Ideas discussed at Hometown Initiative event

By MARY ALICE MURPHY
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Tuesday evening, Hometown Initiative, a grass-roots economic development group, held its annual meeting and invited members from offshoots of the group to present reports to about 40 people in attendance.

"A little over two years ago, people started meeting to talk about what sustainable economic development would look like," Shirley Penarik, Hi moderator, said. "Many groups came out of that first meeting, including the Successful Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, the Systems Approach Team, now called the Community Economic Development Board; and groups advocating a community radio station and recycling. We've worked with the Gila Resources Information Project and Southwest Hispanic Round Table."

She said the purpose of the evening was to network and get new energy into project. Most groups had sign-up sheets available for those who wished to volunteer.

Earl Montoya represented Hi. "We were going to concentrate on political issues," Montoya said, "but we now deal with multiple community issues. We want to promote economic development for all groups. We realize if all groups advance economically, it will also advance Hispanics."

He discussed the Hurley soils contaminated with copper. "An environmental group did a study and determined that the maximum parts per million that would be safe was 3,100 ppm," Montoya said. "Feldspar Dodge took it to Santa Fe.

The Environment Department agreed with the company and set the danger level at 5,000 ppm."

He said things are not always disappointing, but that it is a health issue, which affects economic development.

"Who wants to tour a site or put in a hotel or restaurant if the site is possibly toxic?" Montoya asked. "We still want to challenge the 3,100 ppm as being too high."

Hi and state Rep. Manuel Herrera are pushing for a lively wage. Hi is also promoting a state health insurance program, according to Montoya.

Ken Henry reported that SEED hired an enterprise facilitator to encourage entrepreneurs to set up businesses or expand existing businesses.

"Watch for our new business, Henry," said. "We hold everything confidential, so we can't talk about clients."

Alice Pauser is a project coordinator, working for SouthWest Planning and Marketing Group of Santa Fe, which has a contract for economic development services for the Grant County Economic Development Coalition for Progress. The Community Economic Development Board serves as an adviser to the GCEDP.

"We are working on work-force development and job creation," Pauser said. "We are also developing a grant writer's task force, and working on attracting and recruiting small businesses."

She said infrastructure needs to be improved and "we need to have a well-trained workforce."

A. Wagnan, Silver City attorney, addressed community design and land use planning.

"The most important thing going on is the Extra-territorial jurisdiction advisory committee," Wagnan said. "The group is developing standards for the Extra-Territorial Zone, the three-mile area around the city limits. Developers have to go through the town's regulations and the county's subdivision regulations and sometimes they are in a different set of rules."

According to Wagnan, the ETJ is developing a common set of regulations for the ETZ. He encouraged people to attend the meetings and watch for town of Silver City agendas that address land use issues.

"There's no better way to educate yourself about land use," he said.

Steve Hargrave of Hometown Initiative said the group had discussed creating an economic development newsletter, but "it became clear there wasn't enough interest to do it in the in-the-trenches work."

He asked anyone interested in volunteering to attend town and county meetings to see if they hold to their comprehensive plans.

Joseph Gendron, representing Trails and Open Spaces, said the town accepted a plan in 2002. He was hired as brownfield coordinator to preserve green spaces and remediate problem areas.

He said Blastos properties classified as brownfields also were good open space, such as Boston Hill. Gendron said. "For recreation use, it has been determined that there is no problem from the metals that had migrated into the soils."

Hi volunteers are creating trails and he always needs more help. Other projects he is working on are long-term plans to connect Silver City to Scott Park, creating a trail along the Alcos Creek from U.S. 180 to Silver High School; and developing trails along Silvia Creek and on Mountainview Road.

Jane Olson is a member of a recycling committee formed in reaction to the town's and county's decisions to no longer fund the Southwest Solid Waste Authority and plastic recycling services.

"The reason recycling is not encouraged is because each household pays $5 a month for him, and it is allowed one ton of trash every month," Olson said. "This pay structure makes it too expensive and not recyclable. We need to distribute..."