. Renewable Energy Sector
3. Sustainable Building Construction
4. Environmental Restoration & Stewardship

The goal of this participatory process was to identify specific strategies for local economic development that involve innovation, forward-thinking education, practical training, meaningful employment, and citizen engagement. The results of this process will be collated into a report that will provide direct input into the development of the long range County Economic Development/Work Force Development Plan.

THREE PILLARS



Workforce Development

According to the Center for Economic Operations: Workforce development is an essential component of any successful economic development strategy. All employers need access to a well trained workforce and ongoing training programs to keep their workforce skill levels current, to give their companies a competitive edge, to increase productivity, and to continue to grow and expand.



Citizen Education

An educated citizenry is one that understands the complexity and the inter-relatedness of issues affecting communities. When educated citizens can talk with each other and with their local officials and collaborate through coalitions, communities increase their ability to grow and prosper, for all of its citizens. A thriving community includes all of its citizens, regardless of differences such as race, ethnicity, orientation or income



Economic Development

The core focus of economic development is business retention, attraction, and development. In low density, rural areas, economic development and meaningful employment opportunities can be difficult to achieve using traditional methods of economic development. In recent decades, local officials have committed to a growth model that responds to a complex, competitive, globalized, and diverse world.

During the past nine months, the Task Force has focused its research on identifying practices that promote a sustainable local economy. Its working definition of “sustainable economy” is that of an emerging economic sector with environmentally friendly intentions including but not limited to: energy efficiency and retrofitting buildings, increasing installation and use of renewable energy, sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices, green chemistry and green manufacturing, remediation/reclamation and environmental conservation for future generations. Underlying this focus, the Task Force prioritizes cost savings through greater efficiency, as well as reduced future environmental and human health related costs.

The final Task Force meeting was held May 16, 2018. The steering committee is in the process of producing a final report which will identify recommendations for moving Indiana County towards sustainable economic development. The report will be unveiled at the Sustainable Economy Summit II, to be held September 28, 2018, and presented to the County Commissioners when finalized.

The Task Force announced on May 25, 2018 that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has selected it to be a recipient of technical assistance from the “Local Foods, Local Places” program. Indiana County is one of sixteen communities across the nation to land the opportunity to focus on local food systems and agriculture as an economic driver.



VISION



Focus Group: Sustainable Agriculture

In simplest terms, sustainable agriculture is the production of healthful food, fiber, or other plant or animal products using farming techniques that protect the environment, public health, human communities, and animal welfare. Sustainable agriculture focuses on trying to find a good balance between the need for food production and the preservation of the ecological system within the environment such as conserving water, reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and promoting biodiversity in crops grown. Sustainable agriculture also focuses on maintaining economic stability of farms and helping farmers improve their techniques and quality of life.



Focus Group Leaders: Kay Snyder & Peter Broad

Recommendations for Final Report:

1. *Utilize Sustainable Agriculture Ideas to Develop a Skilled and Qualified Workforce to Fill Labor Shortages in the Agricultural Arena*

Strategies/Action Items:

- Work with community colleges, school districts, agriculture organizations already actively educating farmers, and state-wide organizations to **develop educational programs and resources**.
- Ensure widespread **publication of programs** already available as well as those developed to meet the needs.
- Develop **agriculture incubator**.
- Seek federal, state, county financial resources, grant and sponsorships to **fund programs**.
- Media focus to **promote agriculture**.

2. *Promote Local Agriculture as an Economic Driver in Indiana County*

Strategies/Action Items:

- Publicize existing programs, events and success stories through media outlets.
- Encourage educational events for public and consumers such as farm tours, festivals, farm to table, involving multiple ag organizations, as well as more agritourism.
- Explore school partnerships including: farm to school initiatives, nutrition based curriculum and experiential learning opportunities, gardening, recycling, Ag in the Classroom Program, Mobile Ag Learning Center, etc.
- Seek grant funding through USDA Farm to School Grant Programs, and others.
- Workshops and classes for public on leasing, sustainable ag practices, etc. (*e.g. Westmoreland County's The Next Generation Farm Summit*)



Focus Group: Renewable Energy Sector

Renewable energy is any energy source that is naturally replenished on a human timescale, like that derived from solar, wind, rain, tides, waves, and geothermal or hydroelectric action. Energy produced from the refining of biomass is also often classified as renewable. Coal, oil or natural gas, on the other hand, are finite sources. Renewable energy often provides energy in four important areas: electricity generation, air and water heating/cooling, transportation, and rural (off-grid) energy services.



Focus Group Leaders: Susan Boser & Janice Long

Recommendations for Final Report:

1. Co-establish, articulate and promote a **“Goal Year”** by which a set standard of sustainability and renewable energy is reached, with a set of sub-goals under that.
2. Develop a **demonstration project** utilizing renewable energy.
3. Pursue a demonstration project that utilizes **micro grid technologies** which incorporate renewable energy and improve the community’s resilience.
4. Pursue the **hydro-electric** potential that local water reservoirs provide to Indiana County.
5. Initiate **educational and workforce development** programs that create opportunities to educate the public on the benefits that reducing our carbon footprint and improving energy conservation provide to society.

Strategies/Action Items:

- Indiana County would benefit from having one position identified specifically for researching and targeting opportunities for economic development through the renewable energy sector.
- Generate a white paper outlining a plan for this opportunity, including the requisite steps and potential contacts or partnerships that advance the renewable energy sector within Indiana County.
- Research what companies have acreage, partner them with companies who will invest in setting up renewable energy systems and then purchase the dividends or power produced from those systems.
- Create a renewable energy funding mechanism that will incentivize the adoption of renewable energy as a backup or main source of electricity for corporate or private entities that are interested in doing business within Indiana County.
- Facilitate renewable energy adoption within the local school districts or other community organizations.



Focus Group: Sustainable Building Construction

Sustainable building construction is a comprehensive movement in architectural and building circles aimed at creating structures that are occupant and environment friendly that focuses on increasing the efficiency of resource use — energy, water, and materials and employs techniques to minimize adverse environmental impacts and reduce the energy consumption of a building while reducing building impacts on human health and the environment during the building's lifecycle, through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and removal. Green building (also known as green construction or sustainable building) refers to both a structure and the application of processes that are environmentally responsible and resource-efficient throughout a building's life-cycle: from planning to design, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation, and demolition. The Green Building practice expands and complements the classical building design concerns of economy, utility, durability, comfort, sustainability, energy efficiency and healthfulness. A green building is designed to be ecologically correct by using resources efficiently, using internal recycling, renewable energy sources, recyclable or biodegradable construction materials, and blending in with the local environment, particularly in out-of-town locations.



Focus Group Leader: Josh Krug

Recommendations for Final Report:

1. Reduce **energy consumption** in building construction and use/lifespan in Indiana County.
2. Increase the number of **S.T.E.M. programs** throughout Indiana County with up-to-date curriculums.
3. Creation of an **innovation center** for developing new products and practices in sustainable building materials and construction/land development.
4. Initiate **incentives** to utilize sustainable materials/ implement best practices throughout Indiana County.
5. Establish a **reuse/recycle** center for construction materials in Indiana County.
6. Adopt **training and placement** programs directly related to Sustainable Building Construction/Materials in Indiana County.

Strategies/Action Items:

- Understand/Research/Evaluate any ongoing programs or incentives in place.
- Develop partnerships and work to develop a plan/project.
- Identify/pursue grant opportunities and/or investors.
- Develop/host workshops for contractors/homeowners/developers/municipalities.
- Enhance marketing/promotion to innovative companies.
- Garner support from local community and partner with business community.
- Develop an energy consumption reduction campaign.
- Work with a “champion” community as an example for others.
- Promote research and innovation through all outlets/partners.
- Develop and implement a robust public education plan.



Focus Group: Environmental Restoration & Stewardship

Environmental Restoration is the scientific study supporting the practice of ecological restoration, which is the practice of renewing and restoring degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems and habitats in the environment by active human intervention and action. Environmental Stewardship refers to responsible use and protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices. Aldo Leopold (1887–1949) championed environmental stewardship based on a land ethic "dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it."



Focus Group Leaders: Cindy Rogers & Jeff Raykes

Recommendations for Final Report:

1. Improve and Invest in **Environmental Awareness and Education**.
2. Create **Riparian Buffer Zones & Green Corridors**.
3. Establish the Importance of **Recycling**.
4. Demonstrate Effective **Stormwater Management**.
5. Prioritize Jobs/Training related to **Emerging Methods** in **Environmental Restoration** and **Stewardship**.
6. Foster **Environmentally-Focused Businesses**.

Strategies/Action Items:

Environmental Awareness and Education

- Creation of surveys.
- Environmental Programs & information outreach based on science & facts include farmers, landowners and local residents.
- Keep website updated; make sure information is managed & fresh.
- Hold series of programs on environmental stewardship (with Indiana County Conservation District, Evergreen Conservancy, watershed groups).
- Start regular newspaper and social media features of conservation efforts.
- Increase teachers' knowledge about the environment i.e. Sponsor Project Wet and Project Wild Training.

Riparian Buffer Zones & Green Corridors

- Create a countywide ordinance/plan for greenway corridors and riparian buffer zones on all waterways, beginning with Black Lick Creek watershed.
- Access funding, available through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Western PA Conservancy, Indiana County Conservation District, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and PA Land Trust, government grants.

Recycling

- Pass a county-wide bottle bill for glass & plastic recyclables.
- Create a county-wide ordinance for recycling among residents, businesses and institutions.

- Create a better visual impact by having trash picked up & recycled.
- Study to present pros and cons of recycling for the best economic returns.

Stormwater Management

- County and Municipal governments to adopt stormwater plans.
- Educate residents on stormwater best practices.
- Stormwater infrastructure maintenance jobs.
- Maintenance jobs for AMD treatment ponds and systems.

Jobs/training related to emerging methods

- Encourage businesses that can install and maintain permeable surfaces, stormwater management, AMD and other green technologies.

Environmentally-focused Businesses

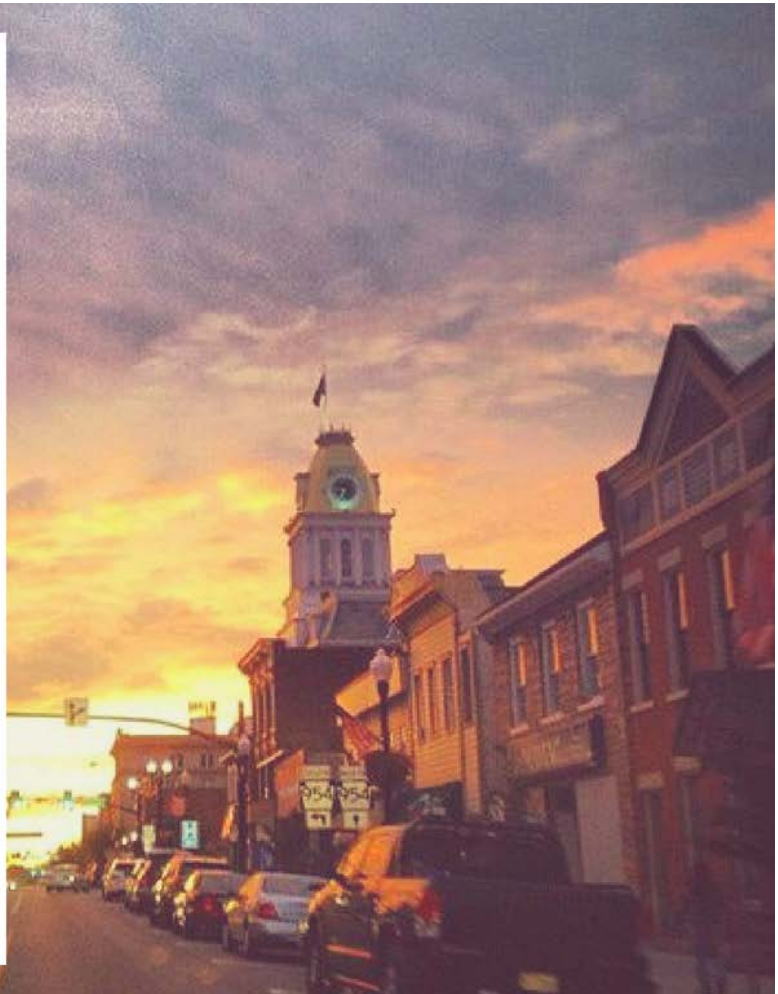
- Produce economic development planning and policy documents that would prioritize and encourage environmentally-focused businesses to locate in Indiana County.
- Provide incentives for developers to obtain LEED Green Buildings or other green designations.
- Provide incentives to residents and businesses to implement green practices i.e. rain gardens.

SAVE THE DATE

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SUMMIT II

September 28, 2018

Rustic Lodge
2199 Oakland Ave.
Indiana, PA 15701



For more information on the Indiana County Sustainable Economic Development Task Force go to: www.sustainableindianacounty.org

Additional input, along with any questions and concerns may be directed to Indiana County Office of Planning & Development Planning Director Jeff Raykes via email at: jraykes@ceo.co.indiana.pa.us or by calling: (724) 388-7710

*Thank you for your participation and we hope to see you
at the Sustainable Economy Summit II*