

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