

The Lincoln County Economic Development Council distributed their annual progress report to the organization's membership in January. Here are some of the reported activities from 2016:

The EDC contracted with Odessa and Sprague to perform income surveys of their communities after inaccurate federal data left them ineligible for grants; an error that only an income survey can reverse. The outcome was positive with the two communities receiving a combined \$1.34 million in infrastructure grants with more possible.

Last year was the seventh year that the EDC has performed as the County's tourism bureau. We promoted the National Park Service's 100th birthday online, in print media, and with a TV commercial in an effort to educate tourists about the National Recreation Area right here in eastern Washington. Other tourism related efforts included rack cards in rest areas along I-5 & I-90; Facebook boosts of events and recreational opportunities; advertisements in the WDFW hunting and fishing regulation booklets; and miscellaneous other print and radio.

The EDC hosted three trainings: "How to Get Found on the Web" for businesses; "Marketing Your Organization" for nonprofits; and "Floodplain Administration 101" for municipalities. We also hosted our 3rd annual EDC Connect business networking event where we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Lincoln County EDC. The new Manager of Innovation & Rural Strategies for the Washington Department of Commerce joined the party as did several new business owners in the county. We also continue to host quarterly Mayors Meetings where Mayors have an opportunity to exchange ideas & discuss issues.

The EDC continues to monitor broadband activity throughout the county. We worked with the Harrington PDA on a project that connected their business district to the high speed NoaNet Fiber housed at their library. Downtown's building owners now can access up to a Gig of bandwidth. The improvements are now being marketed across the state to attract new businesses to the community. CenturyLink is expending the FCC Connect America grant they received for our region. They are currently upgrading broadband speeds for Seven Bays, Lincoln, and Fort Spokane, with Deer Heights and Deer Meadows scheduled to see upgrades in 2017. T-Mobile has added to their grant-funded tower system, this time in Wilbur, bringing our total number of new T-Mobile towers to 7.

A few other activities...the EDC created several more WordPress websites for businesses and organizations to help them develop an online presence....last year's efforts to bring attention to the need for more licensed childcare centers has paid off with at least four new licensed in-home childcare centers opening and several schools expanding their before and after school offerings.....childcare centers were a few of the 68 business assists provided by the EDC in 2016....we also worked with the Odessa Memorial Health Care Center to get them on the radar of the WSU School of Medicine in regard to the school's plan to use rural hospitals for undergraduate clerkship placements.....we partnered with the Davenport museum, the City of Davenport, the Lions Club, and Avista to install an electric car charging station at the museum.....the EDC continues to offer free promotion of commercial properties through our online Available Properties list.....and we participated in the update of the NPS Lake Roosevelt Interpretive Plan to improve the visitor experience.

Through the first half of 2016 (most recent data) our labor force grew from 4,912 in 2015 to 5,083. However, too many still leave the county for work. We will be hosting a Work-Based Learning conference this fall that will tackle that issue.

According to the National Realtor's Association the median sales price for an existing single-family home in Lincoln County went from \$111,340 in 2011 to \$144,230 in 2016. Almira, Wilbur, Creston, and Davenport have all seen homes sell to employees of the Bureau of Reclamation as the bureau increases its permanent workforce at Grand Coulee Dam.

The EDC will be updating the county's Economic Development Strategy in 2017. Watch your paper for opportunities to participate.

The EDC coordinates, communicates, and implements economic development activity for Lincoln County. If you would like to contact the EDC for any reason you can reach them at 509-368-7085 or Margie@LincolnEDC.org.