

# **CENTRAL NEBRASKA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (CNEDD) REPORT FOR DED'S ANNUAL CONSOLIDATED PLAN**

## **Input Summary From Regional Public Meetings**

**St. Paul/Howard County May 17, 2004**  
**Valentine/Cherry County May 18, 2004**  
**Broken Bow/Custer County May 19, 2004**  
**Bassett/Rock County May 20, 2004**  
**Ord/Valley County May 24, 2004**

### **Public Input on Housing:**

The attendees indicated that most of the residents in their respective areas are better off now than they were last year relative to the State of Nebraska's goal to increase cooperation among government entities, housing providers and lender in order to produce more units of affordable housing. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that clients in Rock County and Brown County are better off now than they were last year because of the increased affordable housing units provide through the cooperation of DED programs, USDA, lenders and government entities in the region. Attendees at the Ord meeting indicated that they were not completely aware of this priority, and that this priority is not being promoted.

Cooperation between DED, local ED organizations and the municipalities has been maintained, but not necessarily increased according to attendees. At the Ord meeting attendees indicated that cooperation has somewhat increased, but still unaware of these funds. CNCS has been very helpful, but some housing authorities do not participate in these programs.

Several of the attendees expressed that their respective communities have benefited economically from obtaining housing grants from DED, as well as improvements on housing units.

Attendees expressed several gaps in providing affordable housing in their respective communities;

- Non-existent independent living housing for seniors
- Lack of housing for the developmentally disabled
- Lack of housing for young families with school aged children
- Lack of housing for mental health patients
- Sub-standard housing id not always eligible for federal funding, the regulations need to be changed to allow for all sub-standard housing be eligible for funding opportunities
- Removal and demolition of dilapidated homes/buildings needs to be an eligible activity

- Homes that have been foreclosed on need to be turned over to the local municipality and then rehabilitated, regulations need to be changed in order to do this
- Non-existent affordable housing
- Lack of rehabilitation funds
- Lack of private investment
- Non-existent federal investment
- Most communities are excluded from new construction for affordable housing due to not enough assistance from the state and federal levels (most people cannot afford a \$90,000 home, this is what it costs to build a new average home)
- Lack of communication (need to educate residents on housing programs that are available) Suggestion: DED provide a public relations packet for communities to utilize
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of housing programs for rural residents outside of city/village limits as counties are not utilizing the programs
- Increased low-income homeownership opportunities for Custer County
- Promotion of funding availability/unawareness

### **Public Input on Homeless:**

The attendees indicated that most of the residents in their respective areas are better off now than they were last year relative to the State of Nebraska's goal to provide a continuum of housing opportunities and supportive services for homeless persons plus increase educational outreach and prevention activities. A large number of the attendees were not aware of the continuum.

When the attendees were initially asked this question the majority indicated that their respective communities did not have issues with homelessness. After some discussion the attitude towards homelessness changed, and discussion began on homelessness issues in each of their respective communities. The attendees felt that community awareness of homeless families is the first step, and some of the communities had begun to become aware of the issue. In Valentine they did have a homeless shelter, but lost the building due to lack of funding. In Bassett the attendees indicated that homelessness probably has not been reduced. There is denial that homelessness exists or there is a lack of understanding of what homelessness is.

Since the majority of the attendees were not aware of the continuum of care, it was difficult to measure the improvements. At the Valentine meeting attendees expressed a feeling of waste in the program. Indicating that not enough screening on who needs the money was conducted, nor was their enough training on how to use the money.

Attendees expressed several gaps in providing successful homeless services in their respective communities;

- Non-existent emergency assistance
- Non-existent assistance with rent payments
- Non-existent interim housing
- Non-existent assistance with utility payments
- Non-existent transportation
- Residents in Keya Paha County have multiple families living in one home, and expressed a gap in housing for the homeless
- Residents in Cherry County have issues with Native Americans and being homeless
- Lack of knowledge of programs on homelessness
- DED needs to partner with local groups (ministerial alliances, social services, law enforcement agencies etc.) to increase awareness and implement the program
- Lack of guidelines (many times it goes back to the same situation)
- Lack of knowledge about the program, in regards to short term housing assistance
- Lack of coordination among providers regarding services
- Lack of a package deal (more than just finding a house i.e. job etc.)

**Public Input on Non-Housing Economic Development:**

The attendees indicated that most of the residents in their respective areas are better off now than they were last year relative to the State of Nebraska’s goal to strengthen Nebraska communities by targeting serious community development problems through economic development projects.

Attendees indicated that several of the communities in their area are working to take advantage of this goal by obtaining funding for economic development projects in their respective communities. The residents from Cherry County formed an independent organization to work on economic development projects and are currently partnering with DED on economic development projects. In Bassett, and Ainsworth local chambers and economic development groups are seeking and trying to increase job creation by working with DED field staff, USDA and local economic development personnel.

Almost all (if not all) of the client base in the attendees respective communities can be reached with economic development projects. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that the amount of client base that has been reached is minimal due to the requirement that ED projects require a significant number of job creating positions that are not realistic in our very rural small community settings.

Economic development projects help the residents in their communities acquire good jobs by providing high paying wages, with benefits. This can also hinder small business development due to the regulations. Not all small, local businesses can pay above minimum wage, and offer full benefits. These businesses are still viable to the community. Attendees at the Bassett meeting

indicated some improvement has occurred due to the Technolgent project in Ainsworth. In Bassett the attendees indicated that economic development projects have helped residents acquire good paying jobs with benefits, but if a family has only one income, the jobs still do not adequately provide a suitable standard of living. A concern of the Bassett attendees was that higher wages present a problem for local businesses by making small rural businesses compete for quality employees. In Custer County Beckton Dickson (BD) has been a tremendous employer, and has provided good paying jobs with benefits to the residents in and outside of Broken Bow.

Attendees expressed several gaps in providing successful economic development projects in their respective communities;

- Non-existent federal or state funding for the local economic development offices
- Lack of education on these programs to the general public
- Lack of leadership and training opportunities as well as money to fund leadership training
- Lack of adequate infrastructure to accommodate businesses (new or existing)
- In regards to economic development plans, the timelines need to be changed to either year round or quarterly deadlines for the grant due dates
- DED is spread to thin, need assistance when the project arises
- Keya Paha County needs business loans, currently they have no resources
- Cherry County needs continued assistance from financial packagers, and expressed the need for additional DED financial packagers
- Lack of understanding that realistically rural in Nebraska is less than 5,000 in population not 50,000 in population
- Programs for small employer's for job creation/retention of 1-5 employees in rural settings
- Non-existent micro enterprise programs
- Outsourcing services for Nebraska governmental agencies such as Heath and Human Services provided by Nebraska rural residents that we read in the paper are being sent oversees (surveys that have been conducted in the region indicate that rural residents are willing to work for low, modest wages)
- Lack of public relations and research by DED in regards to non-housing economic development
- Tourism was not addressed in the input meetings (tourism is the third largest industry in the state)
- Lack of labor force, and skilled employees
- Aging Population
- Recruitment of young working families
- Need funding resources for small proprietors (2-3 people)

- Need to spread the risk (it is better to have 10 small businesses rather than 1 large business)
- Regulations and job requirements hinder business development projects
- Too much paperwork
- Davis Bacon regulations are too strict (wage's are too high for construction)
- Not funding retail businesses is hard on rural areas
- Need for educational programs
- Did not discuss tourism programs

**Public Input on Community Development:**

The attendees indicated that most of the residents in their respective areas are better off now than they were last year relative to the State of Nebraska's goal to strengthen Nebraska communities by targeting serious community development projects through infrastructure projects. In Broken Bow .5% of the sales tax goes to towards water, sewer, electrical, and street projects. This funding has helped with the infrastructure in Broken Bow, but they need to work with DED and the development district to find additional funding sources for future infrastructure projects.

Attendees indicated that several of the communities in their area are working to take advantage of this goal by obtaining funding for infrastructure projects in their respective communities. The residents from Cherry County indicated that is too difficult to prove the LMI qualification to utilize the funding resources. The residents from Rock and Brown counties indicated that communities in the region have taken advantage of infrastructure improvements such as water, streets, sidewalks, architectural barrier removal, and community facilities, or are currently researching the possibility of undertaking such a project.

Almost all (if not all) of the client base in the attendees respective communities can be reached with infrastructure development projects. In Broken Bow, because of the city's infrastructure updates they were able to accommodate Becton Dickson (BD), and their emerging business.

Funding assistance for infrastructure projects help communities offset the costs of updating, or creating the infrastructure in their respective communities. Infrastructure costs create a large burden on communities. It is imperative that infrastructure be maintained and enhanced in communities, providing funding assistance to communities makes this possible. The residents from Cherry County indicated that funding from DED makes the projects a reality, and fill in the gaps. The residents from Rock and Brown counties indicated that by helping low-income residents pay for infrastructure services helps make the project a reality.

Attendees expressed several gaps in providing successful public works projects in their respective communities;

- Lack of funding for improvements to county roads, sidewalks, curbs, and city streets
- Lack of grant writers to assist with environmental reviews, grant administration as well as writing the grant applications
- Grant applications need to be accepted on a quarterly basis rather than once a year in rural areas
- Serious gaps in community infrastructure
- Non-existent financial teams with NRD, USDA, DED, local economic development organizations in combining money and assisting with gap financing involving all the partners
- Historical sites can prohibit projects
- Recreational projects are not allowed, but need to be
- Penalized for cooperation with other entities (i.e. school districts)
- Fitness centers not eligible (small towns need fitness centers to attract residents)

**Public Input on Business Development:**

The attendees indicated that most of the residents in their respective areas are better off now than they were last year relative to the State of Nebraska’s goal to strengthen targeted communities with business development projects by providing small business development or job training. In Broken Bow, it was indicated that job training funds have a tremendous impact on their existing businesses.

Attendees indicated that several of the communities in their area are working to take advantage of this goal by obtaining funding for business development as well as providing job training for businesses located within their respective communities. Several attendees indicated that more could be done in regards to business development in their respective communities. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that because of the requirement that a large number of employees are required several businesses cannot participate in funding opportunities that are available. Small rural areas need business development and job training funds for 2-5 positions.

Almost all (if not all) of the client base in the attendees respective communities can be reached with small business development and job training. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that the client base is better off through the job training provided through the Technologent project in Ainsworth. It was also indicated that with the creation of 2-5 jobs in a small community of 800 people or less has a huge impact on the economy.

Small business development and job training strengthen the business climate in a community. Funding assistance enables the businesses located within in a community to obtain small business assistance, as well as job training. Without the funding assistance these activities would not be available to the business owner. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that the employees of

Technologist benefited from the business development assistance (the job requirement is 35, which has been exceeded). Attendees at the Ord meeting indicated that there is a lack of funding for small business training.

Attendees expressed several gaps in providing successful small business development projects and job training to the businesses located within their respective communities;

- Non-existent
- Lack of education on these programs to the general public
- Lack of job training funds
- Non-existent retail assistance funds (funding retail businesses would help promote tourism in communities)
- Funding for job training of fewer employees
- Funding for management, marketing, leadership, and business development training
- Funding of training to provide technical assistance to assist businesses to enable them to increase their business base and markets
- Lack of recognizing the benefits of working one-on-one with the small businesses
- Continued job training programs
- Need for diverse job training programs
- Entrepreneurial training courses
- Small business job training
- Shortage of field staff to do financial packaging
- Distance of travel is unreasonable in regards to the existing field staff
- Have meetings and training sessions in rural communities (i.e. Ord, Burwell, Bassett, Valentine, etc.)

### **Public Input on Planning:**

The attendees indicated that most of the residents in their respective areas are better off now than they were last year relative to the State of Nebraska's goal to target serious community development problems by providing communities funds to solve the problems locally through the planning process.

Attendees indicated that several of the communities in their area are working to take advantage of this goal by obtaining funding for planning projects within their respective communities. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that several communities are not taking advantage of planning funds prior to beginning a project, more public relations is needed in regards to the planning funds that are available.

Almost all (if not all) of the client base in the attendees respective communities and counties can be reached by conducting planning projects, and receiving funds to conduct these planning projects.

Attendees expressed several gaps in providing successful planning projects within their respective communities;

- Non-existent exit plans or financial assistance opportunities for standard or traditional family farming operations
- Lack of education on these programs to the general public
- Non-existent market analysis
- Non-existent income base surveys, indicating how the respective community generates if funding revenue
- Lack of main street development
- Non-existent financing opportunities for young families inquiring on purchasing an existing business
- Lack of knowledge on the financial assistance that is available in regards to community and county wide planning projects for rural areas
- Non-existent or severely outdated community and county wide plans (small rural communities and counties need economic development plans)
- Lack of technical assistance in pre-paring community and county wide economic development plans
- Lack of communication and understanding by communities on the importance of planning
- Community Comprehensive Plans and Economic Development Plans are usually very outdated (the plans are expensive, and need to be specific to each community)
- Lack of citizen participation in completing community attitude surveys
- Lack of validity in regards to the U.S. Census
- Additional technical assistance from DED, the development district and local economic development groups
- Transportation planning activities
- Additional funding availability
- Open application period
- Census data is not helpful for income guidelines

**Public Input on your Relationship with DED:**

The attendees indicated that some of their respective communities/organizations had the following priorities for the next year;

- Conduct a community attitude survey
- Raise funds for community projects
- Increase public awareness on programs that DED offers
- Work on increased economic development programs that address job creation of 1-5 jobs
- Retention of existing jobs
- Value-added programs and local resources
- Focus on farming/ranching community producing (help produce and keep land on the tax rolls and keep families on the job, agriculture is the #1 industry in the state)
- Maintain a good business climate

- Continue to improve the communities infrastructure
- Obtaining funding resources for future projects before the project arises (need to be prepared)
- Recreation projects
- Technology center
- Small business assistance (2-3 people)
- Rehabilitation of buildings needs to be an eligible project
- Tourism focused projects
- Update infrastructure (i.e. paving roads)
- Retention of existing small businesses

Attendees indicated that their working relationship with DED is excellent, especially with their respective field representative who resides within the community that he/she resides in. The field representatives are always available to answer questions that might arise. The attendees indicated their satisfaction with staff being located outside of Lincoln. It was the general opinion that communities need to continue to foster their relationships with DED and the field staff. Attendees at the Bassett meeting indicated that their working relationship with DED is very good, and they are always willing to answer questions and work with the communities.

Attendees listed areas of improvement in regards to their relationship with DED;

- Additional field staff
- Additional business development offices
- Increased partnerships with DED, development districts, and regional groups to help share in DED's responsibilities
- DED should consider bringing the Network groups under their direction (dissolving the Network groups has creating a huge gap, the Network groups are an excellent regional organization)
- Increased trained field staff located in public offices for assistance with financial packaging, housing programs, etc.
- Economic development programs that address the need to create 1-5 jobs in rural communities
- Recognize what defines a small rural community in regards to population numbers
- Increased focus on regional resources (cheap labor, and value added resources, focus on keeping agricultural land on the tax rolls and producing)
- Obtaining community support and communication so that when a project arises the community can work more smoothly with DED
- More communication with DED
- Cooperative projects should be encouraged (i.e. DED, development districts, USDA, local economic development organizations)
- Additional staff
- Be open to rural issues

- Re-define the definition of rural

Additional comments obtained after the public input meetings were conducted;

- The lack or limited amount of DED support for entrepreneurs (DED often has a big “smoke stack’ focus, true rural entrepreneurs have to start small)
- Guidelines for small cities and villages needs to be assessed, and changed (only Omaha and Lincoln exceed the 50,000 population hurdle, meaning that the remaining 90% of Nebraska is being governed by these guidelines, small communities do not have the same needs or issues that the much larger cities do)
- Smaller communities would benefit substantially from rules that were less stringent than those currently in place for cities 50,000 category

Respectfully submitted,

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Enclosures: Meeting Sign In Sheets  
Notice Of Public Meetings  
Meeting Agendas  
Proof Of Publications