



Lincoln County Economic Development Council
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2017 Year in Review:

Fairgrounds Project

The EDC is administering Lincoln County's grant-funded feasibility study of the fairgrounds property. The goal of the study is to identify revenue generating opportunities for the property that could make it self-supporting - without affecting the annual fair. The process began in August and the completed study is expected by the end of April. Watch local papers and the EDC Facebook page for results of the study. [Update: The final report is now available on the EDC website at <http://lincolnedc.org/highest-best-use-analysis-of-the-lincoln-county-fairgrounds/>]

Workforce

According to our regional economist at the Employment Security Department, 60% of Lincoln County's workforce commutes outside the county for employment. That high commute rate makes it difficult for many businesses to fill positions within the county. Last year the EDC surveyed 63 Lincoln County employers. We asked them why employees leave local jobs and the top three answers by a landslide were 1) they accept a job outside of Lincoln County; 2) they are unable to find housing; and 3) they are unable to find child care. The problem has prevented seventy percent of responding employers from expanding their business; caused sixty percent of responding employers to experience lower productivity and reduced output or sales; and *thirty percent of respondents have considered moving their business to a more urban area.*

The EDC is working to bring some of those commuters back through projects like the fairgrounds study and ongoing promotion of available commercial and industrial properties to potential out-of-county businesses. We also look for ways to connect youth with local industry and careers while they are still in high school. The EDC will be hosting a conference on rural workforce issues in Davenport on May 9 from 9:00 am to noon. We will look closely at Lincoln County's workforce; where they work and why; and ways to establish relationships between industry, educators, and school-aged youth.

Broadband

In 2017 CenturyLink began to turn down new broadband customers in parts of Lincoln County. We are told that CenturyLink's copper wire networks have reached maximum capacity and there are no immediate plans to invest in fiber unless government subsidies become available. That might eventually happen, but in the meantime Lincoln County is fortunate to have two internet service providers currently contracting to utilize NoaNet fiber – Odessa Office and LocalTel, formerly Spectrum Online Service. Please help spread the word that if someone gets a "no" from CenturyLink they have other internet options. In the meantime the EDC is working with NoaNet and their contractors to expand access to their fiber.

Income Surveys

EDC staff executed two more income surveys in 2017 – Creston & Harrington. Both surveys were accepted by the state and Creston and Harrington are now eligible for infrastructure grants and low-interest loans that were not available to them before the surveys.

Property Donations

The EDC received two donations of property at the end of 2017. The Jump Law Office and winery start-up property at 201 Morgan was donated by Jay & Kathryn Jump and six lots on Hwy. 2 directly across from the fairgrounds were donated by Keith & Barbara Green and their nephew David Nieman. The house on Morgan Street is being readied for occupancy with the winery building to follow; and the Green lots will continue to be used as overflow parking space for the fairgrounds.

Licensed Child Care

The plan for the Morgan Street house is to work with a licensed child care provider to open a much needed child care center. A recent tour by a Dept. of Early Learning licenser left us with an expensive list of improvements still to be made and questions about its proximity to marijuana retailers. It is touch and go at this point, but we haven't given up. *[Update: The expense of the physical changes needed to bring the building into compliance with state statute for child care centers was more than our budget could handle and sadly the project had to be dropped.]*

Other News from 2017

Sixty-four businesses were directly assisted by the EDC in 2017 and twenty-one so far this year plus several others indirectly assisted through social media and our partnership with Spokane's Small Business Development Center.....The EDC continues to contract as the Lincoln County Visitor & Convention Bureau and remains focused on bringing tourists and their discretionary income into Lincoln County.....The EDC organized a meeting of emergency response stakeholders in Sprague to strategize next steps and line up funding resources for flood recovery and mitigation. We continue to work with Sprague's elected officials as the community looks to mitigate future flood disasters.....The EDC supported the founding of Stimulating Summers Summer Day Camps in Reardan & Harrington last year – two communities that do not have licensed child care providers. As evidenced by our employer survey, licensed child care is critical to retaining businesses and employees in all of our communities and we continue to struggle with limited child care options. If you know someone who is considering a career in child care we are here to help them get licensed. If you have any questions regarding our activities, please don't hesitate to contact us. We are happy to help.