

Survey: Residents Speak: BA gets economic guidance report

By TIM STANLEY World Staff Writer
1/4/2007

Broken Arrow should feel good about its chances for future economic prosperity, but it can improve those chances by taking action now, city leaders were told Wednesday.

Several community representatives gathered at Indian Springs Country Club to hear the first of two reports from Angelou Economics, an Austin, Texas-based consulting firm hired to help the city plan for economic development and make the most of its assets.

The reports will serve as a guide, officials say, for the newly formed Broken Arrow Economic Development Corp., an independent board established by the city, Broken Arrow Chamber of Commerce and Broken Arrow Public Schools to oversee community development.

For the first report, Project Manager Katie Bullard of Angelou highlighted improvements that the city should consider to spur economic growth and presented survey results from Broken Arrow residents and businesses.

The recommendations included developing a "comprehensive economic development vision," improving city infrastructure to keep up with the rapid growth and providing better support for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

The report also urged the continued development of the city's existing assets, including higher education institutions such as Northeastern State University-Broken Arrow and the city's Tulsa Technology Center campus.

"The importance of education to economic development cannot be overemphasized," Bullard said. "It's one of the most important factors."

Making a destination of downtown Broken Arrow also would be a good step, Bullard said.

More than 900 responses were collected from the non-scientific community survey, which was posted online.

Residents praised city schools and public safety, calling them Broken Arrow's "greatest assets," but complained about the city's dearth of entertainment and recreation options. Bullard said the city's Bass Pro Shops store and surrounding development are a first step toward addressing the problem.

Software development and professional services are the industries residents would like to see more of, with restaurants and clothing stores the most desired new businesses.

Businesses cited Broken Arrow's location and growth as the main reasons they located in the city.

"The surveys were well received," Bullard said. "The number of respondents we got was exceptional. People in Broken Arrow really care about economic development."

Comparing Broken Arrow to similarly sized regional cities in several categories, the study ranked the city at the top for the lowest unemployment rate and the most educated population.

Chamber of Commerce President Mickey Thompson said the report was encouraging overall.

"There are some soft spots that need some attention," Thompson said. "But that's not news. We knew that. The big advantage of this is that it allows all of us to focus on some areas and determine what we've got to do."

The final report -- featuring a two-part economic development strategic plan -- should be ready by the end of February, officials said.

The report will identify industries and businesses that would fit Broken Arrow, along with practical ideas for marketing the city to them.

The city, chamber and school district are splitting the costs of the \$120,000 study -- the district is paying \$30,000, the chamber \$20,000 and raising funds for more, with the city covering the rest.

The economic development corporation was proposed in 2005 after the city and school district butted heads over a now-shelved economic stimulus plan.

Having an independent board oversee economic development will ensure harmony and teamwork, proponents said.

Angelou has completed economic plans for cities around the country and in Oklahoma, including an economic impact study for The Channels, a proposed river development project in Tulsa.

Angelou has set up a Web site, www.brokenarroweconomicdevelopment.com, for more information on the Broken Arrow project.