

Gateway to the
Gila WildernessSILVER CITY DAILY
PRESS

Member of The Associated Press

Silver City Daily Press
Wednesday

ON THE WEB

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theDailyPress.com

Oct. 12, 2005

& Independent

Vol. CVI, No. 92 • Eight pages, five inserts 50¢

Ideas discussed at Hometown Initiative event

By MARY ALICE MURPHY
Daily Press Staff

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 Pevarnik, 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 Eco-

nomic 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 projects. Most groups had

sign-up sheets available for those who wished to volunteer.

Earl Montoya represented SHRT. "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 eco-

nomic, 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. "Phelps Dodge took it to Santa Fe.

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

He said he was not only disappointed, 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."

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

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

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

Alice Pauser is project coordinator, working for SouthWest Planning and Marketing out 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 adviser to the CECEDCP.

"We are working on work-force development and job creation," Pauser said. "We are also developing a grant writers 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 work force."

Alan Wagman, Silver City attorney, addressed community design and land use planning.

"The most important thing going on is the Extra-territorial Jurisdiction advisory committee," Wagman 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 a different set of rules."

According to Wagman, the ETJ is developing a common set of regulations for the ETZ. He encouraged people to attend the public 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 weren't enough HI volunteers to do 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 brownfields coordinator to preserve green spaces and remediate problem areas.

"A lot of 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."

He said 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 Pinos Altos Creek from U.S. 180 to Silver High School; and developing trails along Silva 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 glass and plastic recycling services.

"The reason recycling is not encouraged is because each household pays \$5 a month for the landfill, and is allowed one ton of trash every month," Olson said. "This pay structure markets to trash throwers and not to recyclers. We need to distribute

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costs of disposal more fairly by assessing a household's landfill rate by the amount of garbage produced."

She said better education is needed about curbside recycling services. The committee has primary and secondary school teachers ready to begin developing a school curriculum.

"We also need a state bottle bill," Olson said. "It will help the litter problem in our community."

She asked people to call their Town Council representatives and the town manager to encourage the funding of recycling services.

Mattie Johnson is part of a group focusing on alternative energy sources.

"We are encouraging alternative building processes and are working on brochures with information on alternative energy sources and building materials," Johnson said.

Frank Drysdale promoted bikability and walkability.

"Let's control our driving and take the perspective of 6-year-old kids," Drysdale said. "Things are improving. Our policies were accepted into the town comprehensive plan and changes to pedestrian and bike accessibility are seen in the plans for Hudson Street and U.S. 180. Our focus is safe routes to school."

Martha Egnal said she is the "mouth" of the organic food initiative, the community garden and the greenhouse project.

"We are citizens concerned about food sources," Egnal said. "Local is as important as organic. I think. We want a resource library so people know what grows here and what to do with it."

John Fridinger is a member of a committee planning to form a community radio station.

"We've been learning the particulars of community radio and the bylaws needed," Fridinger said. "Other stations around the county have given us information and helped us learn how to support a nonprofit station. We will have to buy an existing FM station. We need member and underwriter support and grants for initial funding."

The committee is seeking two revenue sources — one to buy the station and a second to fund ongoing operations.

"We're 15 percent on the way with our funding," Fridinger said. "We will have investors who are willing to give chunks of money. We have to buy a license and that will increase in value over time. We expect a good return on investment and investors can expect payback within five to seven years."

William Joseph of the Progressive Forum announced an event, "Peak Oil: A Community Response," to be held from 1-4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 3, at the Besse-Forward Global Resource Center. The term, "peak oil," indicates when the amount of oil in the ground is expected to reach its peak volume and then decrease in subsequent years.

When peak oil is reached within five years, according to experts, Joseph said, "it will change our life forever. Consumption is on the rise and production is decreasing. The hurricanes this year are global warming 'in your face.'"

He said people will have to change their lifestyle, because no combination of alternative sources of energy will allow the sustaining of the current lifestyle.

"It has to originate at the local level," Joseph said. "No government can teach us. Until we change how money works, we will change nothing."

Julie Schultz of Desert Sustainability spoke about house construction using passive solar design.

"We also have to evaluate substandard housing," Schultz said, "but not without having a fix."

The group has a training program for youths to fix problems.

She invited people to sign up for evaluations, as well as to help design and devise ways to help repair substandard mobile homes, old frame houses and old adobe structures.

"Where are people going to go, when they get cold and can't afford propane this winter?" she asked.

Participants in the meeting remained to network and ask questions about programs discussed during the evening.

Mary Alice Murphy may be reached at mamurphy@thedailypress.com.

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