

RM Fall 2018 Partners Meeting
Economic Development Group Notes

1. Major Topics of Discussion

a. Successes

- i. New Hatfield McCoy Trail impact on tourism is already showing in terms of increased tourism to southern McDowell County and an increase in lodging business activity
- ii. Small entrepreneurs finding new markets for their services and goods
- iii. City of War and Virginia Tech working on water-related issues
- iv. Farm 2 Table Dinner was a great start to focusing on local events, vendors, and producers as reasons to visit McDowell County
 1. The success of this event suggests that a couple of larger, more accessible events would be successful

b. Identified Needs

i. Transportation

1. Must push local, state, and federal elected officials on the necessity of highways to connect the coalfields region with the rest of the state and region
 - a. All other economic development issues are hindered by lack of progress on this key issue
 - b. Issues surrounding strip mining access to create roadbeds

ii. Connectivity

1. Along with Transportation, part of a larger conversation of how we can connect McDowell County to the rest of the world
2. LARGE need for connectivity in terms of cell service availability and public Wi-Fi at local businesses and public areas
 - a. Lack of these resources hurts efforts related to social media advertising and quality of life for McDowell Co visitors

iii. Collaboration with Land Owners

1. Both large scale commercial spaces and downtown storefront/residential spaces need to be dedicated to economic development
 - a. A plan must be devised to incentivize landowners to commit to these efforts

iv. Collaboration with former McDowell County Residents

1. A potential source of entrepreneurs with access to skills and capital is the pool of former residents of McDowell County looking to move back to the county.
 - a. Sandi Blankenship is a prime example

2. 6 Month Plan

a. Agriculture

- i. Support the efforts of the Emerson Hunger Fellows on two key areas
 - 1. Farm 2 Schools
 - 2. Southern Coalfield Foodshed Development
- ii. Market Planning for coordinated Food Entrepreneurship push during 2019 market season
- iii. Promote local growers through food-center events - both stand-alone and tables at community events

b. Tourism

- i. Provide support to McDowell County Convention and Visitors Bureau to update and promote local business on their web and social media channels
- ii. Three-Point Events
 - 1. A series of events with three key elements
 - a. Central social event
 - b. Food-based event
 - c. Vendors
 - 2. Looking to host one in Welch and one in War
- iii. Increase focused on highlighting opportunities to buy/spend locally
- iv. Working on developing a historical narrative about McDowell County to promote tourism beyond Hatfield McCoy Trail system

c. Tech

- i. Seek out grant funding for the following two projects
 - 1. Public Wi-Fi for two communities in McDowell County
 - a. Pilot project for expansion to all communities
- ii. Seek out funding models to promote free wi-fi access in local businesses
- iii. Plan a broadband-focused convening with local, state, and federal partners to address broadband utilization and access barriers