



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Nederland Town Board of Trustees
FROM: The Mayor's Economic Development Task Force
DATE: March 11, 2011
RE: Improving Nederland's Business-Friendliness Quotient

Background: The Mayor's Economic Development Task Force (MEDTF) was conceptualized during the summer of 2010 and directed to advise the current Board of Trustees (BOT) and town staff on ways that the Town of Nederland (Town) could support the local business community and encourage a robust local economy.

Outreach efforts to attract stakeholders to participate were made by way of notices in the Mountain-Ear, postings on the Town website, announcements at BOT and various advisory board meetings, e-mail notices to Nederland Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) members and word-of-mouth. The sole requirement for participation was that stakeholders express interest in being a part of the task force and participate in its activities.

The following Nederland business owners and Town representatives attended at least one MEDTF meeting and/or participated in the online document edits: Mayor Sumaya Abu-Haidar, Trustee Chris Perret, Trustee Rob Joseph, Town Administrator Alisha Reis, Ken Adler, Katrina Harms, Ron Mitchell, Shasta Fite, Randy Lee, Deb D'Andrea, Dan Ball and Kayla Evans.

The MEDTF held its first meeting on October 27th at the Nederland Community Center with the objective to provide recommendations to the BOT on how to improve the business climate, but with a triform approach in mind, e.g. raising the business-resident-visitor friendliness quotient. The MEDTF met two more times (January 27th and February 22nd) while at the same time utilizing e-mail to refine this memorandum.

During the time the MEDTF identified the challenges and obstacles standing in the way of economic development in Nederland, it took into account input from task force members, residents, business owners and the Town-sponsored Envision Nederland 2020 Community Business Workshop.

At the initial meeting, the MEDTF identified the following challenges and threats to a robust local economy:

1. Job losses and economic slow-down identified in late 80s.
2. Local economy needs to be more robust/less dependent on Eldora.
3. Difficulty of growing local economy with limited commercial real estate.
4. Limited accommodations for visitors.
5. Historically lukewarm attitude (Town staff/government) towards people wanting to start new business.
6. Lack of appropriate space for local artisans (cabinet makers, instrument makers, woodworkers, artists, etc.).
7. Local lease rates challenging for small businesses.
8. Vacant retail spaces.
9. Too few opportunities for locals to find employment in town.

The following goals were suggested as a result:

1. Attaining economic sustainability.
2. Diversifying the local economy with less reliance on Eldora or other large business.
3. Developing a long-term economic growth plan.
4. Balancing livability with the needs of a vibrant business community and healthy economic environment.
5. Balancing sustainability goals with economic viability.
6. Engaging the entire community in discussing these issues through Envision Nederland 2020.
7. Encouraging town government to take steps to more fully support the business community.

Finally, the subsequent specific ideas were discussed for meeting the suggested goals and/or addressing mentioned challenges:

1. Review town regulations to reduce road blocks to new businesses.
2. Research approaches to business outreach (user-friendly section of website, packet in materials at town hall, etc.).
3. Research other towns' approach to filling vacant spaces.
4. Research economic development approaches of other towns our size.
5. Town officials (mayor, TA) meet with local business owners to discuss needs and challenges.
6. Identify goods and services not currently offered in town and recruit businesses to fill those needs.
7. Encourage development of business park/space for small businesses and local artisans.
8. Consider marketing town to conference planners in Front Range area.

Using this input as a guide, successive meetings in January and February resulted in the four recommendations to follow. However, it should be understood that the MEDTF concluded its preliminary work before the Envision Nederland 2020 (Process) subcommittee had generated a report – whether interim or final. Moreover, since the MEDTF respects and supports the Process, the following two factors were given considerable weight: 1) the Process has not concluded, hence, there are no outcomes to consider; 2) it follows that the BOT is unable to provide clear and specific guidelines for what sort of economic development is desired and will be supported.

After careful consideration, the task force agreed that recommendations should be measurable and presented in such a way as to give the BOT the flexibility of individual or collective adoption. Most importantly, it was understood that they would in no way impede or taint the Process. The following four recommendations are now respectfully submitted to the BOT:

1. Establish a working group to review town regulations. Town Administrator Reis is willing to head up the working group and several stakeholders with considerable expertise in these matters have already expressed interest to serve. The group would:
 - a) Review Town regulations and make recommendations on how to reduce road blocks to new business.
 - b) Look to see how the special use review process can be improved to induce entrepreneurs to invest in Nederland (i.e. is current methodology too complicated, restrictive or long?).
 - c) Recommend changes to the Town Code to address barriers to business development (e.g. irregularities in property lines, ambiguities in language, etc.).
 - d) Determine if certain areas should be rezoned to be *live-work* space.
 - e) Review building and design guidelines, especially with respect to Town and Area residents' desire to maintain Nederland's appeal.
 - f) Develop a set of recommendations with special attention to the above and to Town Code enforcement with adherence to the understanding that when codes are not being enforced or are being flagrantly disregarded, immediate enforcement should not be done, rather an investigation into whether or not the code is obsolete, unworkable, undesirable, unpalatable, ambiguous, or just undulating is suggested.
2. Rev up the historically lukewarm attitude by the BOT and Town Staff towards people wanting to start a new business.
 - a. Recognizing that current Town Hall staff efforts have yielded positive comments that Town Hall is much more professional, approachable, efficient and respectful, the MEDTF recommends a continuation of efforts already in place with an eye to identifying and adopting other techniques to boost efficiency and effectiveness.
 - b. The Planning Commission should maintain a collaborative and helpful posture when considering applications.

3. The BOT and town staff should meet and communicate regularly with local business owners to discuss needs and challenges.
 - a. In a group setting within the existing framework of the Chamber's monthly mixers.
 - b. In smaller, more private gatherings.
 - c. Establish standing weekly meeting opportunities similar to "Coffee with the Mayor".

4. Decommission the MEDTF and re-activate it either under the purview of the Chamber, or as an independent organization. (The Chamber Board has agreed to receive and support the new group.) Depending on the final arrangement and upon submission of an approved plan, the Chamber and/or the Town might consider appropriating funds for the new organization. The new group should rename itself according to the wishes of its original members. However, for the purposes of this document we will use the acronym NEDA (Nederland Economic Development Association). Suggestions for topics/projects that NEDA can address in its more permanent role include:
 - a. Researching economic development strategies of other towns similar to Nederland, and among other things, determining their approaches to business outreach and filling vacant spaces.
 - b. Preparing and administering efforts such as surveys and workshops to identify and determine the types of businesses residents want and recruiting businesses to fill those needs.
 - c. Supporting art and culture. (E.g. explore feasibility of converting the stone building into an artisan workspace and the Magnolia Schoolhouse building into artist workspaces and studios with the Community Center Foundation.)
 - d. Assessing the feasibility and impact of a mixed use industrial/business park to provide local jobs supported by products/services exported from Nederland.
 - e. Analyzing the need for increased overnight accommodations for visitors along with a realistic assessment of Nederland's stickiness (i.e. ability to attract, engage and retain visitors).
 - f. Collaborating with other Town stakeholders to study how traffic flow can be improved.
 - g. Authoring plans that represents community goals for:
 - a. economic growth
 - b. visitor development
 - c. marketing the Town
 - h. Establishing a small business fund (revolving loan fund, start-up assistance, incentives policy).

It is the MEDTF's belief that, when successfully enacted, the results will foster a more business-friendly Nederland, while at the same time demonstrating sensitivity to concerns regarding overall development in Town.

This memorandum can be viewed as an interim report or a final one. If it is considered as an interim report (owing to the nature of the current Process), the MEDTF can be re-commissioned after the Process has concluded and the BOT has adopted an economic development policy. At that time, the BOT can entrust the MEDTF to continue its work and present a more complete plan for what economic development might look like in Nederland. On the other hand, if the BOT views this memorandum as a final report, it can accept the fourth recommendation.

Finally, although not a recommendation in and of itself, and assuming adherence to environmental sensitivity and a reasonable and adequate public input process, the MEDTF supports the BOT's 2010-2012 goals as stated in the Town's 2011 Annual Budget. It is the MEDTF's belief that, as these goals are reached, economic development will naturally occur (*however, we must be sure to have an active hand in how this change manifests*) and that Nederland will likely enjoy a complete and full growth of cottage businesses and industry.