

Town Wide Route 6 Meeting

Feb. 21, 2006

Rick Trucello from the EADES Group, and Terri Dennison of the Rt. 6 Corporation presented nearly 70 local townsfolk's with an update of the progress of the Route 6 Heritage Committee since last year.

Mr. Trucello noted the goals, visions and progress of the Rt. 6 Committee was, "a work in Progress."

Although the area has seen small decline in population, there is a high quality of life in the communities which enhances commercial, community, and recreational opportunities for growth in the tourist business. Regional attractions, such as festivals, races, and ethnic events that already exist are also positive features of the area that draw tourists, and increase business.

Other features that hold potential for motivating tourists to visit our area are the over 50 historic structures that are in Smethport, the ghost towns that permeate our area that are remnants of our old industrial past, and existing facilities in the Allegheny National Forest, Lumber Heritage Region, PA Wilds, and America's First Christmas Store. The Bucktail legacy is also of huge interest, as well.

New types of specialty shops, entertainment places, and restaurants were seen as important expansion businesses to the nearly 150 businesses already located in the area. It was also noted that storefront/streetscape improvements were critically needed to enhance these businesses, but there are few distractions from telephone poles, etc. in the business district, which is a big plus toward increasing the potential for attendance at the downtown shops.

The strengths of the community include a rich industrial heritage with vibrant existing industries, a strong creative and entrepreneurial spirit, the Bucktail story, an intact Victorian downtown and mansion section, and a natural, historical setting that hasn't been eroded by modern progress.

Issues to overcome were limited retail choices, demographic declines, and a lack of emphasis on young people and travelers.

Hamlin Lake Park is one of Smethport's greatest assets. The isolation of Hamlin Lake from the touring public, the Smethport business district, and the existing tourist areas such as Allegheny National Forest, the Lumber Heritage Region, and the Oil Region in and around the Bradford area needs to be improved with better signage directing visitors to the lake, and more year-round activities.

Some of the positive elements that Smethport already has to enhance tourism are a natural continuity with outdoors and forest activities, a technical ingenuity that already exists, and the unique charm, enchantment, and friendliness of the community.

Activities to enhance tourism focused on formalizing/enhancing the mansion district by providing walking tours, providing interpretive information about the mansions history, preservation efforts to safeguard existing mansions, and developing plans to reuse existing historical structures without defacing their architectural integrity.

The Historical Museum needs to add a discovery/interpretive center that offer stories about the area. The museum needs to develop visitor friendly hours.

Gateway entrance enhancements were also recommended, especially for welcome signs, along with coherent sign and zoning regulations that would enhance the street appearance.

There also needs to be an emphasis on business improvement and recruitment, and a marketing strategy that focuses on tourism, and the funding initiatives needed to make infrastructure changes.

Increasing the recognition of local resources, and how to develop multi-seasonal use of existing recreational areas, especially Hamlin Lake, were also important considerations. One area of the above that can be increased is the development of industries in the wood-timber industry as a heritage associated activity that uses wood products as crafts, etc.

Incubator space needs to be developed to help start these cottage type industries.

Hospitality training for the local people is essential for them to understand the processes that enhance tourism, and communicating important information about community events that attract tourist attendance at local events and festivals.

Attendees gave ideas at the end of the meeting. Areas of concern for improvement were maintaining a web-based activities calendar, and placing more emphasis on spring fishing activities and contests. More signage was needed directing visitors to the lake area and historical district.

Smethport also needed to pursue ways to guaranty funding to maintain sustained long-term community growth.

Advertising about the area needs extended to include the entire state and eastern US region.

Increased facilities for lodging need built, and more usage of old railroad grades for mountain biking, and snowmobiling activities. Other winter sports, such as the construction of ski slopes in the Smethport area were also recommended, as were an increase in snowmobile-ATV trails.

Culinary arts education at the Seneca Highland Vocational-Technical School was endorsed, as was the protection of historic districts, green tree programs, and hospitality training via programs that have already been developed by I-U9.

Wayne Pearson, Chairman of the Route 6 Heritage Community Committee, read the Vision Statement recently completed by the members of the committee. It states that *“Smethport, in the year 2015, is thriving economically, as a new generation of entrepreneurs, building on Smethport’s heritage and rich natural resources, are making it a hub of innovation, driven by new technologies. A vibrant, pedestrian-friendly business district has shops, lodging, restaurants, and places of worship. A promenade, dwellings, and restaurants surround the town’s centerpiece, Hamlin Lake. Visitors and residents enjoy the year-round recreational opportunities of Hamlin Lake and the surrounding mountains and forests. Residents have a high quality of life, created by merging the town’s rich heritage with its traditional values.”*