

**Florence County Focus Group**  
**January 21, 2009**  
**9:00 AM**

**Participants:**

- Russell Tripp, Florence County Chamber of Commerce
- Meg Dallapiazza, UW Extention – 4-HYD
- Jim Horvatl, Florence Co Board
- Judy Gehlhoff, Town Board
- Dennis Christian
- Brent Dallagrana, Florence Abstract
- Keri Buffinton, Spread Eagle Garden Center
- Conrad Kohberg, Hooglands Woodshop
- Sue Hoogland, FL Cty School Board Business Owner
- Chuck Hoogland, Hoogland's Wood Shop
- Roger Osterberg, 1247 Fischer Lake Pkwy
- Bill Dyer, Town of Auroa
- Don Gardner, County Board
- Clyde Nelson, State Bank of Florence
- Hank Murphy, Florence Mining News
- Jay Glime, G&G Lumber
- Dwaine Drew, Subway FCCC

## **I. SWOT/GAP ANALYSIS**

### **1. STRENGTHS**

- Tourism – snowmobiles, woodlands, trails, lakes, fishing, hunting
- Close to suppliers for logging industry
- Iron Mountain/Kingsford is diversified – though Florence not diversified
- Regional economy, Kingsford and Florence
- Kingsford is hub of job opportunities
- Our area has entrepreneurs starting businesses
- People are best asset
- Many small businesses (diversified)
- Dedication of small business owners
- Natural resources – draw residents and tourists
- Education system – good schools, e.g. “Bay”
- Timber industry
- Hardworking workforce – good people, excellent work ethic
- Strong volunteerism
- Fuel prices an advantage – close to Fox Valley for tourism as compared to Vilas or Oneida counties
- Public land - ATV and snowmobile use
- Low cost of living
- History of conservatism good in tough economic times
- Great place to raise/start a family
- Region can meet all needs

### **2. WEAKNESSES**

- Iron Mountain/Kingsford is diversified – though Florence not diversified
- Farming is tough
- No good economic base for jobs
- Money outflow to Iron Mountain for shopping and services
- Too few people (especially in winter, summer ok) – small customer base (this is why lost supermarket)
- Dilapidated structures = poor image
- Seasonality of tourism
- Youth leaving (14-20%?)
- Need jobs for young people (2)
- Reliance on tourism
- Lack of transportation – no rail, limited highways
- Lack of tech growth – infrastructure is small
- Education a “mess” – declining enrollment, closed a grade school
- Retirees and tourists don’t support schools
- Can’t compete with Dixon County Schools
- Need more promotion of tourism opportunities, especially trails

- Need a grocery store
- Gap in workforce between highschoolers and elderly – 20-40 age group too small
- Resistance to halfway house
- Not enough good jobs to support 20-40 age group, better jobs available in Green Bay
- Need businesses that keep professionals in area
- More industry needed not tied to timber – not diversified enough
- Location – far from raw materials
- Transportation
- Lack of EDC funds – small budgets, not enough resources
- Perception of education is problem, we have good schools and good results but news is about enrollment and closings and perception is reality
- Logistics of county for education – long bus rides
- Perception of community is poor – dilapidated structures and junked vehicles are embarrassing – need to enforce ordinances
- Funding system for schools a problem
- Need housing affordable to middle income level
- Have gotten too good at doing things with less – too conservative
- “Good enough” is prevailing attitude, not striving for excellences
- Personal property tax on business equipment – pay sales tax, then personal property tax
- Lack of positive press
- Young not as willing to work hard
- Cross state relationships don’t always work well.

### **3. THREATS**

- Youth leaving – brain drain
- Aging population, aging workforce, retirements
- Economy is affecting tourism
- Less snow tourism when more snow in south
- Curriculum cuts
- Opposition to paper and mining industries
- Resistance to change
- County revenue through timber sales could change – decline in homebuilding will affect county revenues
- Mill closure due to changes in timber industry
- Attraction of Green Bay for shopping
- Declining school enrollments
- Environmentalism cuts down on ability to act locally
- Failure to cooperate
- State deficit – county relies on state grants
- Lack of funding for county promotion and investment capital
- Not enough money to go around
- Escalation of property taxes
- Invasive species in waterways and forests
- Increasing interest rates

- Globalization
- Regionalization (e.g. schools)
- Paying people to do nothing – social programs too strong, social assistance has lost stigma, people too willing to take food stamps and unemployment

#### **4. OPPORTUNITIES**

- Help ourselves – spend money to make money – promotion and cooperation efforts
- Promote startups
- Full time economic development coordinator (Wendy), and she needs a database of available land and space for interested businesses
- Get Fed govt to harvest timber
- Rail would allow for affordable transport
- Pay attention to bottom 85% of schoolkids – trades programs!
- More ED money under Wendy's control
- More positive attitude
- County farm
- Promote what we've got (5)
- Family values here are strong
- Space to grow (2)
- Promote ATV accessibility – trails and town roads (legal to drive on)
- Develop and encourage INDUSTRY, and diversify
- Perception is reality – be positive!
- Entrepreneurship program in school district
- Cooperation – County Board and Town Board
- Grants for startup help
- Be welcoming to new people – DMV hours in town an asset – courthouse is not welcoming
- Focus on job creation
- Tourism Council and Chamber of Commerce
- Value-added wood products (skilled jobs)
- Downtown Florence could be very attractive with limited investment
- Lodging in Florence – we're turning people away
- Idle farmland could be used for biofuels – ethanol or rapeseed biodiesel
- Connect local producers to school to provide food (e.g Hilbert, WI)
- Investigate wind power
- Conservation funding
- Be welcoming to retirees and recruit their expertise

#### **5. GAPS/DEFICITS**

- Communications: eastern part of county good for phone and internet, western parts of county not as good.
  - Local area won't be covered by HD broadcast
  - No public radio

High speed internet penetration is getting better

- Full service grocery store
- Accountant
- Bus services
- Pharmacy
- Entertainment venue (outdoor)
- Multi-use racetrack facility
- Lodging
- Retail shopping
- Downtown planning/promotion funds
- Historic society
- IT help (web design, computer assistance)
- State and federal funding

## **II. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS**

### **6. ECON DEV. ORGANIZATIONS**

#### **7. Key?**

- Bay Lakes Regional Planning
- Florence County EDC
- Work with Dickinson County

## **III. OTHER THOUGHTS**

### **1. THOUGHTS?**

### **2. OTHERS?**