

## **Getting down to business -- Pelican biz retention-expansion study leads to four community priorities**

*Pelican Rapids Press*, November 30, 2016 (used with permission)

They say that good things come to those who wait. What isn't mentioned in that common phrase is that more than waiting is necessary to accomplish those good things.

The Pelican Rapids Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) project leadership team and task force has been working diligently behind the scenes for the 'good things' and has identified four priority projects to kick off a revitalization and strengthening of Pelican Rapids' businesses and community.

The annual Pelican Chamber of Commerce holiday social on Monday, December 5 will be the official announcement and kickoff to the implementation phase of the BR&E after a journey that started in February of this year.

At that meeting, Ryan Pesch, University of Minnesota Extension educator, will give a summary of the project results and present the final report. Members of the leadership team and task force will also present the four priority project items.

"We learned a lot about Pelican Rapids from the project," said CJ Holl, "We studied the demographics, the workforce challenges, housing needs and of course got great feedback from the businesses"

Holl said that over 50 percent of the businesses interviewed said they would plan to expand, modernize or add staff if the conditions were right. They also clearly said they are satisfied with area recreational opportunities, our schools, the fire department and city services. They expressed less satisfaction with the availability of housing, child care, incentives for businesses, broadband speed and the cost and availability of buildings. Projects identified that are already being worked on are: Organizing and coordinating the area civic groups, Restructuring of the Chamber and revitalizing the Pelican EDC (Economic Development Corporation), developing a Business Toolkit for existing and new business and developing a marketing plan for the community.

### **Civic organizations a key**

Dawn Finn and Dena Johnson will be leading the effort to organize the civic groups. They will focus on possibly assisting with grants, highlighting services the groups provide or even developing a Day of Service event in Pelican Rapids.

### **Chamber, economic development**

John Ohman will be leading a group working on reorganizing the Chamber and regathering the EDC. The EDC is a private economic development group that has been inactive in recent years.

The BR&E identified it as a priority to be re-energized with new members and direction.

### **"Business Toolkit" to aid development**

Don Solga and his working group will be tasked with coming up with a Business Toolkit and strategy to provide a one stop shop for business information and incentives. The group will coordinate and market its availability when complete.

### **Community marketing campaign**

CJ Holl will lead a group in developing a marketing strategy for the city and its businesses. Cooperative advertising was identified as a need through the BR&E process and the group may propose a separate marketing campaign or may tie in with existing county initiatives such as the Find Your Inner Otter or Live Wide Open marketing programs already started in Otter Tail County.

There are many pieces and parts to those four overall action items, but the goal of the project teams is to meet regularly and roll out completed projects throughout 2017. Several of the groups have already gotten a head start.

### **U of M aids business expansion**

The BR&E project was done in conjunction with the University of Minnesota and it solicits and involves area businesses. Teams of volunteers, task force members, interview business to gather their feedback on everything from the business climate to their views on city services and recreational opportunities. The goal is then to consolidate the feedback, evaluate the results with an eye to developing and action plan to address pressing issues.

### **Nearly 50 businesses involved in study**

The Leadership team was assembled in March and volunteers were trained in May for the business visits. 45 Pelican Rapids and area businesses participated in the study and were interviewed through July and August. "We had a good rate of participation among the businesses," said Pesch, "we targeted 120 businesses and 45 surveys were completed, a good representative sample." Pesch said that the U of M Extension has completed over 90 of these community projects across the state. They recently started one in Coon Rapids and only 25 businesses participated so he was pleased with the response in Pelican Rapids.

In August, members of the leadership team and Mayor Frazier attended a strategy session at the University of Minnesota St Paul campus to review the initial results and well as strategize possible projects. They were joined by a team of experts from the University of Minnesota economics department and state of Minnesota officials to provide insight and input to the Pelican Rapids Project.

A BR&E retreat was held in October at the library where members of the leadership team, the task force, business leaders and others were led by Michael Darger, Community Development Director at the University of Minnesota. They discussed and prioritized projects to arrive at the four to be implemented.  
Leadership team listed

The Leadership Team consists of Brittany Dokken, Dawn Finn, Dena Johnson, CJ Holl, John Ohman and Don Solga. In addition, over two dozen volunteer Task Force Members were involved in business interviews.

Louis Hoglund  
Pelican Rapids Press  
[newsprpress@loretel.net](mailto:newsprpress@loretel.net)