

Heartland 2060: Where Do We Begin?

November, 2007 Meeting Summary

Overview

The second organizational meeting of the Heartland 2060 initiative held in the City of Sebring on Wednesday November, 28th was attended by 26 public, private, and community representatives. The meeting opened with presentations by Pat Steed, Director of the Central Florida Regional Planning Council and by Cambridge Systematics. Pat Steed presented, "Heartland 2060: Where Do We Begin?" an overview of the region's economic, social, and political dynamics, including overlapping regional relationships and boundaries within the Heartland. John Kaliski, Chris Porter, and Evan Enarson-Hering of Cambridge Systematics presented, "Heartland 2060: Getting Started", an overview of regional visioning, including key elements and approaches, as well as an introduction to the topical discussion issues of: Heartland values, leadership structure, issue working groups, and public involvement methods.

Following the introductory presentations, participants broke into three working groups. Each working group was asked to identify the region's core values and to discuss one of three topics related to the visioning process: the leadership and organizational structure, issue working groups' scope and composition, and methods of public involvement. The meeting concluded with discussions of the initial funding partners, and identification of next steps in the process.

Lessons Learned

Significant messages from participants relating to the future of the regional visioning process included:

- Ensure that previous work in region is acknowledged, accepted, and anchors the continued visioning work.
- Develop political and community champions and encourage broad participation early in the process to effectively build support.
- Acknowledge the region's own identity and the differences from coastal communities.

Heartland Core Values

Working in groups of eight to 10 people, participants were asked to identify core values and principles that they feel embody the Heartland and its residents. The lists developed by the three groups are shown below:

Heartland Core Values

Future	Character	Surroundings	Community	Growth
- Future for children	- Keep character of rural communities	- Stewardship and natural preservation	- Independence	- Smart growth
- Need for educational opportunities	- Sense of community	- Appreciation for open space	- Fairness	- Keep amenities
- Willing to change	- Pride	- Respect for agriculture	- Honesty	- Urban and rural lifestyle
- Desire to grow	- Friendliness	- Protect water	- Ethics and morals	- Planning before growth
- Do something different	- Small towns		- Sincerity	- Not the coast
	- Heritage		- Hardworking	- Sustainability
	- Tradition		- Respect	- Mobility
			- Entrepreneurial	
			- Faith-based and family values	

Breakout Sessions

Participants formed groups to address three significant organizational themes. These brainstorming sessions raised relevant issues and developed initial guidance to move the visioning process forward. The three themes addressed were:

1. Leadership and Organizational Structure,
2. Issue Working Groups, and
3. Public Involvement.

1) Leadership and Organizational Structure

Participants suggested that a formal Leadership Group with inclusive representation be established. Generally, participants expressed the need for a committed group of leaders representing public, private, and civic sectors, as well as smaller core steering committee. It was suggested that the chairperson of each of the supporting committees and issue working groups might form the core steering committee. The need to support the leadership group was anticipated, with:

- a. One or more technical committees to assist with issues related to data, modeling, and GIS tools and public involvement. These committees could be more informal, with voluntary participation on an as-needed basis.
- b. Several issue working groups with representation from subject matter experts (see discussion item #2).

The group also discussed the possibility of developing a group of elected officials over the course of the process that could provide a bridge to implementation. This concept is to be explored further, as it is a current best practice and typical element in regional visioning. The possibility of

creating a citizens advisory committee was suggested, but the group's sense was that existing county groups might well provide this function.

2) Issue Working Groups

The priority issue areas to be addressed by the Issue Working Groups were identified. The discussion group strongly recommended that membership of these groups should include representatives from the business, government, and civic or special interest communities. The groups and issue areas suggested were:

Transportation and Land Use: Addressing aspects of planning, policy, and decision-making at the intersection of these two issues.

Education: Addressing aspects of the region's educational systems with a broad focus on lifelong learning and educational pipelines.

Economic Development: Addressing aspects of the retention of existing small businesses and agricultural industries, as well as the region's business support networks, regulatory environment, and provision of utilities and infrastructure.

Environment: Addressing aspects of continuing regional access to recreational opportunities in existing and new water and natural resource protection areas.

Community Infrastructure: Addressing aspects of the region's health systems and its cultural resources.

3) Public Involvement

Participants brainstormed a variety of effective outreach and involvement techniques that could be employed within the region. Primarily, efforts focused on extensive outreach, engagement, and involvement of existing community leaders and organizations, special interest groups, and demographic blocs. Methods suggested included focus groups; opinion surveys (online, in person, and mailings); community presentations to existing groups, schools, and churches; and radio and public television programming. Interest groups suggested for these activities included local landowners and developers; farm bureaus; Audubon Society, Sierra Club, 1000 Friends of Florida, and other environmental groups; economic development organizations; and ministry Associations. Significant guidance identified by participants included:

- a. Draw on previous work in the region and communicate that earlier public input has been heard and will be used in this effort.
- b. Establish political support by getting elected officials and policymakers involved.
- c. Create a consistent message early in the process to encourage public participation.
- d. Focus educational efforts to communicate to the public why visioning matters, and simplify public materials and presentations.
- e. Bring outreach "to the people," recognizing that time constraints and long distances make it hard for many to attend centralized meetings.
- f. Work through schools and churches as effective ways of reaching the full spectrum of the region's residents, including minority populations.

- g. Be proactive in building early relationships with the media.
- h. Enable the ability to communicate to different audiences, including multi-lingual communications.

Next Steps

Pat Steed provided an overview of existing sources of funding for the effort. Currently, the Florida Department of Community Affairs has provided \$125,000 in grant monies and the Florida Department of Transportation has provided in-kind consultant resources. A general funding strategy was laid out that included state agencies, local governments, and private sector contributions. Local governments present indicated that it would be difficult to commit significant resources given current funding constraints, but that a modest contribution from each county may be possible. The CFRPC will follow up with each county and continue to identify potential private funding partners.

While not fully addressed due to time constraints, Pat Steed raised the question of branding to the group. The initial reaction was to continue with the “Heartland 2060” name. Pat Steed also announced that the web domains for Heartland2060.com and Heartland2060.org are available.

The next steps for the effort are to begin identifying regional stakeholders and issue working group membership; to finalize the initiative’s leadership structure; and to develop an initial work plan.

Finally, the next meeting of this organization group was suggested for January 23 or 30. It was acknowledged that Sebring appears to be a convenient and logical central site