



To: Members of the Desha Forward Steering Committee  
 From: Jennifer Tanner, SGI Project Manager  
 Date: September 17, 2008  
 RE: Follow-up to Town Hall Meetings

### Desha Forward Mission Statement

Desha Forward will create and implement a strategic planning process for the county that is inclusive of all its citizens incorporating these core values: honesty, cooperation, trust, and focus on the future.

There were a total of 158 participants present at the September 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Town Hall Meetings in Arkansas City, McGehee, and Dumas. The participants voted unanimously to commit to the Desha Forward Mission and Planning Process.

Overview of Town Hall Meetings
Introductory Remarks (John Heard & Ken Shea) – Discussed the purpose of Desha Forward, the Draft Mission Statement, the timeline for the project, the reason and goals for the project, and why the Town Hall Meetings were being held. Introduced the Co-Champions and SGI / Connect-Arkansas Consulting Team.
Description of the Connection between Community and Economic Development, how technology is a key component, and a brief look at Census Data from Desha County.
Consulting Team Presentation will be posted on website when in place
The Town Hall Meeting participants split into small groups for a 30 minute discussion about the County's assets and barriers to success. Participants were also asked to discuss their top 10 wishes for Desha County's future. Each small group recorded their answers on a worksheet provided to them. A summary of these responses is available in the appendix.
Attendees at the Town Hall Meeting were asked to seriously consider whether or not they wanted to continue with the Planning Process as it had been presented to them. Several questions about the process were answered at this time. The meeting participants voted privately on a slip of paper, and were also asked to submit their contact information on this sheet if they were interested in being on a sub-committee. The votes were counted, and at all three meetings the participants voted unanimously to continue with the Desha Forward Strategic Planning Process.
A description of the Project's organization was provided, the phases of the planning process were discussed, and a preliminary schedule was announced. It was emphasized that expansion of the steering committee needed to continue.
Next Steps:
1. The Executive Committee met with representatives from AEDC on Monday, September 15, to

Overview of Town Hall Meetings
<p>discuss a statewide public announcement about the Desha Forward project. More details will be coming as the planning process continues. In order to align schedules of various state and local officials, the public announcement will take time to organize. The project will continue as planned into the Discovery Phase.</p>
<p>2. The consulting team would like to schedule interviews and focus groups in Desha County during the week of October 20<sup>th</sup>. 30-35 interviews and several focus groups need to be planned and scheduled. Will work with Executive Committee to get this process underway.</p>
<p>3. A detailed schedule and communications plan will be drafted and submitted to the Executive Committee by September 24<sup>th</sup>. A website needs to be developed by the community in order to post all related documents and announcements as soon as possible.</p>

Appendix

Desha Forward Town Hall Meetings—Arkansas City, McGehee, and Dumas  
September 2 & 3, 2008  
Small-Group Responses

Top 10 Assets in Desha County

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- § UAM Community College/Local Schools/Education (31)
  - § Healthcare Facilities (14)
  - § Yellow Bend Port (10)
  - § I-69 and four lanes of Hwy 65
  - § Long-term Care Centers
  - § Great River Bridge
  - § Local Government Cooperation
  - § Small Community Makes it Easier to Get Things Done
  - § Transportation Access—Railroad, Highway, Interstate, Airport, River (23)
  - § Low Labor Cost
  - § Spirit of Volunteerism
  - § Hospitality/People in the Community (13)
  - § Industry-friendly (2)
  - § Climate
  - § Low Crime Rate (4)
  - § Low Cost of Living (3)
  - § Access to State Government
  - § Parks and Recreation (11)
  - § Public Safety—Fire, Police
  - § Affordable Housing (4)
  - § Current Industries (5)
  - § Cooperative City Government (3)
  - § Banks
  - § Historical Sites (2)
  - § Labor Pool/Trainable and Available Workforce (4)
  - § Radio Stations
  - § Cell Tower
  - § Potlatch Paper
  - § Potlach (3)
  - § Harvest Rice
  - § Low Taxes (2)
  - § Lodging
  - § Abundance of Housing
  - § Japanese Relocation Camps
  - § Good Working Relationships Among Social Classes
  - § Bayou Barthelomew
  - § Wildlife (4)
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- § Agriculture/Farm Economy (13)
- § Location (6)
- § Timber
- § Positive Attitude of People
- § Boys & Girls Club (2)
- § Core of Committed People (2)
- § Less Environmental Regulation Issues
- § Devoted Community/Community Engagement (5)
- § Slow Lifestyle/Pace (2)
- § Quality of Life (2)
- § No Heavy Traffic
- § Hydroelectric Plant
- § Churches/Religious Faith (11)
- § Strong Heritage (3)
- § Food Pantry
- § Tourism (5)
- § EAST lab with Community Involvement (4)
- § Weekly Paper
- § Banks (2)
- § Rivers (10)
- § Plenty of Available, Fertile Land (10)
- § Major Utility Carriers
- § Potential for Energy Production (oil, soybean) (2)
- § Excellent Fire Insurance Class Rating
- § Potential Infrastructure
- § Legislative Delegation
- § Clean Air
- § Natural Resources (12)
- § Youth Involved in this Process
- § Improved Race Relations
- § Diverse Population
- § Lack of Congestion
- § Small Businesses
- § Artistic Talent

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#### Top 10 Barriers to Success in Desha County

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- § Uneducated/Unskilled Workforce (19)
  - § High Fuel Prices
  - § People Get Discouraged
  - § Lack of Professional-Level Jobs
  - § Not Enough Money/Low wages and Earning Potential (3)
  - § Disconnect Between Communities
  - § Drug and Alcohol Abuse (10)
  - § Lack of Land Development
  - § No Plan for Infrastructure Development of River Transportation by State (2)
  - § Small Business Incentives
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- § High Chronic Illness Rate Due to Lack of Preventative Healthcare
  - § Low Literacy Rates
  - § McGehee Downtown is Ugly
  - § Lack of Childcare, Especially for Night Shift
  - § Lack of Spur Service or access to Railroad of Local Businesses
  - § People in Power Want to Keep Their Power
  - § Business As Usual/Fear of Change (4)
  - § Lack of Motivation/Complacency (7)
  - § Lack of Quality Affordable Housing (7)
  - § Lack of Trust Among Races (4)
  - § Do Not Have Needed Political Strength
  - § Lack of Rail Service to Yellow Bend Port (3)
  - § Lack of Shopping Venues (13)
  - § Lack of Entertainment Venues (10)
  - § Too Many Single Mothers
  - § Lack of Corporate & Community Pride/Beautification (5)
  - § Amount of People on Welfare/Poverty Level (4)
  - § Lack of Finance (6)
  - § Lack of Industry with good pay (18)
  - § Lack of Access to Healthcare, Physicians (5)
  - § Lack of Restaurants
  - § Distance from Commercial Airport
  - § Lack of Infrastructure (9)
  - § Youth Leadership Training
  - § No YMCA—Men and Women
  - § Parenting Training
  - § Desha County is GPS Inaccurate
  - § Deteriorating Buildings
  - § Lack of Government Funding
  - § Lack of Youth Activities (8)
  - § Parental Involvement (3)
  - § No Movie Theatre
  - § Lack of Competitiveness
  - § Proximity to Metropolitan Areas
  - § Lack of Expertise in Grantsmanship
  - § Lack of Adequate Police Protection
  - § Vandalism
  - § Continued Declining Population (5)
  - § Aging Population (2)
  - § Lack of Bus/Public Transportation (5)
  - § Lack of Young People Involved
  - § Mobility to Work Across County Lines
  - § No Paid Professional for Economic Development (2)
  - § Lack of Economic Opportunity (2)
  - § Keeping Youth in the Community (3)
  - § No Tourism
  - § Same People Do Everything/Too Few People Making Decisions (3)
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- § County Revision
- § Lack of Promoting the Area and its Image (7)
- § Lack of Economic Development Plan, Implementation, and Follow-through
- § Too Far from Mississippi River Bridge
- § Lack of Technological Infrastructure (10)
- § Poor Work Ethic (4)
- § Mosquitoes (9)
- § Lack of Job Opportunities for Youth
- § Community Center
- § No Unemployment Office
- § Declining Small Business Community (2)
- § Impact of Globalization on Industrial Jobs
- § Condemned Homes
- § No Central Grant Writer
- § Emergency Shelters
- § Cell Phone Coverage is Unreliable
- § Recreation (3)
- § Lack of Communication/No Formal Communication Structure (4)
- § Healthcare (3)
- § Lack of 4-lane highway system
- § Remoteness
- § Code Enforcement
- § Cultural Diversity
- § Lack of Marketable Natural Resources

#### 10 Wishes for the Future of Desha County

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- § Oil Refinery at Port
  - § More Jobs/New Industry (12)
  - § Survival of Local Hospitals
  - § Thriving Retail Businesses/Entrepreneurs (3)
  - § I-69 Completion/Access (12)
  - § Hwy 65 will be four lane (3)
  - § Surveillance Cameras
  - § Movie Theatre
  - § Drug Tests for Anyone Receiving Government Assistance
  - § Completion of Bouef Tensas Irrigation Project
  - § Diverse Groups Working Together
  - § Higher Education Standards
  - § Reduced Drop-out Rate (2)
  - § Roads to Connect Southeast Arkansas to the Rest of the State
  - § Growing Population (6)
  - § Top 10 on All of the Good Lists
  - § Welfare Reform
  - § Great River Bridge (3)
  - § Benefactor Similar to Murphy Oil in El Dorado
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- § More Major Manufacturing (2)
  - § Development of Local Manufacturing
  - § Better Political Representation
  - § Diverse Educational Opportunities
  - § Higher Wages (5)
  - § More Shopping Facilities (8)
  - § More Restaurants (2)
  - § More Recreation (5)
  - § "Super Center" (3)
  - § More Community Involvement (4)
  - § Enhanced Emergency, Fire, and Police Services
  - § Main Street Arkansas
  - § 100% Volunteerism within the Community
  - § City Park
  - § High School Graduates Have Life Skills and Vocational Choices
  - § Community Center (3)
  - § Entertainment/Cultural Opportunities (8)
  - § Boys & Girls Club in Every Community (3)
  - § Adequate Funding to Achieve our Goals (4)
  - § Tourism (3)
  - § Museums (2)
  - § Safe Living Environment (2)
  - § Concert Center
  - § Youth Respect Their Elders
  - § Expanded College of Technology
  - § High Speed Internet Access for Everyone (10)
  - § More Technology
  - § Computer Literacy/Technology Center (3)
  - § Venture Capital Business Loan Center
  - § Saturday Classes for Development Skills
  - § Nutritional Health Center
  - § Friendly Customer Service
  - § Job Training Center
  - § Rail Line to Yellow Bend Port (8)
  - § County-Wide Health System (2)
  - § Communication Improvement
  - § Assisted Living/Retirement Facilities/Elder Care (4)
  - § Develop Arkansas City as Resource
  - § Remodeled Theatres
  - § Social Events
  - § More Community Services
  - § Better Access to Healthcare (8)
  - § Cell-Phone Service in Whole County (2)
  - § Cleaner Environment
  - § Drug-free Community/Workforce (2)
  - § Better Availability of Quality Housing (3)
  - § Community Pride (4)
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- § Code Enforcement (2)
  - § Skilled/Educated Workforce (3)
  - § Oil and Gas Wells
  - § Stop Brain Drain (2)
  - § Vibrant Downtown
  - § Better Place for the Arts
  - § Potential Transportation Infrastructure (3)
  - § Capitalization on the Creation of Added-value Agricultural Products
  - § Alternative Fuel Technology (4)
  - § Unlimited Supply of Government Grant Dollars
  - § Improved Educational Opportunities (9)
  - § Tutoring/Mentoring Program
  - § Another Community College
  - § Magnet School (2)
  - § Visitor's Center/Welcome Center
  - § Mosquito Abatement (2)
  - § Fitness Center (2)
  - § Motivated Workforce
  - § Public Transportation (5)
  - § More Public Access to Natural Waterways
  - § Money
  - § Zero Unemployment (2)
  - § Every Citizen Has at Least a 2-year Associate Degree
  - § More Racial Unity and Harmony
  - § More Public Access for Hunting/Fishing
  - § Bridge Across Mississippi River
  - § Improved Housing Stock (2)
  - § Desha County viewed as a Special Place/Improved Image (2)
  - § Continued Regional Cooperation
  - § Decreased Power Struggles Across Counties and its Cities
  - § No One Goes Hungry
  - § After School Programs
  - § Work Training Programs
  - § Improved Family Values
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