

Development authority discusses region's economic future, assets

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Project managers from NorthernNVision were in Fallon on Tuesday to present findings to community leaders from seven Northern Nevada counties about the future of economic development in the region.

The Northern Nevada Development Authority (NNDA) has named the economic development strategy NorthernNVision, which will help determine the strengths and weaknesses of economic development in Carson City, Churchill, Douglas, Lyon, Mineral, Pershing and Storey counties.

NorthernNVision has been collecting data from all seven counties through a survey on its Web site, www.NorthernNVision.org.

The NNDA hired an economic development consulting firm from Austin, Texas, AngelouEconomics, to develop and help implement the strategy.

AngelouEconomics is currently completing the second of four phases in the strategy. A team from Texas was in Fallon on Tuesday morning to present the first report with data about the region's economic climate to the NorthernNVision Steering Committee, which consists of representatives from county governments and industry leaders in the area.

The report, called the Database of Assets, showed information on Northern Nevada's population growth, average age, educational levels, income and wages, labor force, industry clusters and regional strengths. Information was taken from the U.S. Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The region's population grew by 56 percent since 1990, ranging from above average growth of 119 percent in Lyon County to a 28 percent decrease in population in Mineral County.

The region's media age of 39.9 years is slightly higher than the national median age of 36.3 years. The Census Bureau figures showed only 24 percent of the region's residents fall into the "young professional" category of 25 to 44 years old, which is important because most high-tech companies want to see around 33 percent of residents in this age range.

The report showed the region has a low percentage of college-educated professionals and the region's median income is \$47,801, with the lowest in Mineral County and the highest in Douglas County.

Regional wages of \$32,069 are also below the national average of \$39,127.

Information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed the region's labor force grew 1.7 percent between 2001 and 2005, which significantly lags population growth. Two counties, Pershing and Mineral, saw a reduction in their labor force while the other five counties posted growth. None reached the national average of 4 percent growth.

AngelouEconomics reduced the data down to five critical issues: a lack of diverse and high wage jobs, lack of a young and professional work force, low number of college graduates, the rising cost of living and unaffordable housing and the strain on infrastructure and natural resources.

Their report further broke down the key issues each county faces. The key issues for Churchill County include having the youngest population of the seven counties, an average wage lower than the national average and the lowest unemployment rate in the region.

A focus group for Churchill County was held Tuesday afternoon, led by Katie Bullard, project co-manager.

The group participated in a visioning exercise to identify unique characteristics of Churchill County, things to change in the county and targeted industries to bring to the county. The focus group consisted of representatives from the county and the Fallon Tribal Development Corp.

The survey gathering will end May 31 and results will be analyzed and presented in the "visioning document" to the steering committee in June.

Bullard said information from all the focus groups will be used as the basis of the visioning document and will identify gaps between what exists now and what counties would like to see in the future.

Businesses and residents in the seven counties are urged to complete the three-minute survey on the Internet at www.NorthernNVision.org.