

GULF COUNTY – IEDC MEETINGS, ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- **Planning and Infrastructure (Projects Planned):**
 - Focus on port/rail related development
 - Bio fuels/green energy park
 - Northwest Florida Renewable Energy Center – working on permitting (say all is done but air, but in later tour sounds like wetlands still need to be mapped, roads approved, use of potentially invasive grass may also be an issue.)
 - Research and development re biomass – want to pull in FSU, Gulf Coast Community College, DACS, etc.
 - EDC working on attracting another bio energy company to work in concert with NWFREC that will want to locate in the industrial park.
 - Maintain/improve tourism industrial balance.
 - Haiti rebuild.
 - Working with Premier Chemicals to use their site for a new business .

- **Major Concerns/Challenges Identified by Santa Rosa County participants:**
 - Tourism – perception concerns – some concern, but doesn't appear to be too serious.
 - Vacations booked 2 years in advance could be longer impact – concern that could be long term impact for next year.
 - However, one hospitality rep says that the season was stronger than ever – owns two hotels, a bar and other establishments that has seen activity through BP cleanup activities and government visitors as well as some activity with the new hospital (blue collar – construction folks staying long term at hotel suite). Further, he thinks he has picked up some visitors that would have otherwise gone west of here.
 - Construction/development – seems to be one of the bigger problems that the county is facing, but only aggravated by the spill – may be on slow recovery based on banker's comments.
 - Banks significant drop in business, but slowly returning now.
 - Biggest employer – trusses – went from 166 people to 16 and being foreclosed on by SBA .
 - Fisheries? – don't know of impact – no one showed.
 - Accountant for one outfitter/outdoor store attended – stated that there has been a decline in sales, but that they have not lost any of their employees to this point.
 - Uptick on needs – homeless shelters – due to BP layoffs (DCF).
 - Claims process too slow some rental businesses could go under.
 - Local governments hurting and need help – concern that infrastructure projects could be in jeopardy – EDC chair wants unrestricted funds for local government .
 - Property values dropping, bankruptcies, banks taken over by FDIC.

- 75% of income for the year occurs in June and July .
 - Chemical companies leaving.
 - General economic downturn.
 - Government infrastructure issues –consent orders on waste water, potential one coming re drinking water (80 year old pipes).
 - Locals fully bonded out with things like the \$16.5 bonded for expansion of water system.
 - Jobs – Workforce board gave figure of 52,000 people that have come to them re jobs – half sent to BP.
 - Small population results in limited opportunities in the high schools for the students (Gulf and Franklin graduating classes totaled about 110 students).
- **Assets of County**
 - Port (not really operational, also leased by St. Joe).
 - Rail – threatened long term due to loss of chemical plant unless something comes in in near future to use the rail.
 - Natural gas capacity.
 - Waste water not permitted to full capacity, but could be if work force needed.
 - Workforce from chemical plants.
 - Taxes are low for a rural county maybe (4.7-6 mils).
 - Quality of life selling point.
 - RACEC expedited permitting.
 - Land – 10,000+ acre industrial park and an additional 1,000 acre parcel for the biomass operations.
 - Community College serves Gulf and Franklin – emphasis is on nursing and corrections fields.
- **Economic Recovery Ideas /Needs of County**
 - Infrastructure improvements provided at local level.
 - TIGER grant for port – applied for \$39 m but have match problem. Also looking to develop public/private investment in port.
 - Dept of Energy grant request for \$200 m biomass plant.
 - No 4-lane highways in the county – want the expansion of 231 to include Gulf (apparently this was recently scaled back to remove the Gulf County portion to the port). But they are getting identified as an emerging SIS in DOT update.
 - Permit related to the port applied for in December '08??
 - State mandates are eating up all ad val. Taxes (sheriffs budget, Medicaid)
 - Ease up on federal rules, ie CDBG – communicate to DCA so they have more latitude to relax some of the requirements such as participating party requirements and match.
 - Streamline state processes – permits (BP got a permit in an hour; takes years for county to get permits) (DOT & DCA good – DEP seems to be the issue re permits.
 - Remove impediments to existing programs – HUD, EDA Dept of Ag – remove headway/streamline and waivers similar to REDI; DCBG CFR issue.

- Help get Haiti project going and ease up on SBA foreclosure of truss company – further bridge assistance to truss company to help it survive – looking for World Bank \$ for funding (Clinton and Bush effort).
- Workforce board requests extension of the TANF – FI. Back to Work program through March .
- Asbestos removal in county building in Wewa that could be used to attract a business (lost one due to the existence of the asbestos).