

Regional Roundup

By: Karen McDonald

November 2012

Central Illinois Discovers its assets

Discovery week attracted more than 300 individuals from Woodford, Tazewell, Peoria and Mason counties to uncover assets in the region.

The asset mapping events were designed to find and identify what truly unique or distinct assets are to this region and how those assets can create economic value that stays in the region.

communities throughout Mason county, but they're not what they used to be in terms of economics and I think we can make that the way it used to be."

Jim Baumgartner, chairman of the Policy Steering Committee noted more than 700 individuals have gotten involved in various aspects of the Focus Forward CI effort



"I believe that this will be a different effort than we've seen in the past. It brings a different set of resources. It brings a different method. It will have specific goals and they will be measured," Mason County Clerk Bill Blessman said during his county's asset mapping meeting.

"The main thing we need is a groundswell of support for this in our community because we really can bring prosperity and jobs and high quality of life to our communities. We have wonderful

since it began. "All of these volunteers – these ambassadors – will be part of the legacy."

"The strength of the journey we're on is a function of the energy and commitment from people within our communities – we have people who are volunteering and interested in raising the level of economic security," Baumgartner said during Peoria County's Asset Mapping meeting.

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WHAT'S NEXT?

The next Milestone Meeting – set for **February 4, 2013** – is the Connect Milestone. The goal of that meeting is to "connect" assets for greater economic value.

Vertical asset mapping – asset mapping focused on specific topic areas related to a comprehensive balanced community economic development strategies – will be held **Jan. 8- 10**.

The purpose of those sessions is to recognize assets within four strategic categories: Quality of Place, Community & Economic Development, Education & Workforce Development and Innovation & Entrepreneurship. Included in the mapping process will be an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and connection opportunities

Citizens Advisory Group meeting set

The next Illinois Department of Transportation hosted Citizens Advisory Committee meeting to further narrow the four corridors is set for **6 p.m. on Dec. 6 at the Countryside Banquet Facility in Washington, IL.**

The CAG is a group of about 45 individuals representing property owners, communities and other stakeholders to ensure good communication between the IDOT Study Team and community that has a stake in the study outcome.

The general public can attend as observers but are asked not participate. The meeting is meant for the Community Advisory Group to share and receive information with IDOT as an ongoing process for their involvement.

The last CAG meeting was held in March where the number of corridors was narrowed from six to four. It is expected the group will drop the corridor to the far east – D-13, which intersects Interstate 74 near Dee-Mack Road. It intersects Illinois Route 6 near Mossville and runs east of Washington and Germantown Hills.

Rotary Club presentation

Mike Hinrichsen made a presentation to the Germantown Hills Rotary Club

about Focus Forward CI Economic Development efforts and Eastern Bypass.

“I see Economic Development being the ‘R and D’ of government. It’s the (research and development) we do so we know we have a future. It’s how we’re going to compete,” Hinrichsen said. “We are determining how we as a four-county area are going to create unique value.”

On the Bypass, Hinrichsen said infrastructure development will allow us to compete globally and the Eastern Bypass is part of that.

“People say we can’t afford infrastructure. We can’t afford to NOT have infrastructure,” he said. “We have two unique opportunities that have the potential to significantly impact Germantown Hills and Metamora.”

Bypass support continues

The Eastern Bypass Coalition continues to gather resolutions and letters of support to submit to the Illinois Department of Transportation.

The Woodford County Board in November approved a resolution supporting the Eastern Bypass by 12-3.

Board member Mike Hinrichsen, who also serves as president of the Eastern Bypass Coalition Board of Directors, noted the road is

“critically important to our area, particularly in the work we’re doing on economic development.”

The resolution notes the new roadway will serve several important purposes including connecting several of the region’s industrial areas and providing an improved north-south corridor in Tazewell and Woodford Counties. The resolution supports the acquisition of funding needed to complete the Location and Design Study.

Board member Terry Pille noted the resolution is to support additional research so the board can have all the facts before making a final decision whether to support the eventual construction.

“Until we know where the road will go, we really can’t make an honest opinion of whether the road needs to be there or not be there. The support is very important to at least get to a final decision that we know and that people can either endorse or be opposed to,” Pille said.

The project is in the Corridor Selection Phase One (Location and design). IDOT anticipates a final corridor will be selected by the end of 2013. No funding is currently allocated for the next phase – Alignment – that is expected to cost \$10 million.