

UNITY Listening Session

1/26/23 (Start time: @5:30pm End time: 7 pm)

Number of Participants: 2

UNITY Leaders: Emma Kelly, Terran Young, Jess Mullins, Jay Tyler

I. Starting Point

- a. Participant's Length of Time in Lee
 - i. Deb Artrip and her daughter Hannah are in attendance
 - 1. Deb has been in the local area for 52 years
- b. Board Supervisors
 - i. Considerations from the Community
 - 1. Fighting is necessary to see change

II. Strengths of the County

- a. Tourism
 - i. Beautiful county
 - ii. Lots of wildlife
 - iii. Animals
 - iv. Quiet neighborhoods and communities
 - v.
- b. Education
 - i. Smaller schools were much better

III. Weaknesses of the County

- a. Education
 - i. Current school is over a swamp
 - ii. Vo-Tech School
 - iii. Many schools in the area have roofing issues
 - 1. Lack of funding
 - 2. Old schools have better structures than the new ones
- b. Grants
 - i. Grants are not being applied for that could benefit the area
 - 1. Grant money is there but there is no funding because they are not being applied to
 - 2. **One of the biggest economic barriers for Lee County**
 - a. **Mr. Bost is the current grant writer, though listening session members do not know when he has applied to grants or what he has applied to.**
- c. Retaining of Community Members
 - i. Younger people leave the area
 - ii. County government jobs are not posted often if at all, meaning it goes to older members of the community
 - iii. Lots of nepotism in the area and success is based on who you know
 - 1. Many of the same families control the banks
 - iv. Emigration for better opportunity
- d. Audits

- i. Tax Audits: are they up to date?
 - 1. Local towns cannot apply for grants without audits being up to date
 - a. Inconsistencies in audits
 - 1. **Lee County tax audit shows the same amount of money being spent differently between the first page and the last page.**
- e. Lack of Communication
 - i. Community meetings and board meetings are poorly promoted in the area
 - ii. They are either publicized in the paper too late, or are hidden in the legal section of the local paper

IV. **Where do you see Lee County in 15 years?**

- a. Deb says she believes that Lee County will be abandoned or shut down
 - i. Does not see room for improvement, believes the area is in trouble
 - 1. Lack of things for older people to do
 - 2. Quality of living from town to town varies too much

V. **What can we as organizations do for Lee County?**

- a. Many of the older people in power shut others down quick
 - i. Members of the community easily lose spirit
 - 1. Once a decision is made, all fight is gone
 - ii. There is room for organizations to speak up when the community either can not or chooses not to.
 - iii. Aggression is necessary for change in Lee County
 - 1. "Either sit down and say nothing, or you are aggressive."
 - 2. Speaking up leaves room for you to be attacked
- b. Add more local events, businesses, and support
 - 1. Would like to see an eatery put in place for the community to eat at
 - a. Burgers, hot dogs, shakes, etc.
 - 2. Leeman Field
 - a. Great area for local kids to perform at the stage on the weekends, have light food, do it as a light fundraiser for the area
 - i. Ex: Charge \$5 to come support the local kids as they perform, hold events for the town to bring in money, etc.

VI. **Root Cause: Nepotism in the Local Government**

- a. **In the banks, schools, county offices**
 - i. **As long as you hire family members to secure permissions, there's no desire to expand or apply to grants because their own assets are protected.**
- b. **If you were to remove nepotism, you would solve 90% of the county's problems.**

VII. **Final Notes/Additional Comments**

- a. **Localities do not respond to local organizations who wish to aid them with applying for federal funds.**
- b. **Uniting is important and there needs to be a way to unite the community members regardless of political affiliation.**
- c. **There needs to be more open communication regarding funds.**
- d. **Local people do not want to run against current local leaders.**
 - i. **Promising candidates before voting in November**
- e. **What UNITY will do:**

- i. **Try to work out a rotating letter to the editor**
 - 1. **Keep eyes on the current issues to make sure we consistently get public awareness for it through the letters**
 - a. **300 words max**
- ii. **UNITY will look into the potential of holding an event at Leeman Park for the community, perhaps in the spring**
 - 1. **Tammy Joe Franklin is the local event coordinator**
 - 2. **Toys for Tots woman works at local thrift shop**
 - a. **Can see about coordinating the event with her**