

Community task force making plans for county's future

By Christian Alexandersen Times Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, June 26, 2013 12:00 am

A task force of local educators, business owners, farmers, public safety experts and others are in the process of developing a plan that aims to shape all areas of Carroll County in the future.

Commissioner Doug Howard, R-District 5, created the Carroll 2030 Task Force in an effort to learn about what various members of the community think the county should look like in the future and what steps the county can take to get there.

After the task force collects enough information from the community, Howard said it will develop a long-term strategy to present to the Carroll County Board of Commissioners.

Howard said he hopes to have a draft of the plan ready for the board to review in October.

"I'm concerned that for all the things [the board] has done well, we've been more short-term oriented than long-term," Howard said. "We don't have a mechanism in place to plan for what the operational needs for the county are going to be or what future investment needs [must be addressed]."

The task force is made up of more than 20 volunteers, with each person part of a "cluster." The "clusters" have to do with specific areas of interest in the community — business, agriculture, education, environment, housing and infrastructure, art, culture and recreation, health and well-being and public safety.

Mike McMullin, president of the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, is one of the members of the business cluster. In an effort to learn about the needs of the county's business community, McMullin's cluster sent out more than 500 surveys to local businesses.

So far, surveys have indicated that business owners want unrestricted Internet access all over the county, road expansions and infrastructure improvements, he said. The survey responses are providing a good vision of what business owners want to see in the future, McMullin said.

"I think it's a really good idea to look down the road and see where you want the county to go," McMullin said. "There's no way to get where you want in the future unless you get a plan and a vision together."

The cooperation of the various volunteers has been wonderful, according to Lynn Wheeler, director of the Carroll County Public Library system and chairwoman of the task force. Wheeler described the tireless work being done by the volunteers as a "harmonic convergence."

“It has been a superb experience to see these people talking, sharing their thoughts and then agreeing on things that are most important and prioritizing,” Wheeler said.

Carroll 2030 Task Force to hold first event

By Kelcie Pegher Times Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, October 17, 2013 12:00 am

The Carroll 2030 Task Force will hold its first event Friday, kicking off the task force's efforts to make communities successful in a changing economy.

Dave Ivan, of Michigan State University, will be presenting research about investing into small communities, he said. He will be presenting at Carroll Community College.

About two years ago, Ivan began researching almost 200 high-performing small communities to see what they are doing to add vitality to their towns, he said.

He looks at five items, he said. He looks at whether the community has strong entrepreneurial development, ranging from whether they foster growth of an existing business to helping startups. He also looks at whether the community fosters innovation and has the ability to create strong social capital through networking.

Another component is bringing young professionals to the area, he said. And the final is to find a community that has a strong commitment to the region.

He said for his presentation he wants to use specific examples of areas that are comparable to cities like Westminster.

"I'm a small-town guy and I have a passion toward smaller communities," he said.

The Carroll 2030 Task Force was created by Commissioner Doug Howard, R-District 5, in an effort to learn about what members of the community think the county should look like in the future.

After they collect enough information, it will develop a long-term strategy to present to the Carroll County Board of Commissioners.

Each member of the task force is categorized into a different cluster, which include business, agriculture, education, environment, housing and infrastructure, art, culture and recreation, health and well-being and public safety.

Lynn Wheeler, director of the Carroll County Public Library system and chairwoman of the task force, said the event is a kickoff to both learn more about the Carroll 2030 Task Force and get more ideas for what Carroll County could do.

"It's an opportunity to look at our operations and say what are things we think we are going to need to address in the next 15 to 20 years," she said.

The group has already looked at a survey asking members of the community what they think Carroll needs. The highest priority from businesses included a better broadband infrastructure, she said.

She said she's looking forward to hearing Ivan's advice and research about what other communities have done to position themselves to be successful.

"At this point it's been a very, very positive look at how we prepare ourselves to meet the challenges and be successful as we go forward," she said.

Carroll 2030 group: Technology, education, infrastructure are key priorities

By Christian Alexandersen Times Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, March 6, 2014 7:00 pm

Upgrading technology, sustaining a strong education system and improving infrastructure are the three key areas a group of Carroll County residents, business owners and professionals have identified as priorities for the future.

The Carroll 2030 Task Force presented the Carroll County Board of Commissioners Thursday with information it has gathered over the past year on what various members of the community think the county should look like in the future and what steps the county can take to get there.

Commissioner Doug Howard, R-District 5, said the task force will bring its ideas for improvements into the community for additional feedback before bringing a plan-of-action for the board in the summer. The plan, Howard said, will include long- and short-term timetables and projects that have been identified by task force members and other individuals.

The task force, which was created by Howard, is made up of more than 20 people, separated into clusters of topics. Those clusters included education, businesses, public safety, transportation/infrastructure, municipalities, health and well-being, agriculture, environment and arts, culture and recreation.

The clusters were tasked with developing a list of priorities for the future. The common thread among the priorities provided by all of the nine clusters was technology, education and infrastructure.

Mike McMullin, president of the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce, sent out a survey to hundreds of local business owners in the county to determine what the biggest future needs are for the county's business community. Business owners indicated that a strong education system is one of the most vital areas that must be addressed for the future.

In fact, McMullin said, the priority that received the highest number of top votes in the survey was maintaining strong public education in Carroll County. People start businesses in and move to Carroll because of the stellar public education available in the county, he said.

Superintendent of Schools Steve Guthrie said technology was the underpinning of all of the priorities identified in the education cluster. Improving technology is crucial to the future operations of the school system as it looks for ways to enhance curriculum, provide training for staff and best utilize its facilities.

Joe Kuhn, president of the Carroll County Farm Bureau, explained that small businesses in Carroll would greatly benefit from increased broadband access to the Internet. Better access to the Internet

would be help farmers, in particular, advertise and market their products more cheaply than other options, he said.

The areas of public safety would also benefit from technology improvements and greater access to the Internet, said Col. Philip Kasten, with the Carroll County Sheriff's Office. One of the biggest priorities for public safety is the continued development of mobile technologies for law enforcement and emergency responders, Kasten said.

With so many clusters identifying technology as an important aspect of future growth and development, Guthrie said the different areas of the community should join together to fund improvements to technology and Internet access. There is no reason, Guthrie said, that business owners, municipalities, schools and other areas have to do their own technology improvements and not work together.

"We don't have to go down this path alone," Guthrie said.

Aside from a strong public education system and improved technology, Tom Ferguson, a former Westminster mayor and councilman, indicated that maintaining and modernizing the county infrastructure is important for the future.

There needs to be a focus on improving roads, providing adequate water and sewer for planned growth areas and offering a robust intra-county transportation system connecting places of employment to businesses, Ferguson said.

Editorial: Vision focuses priorities

Editorial | Posted: Sunday, March 9, 2014 1:00 am

While a task force looking at the long-term needs of the county is still early on in its work, our Board of County Commissioners should pay close attention to areas identified as community priorities as the budget process unfolds this year.

Carroll 2030 is a group put together by County Commissioner Doug Howard to look at Carroll's needs in the future. Sub groups of Carroll 2030 include such areas as education, business, agriculture and environment. In a presentation to the commissioners last week, the group said that the work it has done in the past year has revealed that a strong education system, improving infrastructure and upgrading technology are the three top priorities identified so far.

Howard said the next step is for the group to take their ideas to the community for more feedback. From there, the idea is to identify long- and short-term projects and set timetables for moving forward with a plan of action.

While the work of the task force will continue to evolve, the commissioners should keep in mind some of the overarching priorities as they begin their budget process.

Education has always been a priority for residents, so it is no surprise that it was among the top issues identified. But for the past three years our board of commissioners has attacked education funding. Whereas the Board of Education and Board of Commissioners in recent years under different boards have been able to work together to resolve budget issues, this board of commissioners has turned the relationship adversarial.

This board of commissioners also has not invested a lot of time or money in infrastructure needs, nor has there been much focus on improving technology, two things which would help Carroll businesses grow and compete in today's economy.

What we have seen are revisions to county codes to make it easier for developers to increase profits, a halting of an impact fee for schools and exceptions being granted despite concerns about coverage from our county's emergency services.

Areas for improvement already identified by Carroll 2030 aren't things that can be accomplished overnight, nor cheaply. They take a long-term commitment and investment in our future.

The process of identifying priorities will continue to evolve and unfold, but as it does, and as the commissioners immerse themselves in this year's budget debates, they should keep in mind these major concerns and priorities that have already been identified, and look for ways to align their priorities with those of the community.

Education is a priority in Carroll

Editor:

Let's just forget about Common Core for a while. For some reason it has become a divisive, hot-button topic. As a longtime educator in Carroll County, I can see some positive outcomes from Common Core, and there are some things I don't like. One thing I can say with certainty, however, is that Common Core will not lead to the demise of education.

We have a much more immediate threat to education here in Carroll County, and that is the present political climate.

Carroll 2030, a task force of stakeholders around the county who looked at the top priorities for our community, reported that sustaining high quality public education was the top priority for business owners. Yet we have two commissioners who have been working to defund and dismantle public education.

Commissioner Richard Rothschild is holding the budget hostage unless he gets his way. He wants to see some schools closed, despite the fact that the MGT Facilities Utilization Study thoroughly explained why that was not advantageous. Instead of listening to an independent outside study, which he demanded, Rothschild uses skewed statistics to make it

sound like our schools will be desolate ghost towns in a few years. Actually, enrollment projections begin to increase within 10 years. Closing or mothballing a school takes time and would cost much more in the long run.

Commissioner Robin Frazier wants to fund the Board of Education at the lowest amount allowed by law. Such draconian cuts would not only damage our school system, but our greater community as well. Rather than commending the school system for its good stewardship of funds by saving money for emergencies, she uses this as an excuse to cut funds. I find it hypocritical to criticize the school system when the commissioners maintain their own emergency contingency fund.

Families and business owners in Carroll say a strong public education is a top priority. Another priority reported by Carroll 2030 is the need to upgrade technology. This happens to also be a top priority for the school system. Rothschild and Frazier need to understand this costs money.

Finally, these commissioners need to work to keep school salaries competitive. Good teachers and administrators leave our system every year to make more money in nearby districts.

Bob Dylan sang, "You're gonna have to serve somebody." If these commissioners will not serve the people, who are they serving?

Thomas Scanlan
Westminster