

Citizen Input

The Interviewees

The six “above” average citizens I interviewed love their town; at least none of the six interviewed during the assessment have any interest in living anywhere else!

The sampling of six average citizens could/should have been more diverse. The interviews were with four women and two men. Although all six had children, only one had a school-aged child still at home. Only one of the six works full time (a local business owner), the others were retired, semi-retired, or working part time. No one interviewed was under the age of approximately fifty, with the majority being in their 60s or 70s. No one had lived in the area less than fifteen years. Four lived in town and the other two lived outside the Village limits. Not only did none of the six have plans to ever move away from the area, none could even think of a reason that would entice them to move away.

Everyone agreed that Chesaning is a great place to live and raise a family. They are happy with the school system and the entertainment provided through its athletic, music, and drama programs.

They all enjoy the closeness of a small community and having people that know you near by to help out when help is needed. They also noted that that same closeness means that everyone knows what is going on, but that was not a major problem to any of the interviewees.

Local Politics

This group of citizens is unhappy with the lack of unity between the Village Council and the Township Council. They talked about the lack of a unified vision among the leadership – the Councils, Chamber, and business leaders. They also said that there was a lack of cooperation amongst the governing bodies. Specifically, the lack of Township

assistance (funds) for the expense of police protection was a hot topic as well as support for the ambulance service.

When talking about leadership in the community, they again talked about the polarization such as Township vs. Village, those who want growth vs. those who do not want growth, those who see Chesaning as a tourist town vs. those who see it as a town that is too concerned with the tourist trade.

No one thought there was a lot of interest in local politics or in running for office. Reasons cited for this lack of interest were lack of time, that it was too much grief for non-paid positions, that they would not have any influence or be heard if they chose to attend Council meetings, and another thought that maybe people are satisfied with things and that is why there isn't more participation at Council meetings or interest in running for office. One person thought that the people's lack of time to be politically involved was another argument for having a professional person as the full-time Village Manager.

Another observation on local politics, there are some "leaders" who are perceived as "negative" people that are resistant to change. According to those interviewed, these people have had a negative impact on the area.

Infrastructure

Another sore point is "infrastructure" needs in the area. People repeatedly talked about the poor condition of the roads, sidewalks, and the need for sewers and water. They also noted that some local businesses may not be anxious for sewers to move into the area as that could cause development away from town that might take business from the downtown merchants.

Local Business

The majority of the people interviewed buy their groceries, medical services, pharmaceuticals, and other durable goods in Chesaning. They generally travel to other areas for women's clothing and entertainment. Remember, though, that none of the

group interviewed was employed out of the area so they did not pass other stores or shopping centers in their daily travels. Also, there was only one child still living at home, amongst the six interviewees, making demands for child/teen-related items. Finally, the people interviewed did not seem to be particularly price-sensitive. It appeared that the benefits of buying locally because of the convenience, friendliness and service, and assisting the local economy, were of more importance to them than price comparison.

The service received from local businesses is a definite plus for the area. However, some people mentioned that it is becoming increasingly difficult to purchase locally as more businesses close operations; one person said that it was too expensive to purchase locally.

All of the interviewees agreed that one of the most significant changes they had seen in recent years was the decline in the number of downtown businesses and that the local businesses remaining were struggling. They all agreed that the excellent service was indeed the best reason to buy locally, but that the lack of selection and availability of goods was making it more difficult.

The one business owner I talked to was concerned that the Village/Township/Chamber is too focused on the businesses that cater to the tourists, rather than in assisting the local businesses that serve the community.

There was some discussion that perhaps the community was leaning too much toward “events”. As one person put it, the volunteers, the participating vendors, and the tourists are burning out and attendance and participation are down according to a couple of interviewees.

What This Town Needs!

Most ideas were for more local entertainment, not only for adults, but also for teenagers and families. Ideas included a new family restaurant where one could gather after ball games, riverboat paddle cruises, a restaurant on the riverbank , a movie theater, bowling alley, and roller blading area.

Bringing well-paying jobs to the area was another priority in order to attract young families to town. A couple of people tied this with needing infrastructure improvements to allow for growth (sewers, water, and roads). They talked about the local kids going away to college and finding jobs that keep them away from the area.

A suggestion was for the community to consider giving property to an industry to attract it to locate in the area, rather than offering tax abatements, thus not negatively impacting future tax revenues. I must note, though, that offering tax abatements results in an increase in revenue to a municipality, not a cut.

This Project & Volunteering

When asked if they would be interested in being involved in this project as it moves forward, all interviewees gave a qualified “yes”. They would be interested if their particular interest(s) could be matched to the task involved. They also are interested in seeing results, they do not want to make a career of this project and not see any results from it. They were all supportive of the Task Force and this initial assessment process and see it as a beginning and hope that the local governing bodies will support the results of the assessment.

Recommendations

- Publicize the results of the assessment so everyone has the opportunity to feel involved, ask questions, know who to contact to volunteer
- Identify specific committees/work groups/task forces and ask for volunteers. Give specific goals and time frames for the committees to meet the objectives.
- Survey the community through the local newspaper or mailing as to its desires – more or fewer “events”? Local entertainment desires? What is important to them? How to achieve it or make it happen?
- Begin educating the community on the necessity of raising revenues, and the financial impact on them as well as the rewards the Village/area would reap, to improve the infrastructure.