

The Baytown Sun

Report: Baytown could thrive on 'power' theme

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BAYTOWN — Much of Baytown's expansion during the 20th century came because of its ability to provide for a nation's growing need for power. According to an economic development plan released Tuesday, the city's ability to power the nation is an attribute that can be used to sell the town.

AngelouEconomics, an Austin-based firm hired by the Baytown/West Chambers County Economic Development Foundation to come up with an economic development plan, presented its draft plan to the public Tuesday. The plan recommends a marketing theme, suggests industries the city should target to bring to Baytown and includes other possibilities.

The firm will collect feedback from the presentation, present the final copy to the foundation's steering committee and have the final report done by the end of October, said Angelou vice president Amy Holloway. About 70 people attended the presentation.

Holloway suggested coming up with a marketing theme for the city that revolved around power and energy, such as "Baytown, Powering Business." Such a theme would resonate for attracting all four target industry areas Angelou selected, even retail and restaurants, she said.

"Energy conveys vibrance, and a vibrant population that supports its businesses," Holloway said.

Kitty Allen, a marketing executive and a board member of Baytown's Municipal Development District, said an energy theme had resonance, similar to a slogan painted on a local Exxon Mobil tank, "Fueling America's Dreams."

"There's got to be an overreaching theme," she said.

Perception of the city is a problem, according to a draft report by Angelou. Many people both inside and outside the city think of Baytown as a dirty, industrial city.

However, the presence of employers like Exxon Mobil and Bayer serves as a major advantage for the city, Holloway said. She said most cities lack such an edge and are forced to use "hot-air balloon" themes, marketing their quality of life instead of tangible benefits like available employment.

“Baytown needs to be marketing around its major employers,” Holloway said. “You need to start touting them as a major benefit in the national realm.”

The report suggested using the theme to draw in four industries: building fuel cells, logistics and distribution, advanced, high-tech manufacturing, and restaurants and retail.

Fuel cells are a relatively new technology that use hydrogen instead of combustion to power cars, homes and businesses.

Baytown already has received attention for logistics and distribution centers, drawing such centers for Home Depot and Wal-Mart to West Chambers County. Advanced, high-tech manufacturing means cleaner industry, Holloway said.

All such fields would bring highly skilled workers to the area, Holloway said.

“Retail and restaurants are not necessarily primary jobs,” she said. “They’re the type that follow growth.”

Holloway said that the city can draw new retail and restaurants by providing incentives such as reduced permitting fees.

Some of Angelou’s recommendations are already in motion. The firm recommended creating some kind of annual festival. Independently, a group of citizens have already begun working on an outdoor festival, tentatively scheduled for May 14-15, 2005.

“Great minds think alike,” Mike Beard, chairman of the festival’s steering committee, said jokingly.

The report also recommended forming a group to promote civic pride. The draft report said the city suffers from “low self-esteem.” But the city already has the “Believe in Baytown” initiative, recently formed to promote the city among its citizens. Other recent civic pride efforts include a recent cleanup of Texas Avenue, which brought in about 35 volunteers.

Mayor Calvin Munding said the city is looking at new ways to address the city’s problem with sewer capacity. The city has difficulty supporting new growth because cracked sewer lines, both private and public, allow in rainwater and overload the city’s sewage treatment plants. He said City Council will soon consider a pilot program for the city to fix private sewer lines.

The city must do more to attract a younger crowd, according to the plan. It must find a way to make young professional feel involved in city leadership, such as forming an organization for them.

“When we look at high-tech communities and the most successful communities, they always have one thing in common — the average age is 32 or younger,” she said.

According to the 2000 Census, the median age in Baytown is 30.6 years old. Angelou’s report, however, found that the percentage of 25-44 year olds shrank since 1990, while the percentage of 45-64 year olds grew, indicating an aging population.

Over the past 15 years, the city has had a few plans, including the Regional Urban Design Team and the Baytown 2020 Comprehensive Plan. This plan is different because it focuses on economic development, said Lisa Urban, chairwoman of both the RUDAT and 2020 Plan steering committees.

“It’s great, it’s a good plan,” she said. “A lot of things here were mirrored in the 2020 plan.”

Former Mayor Pete Alfaro said one of the key difference in this plan and plans of the past is that this plan considered other governmental bodies, such as the Goose Creek school district and Lee College.

“I like that idea of having a combination, so all the different entities have one economic development plan,” he said.