

Community Listening Session on Economic Development: Kent County

Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Auditorium

89 Kings Highway, Dover, DE 19901

October 26, 2017

5:30 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

5:30 PM: Information Session

Participants signed in. Participants were able to walk around the venue and review each station to familiarize themselves with scenarios prepared to spur discussion about the Division of Small Business, Development and Tourism's future. Staff from the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration (IPA) was on hand to answer questions and provide clarification.

6:00 PM: Overview of Delaware's Small Business Landscape & Introduction of Scenarios for the Division's Future

IPA Policy Scientist Troy Mix delivered a presentation outlining the small business landscape in Delaware. He reviewed five findings on Delaware's Small Business Landscape:

1. Large companies with more than 5,000 employees account for a higher than average share of Delaware-based employment.
2. There is significant regional variation in the share of employment with fewer than 50 employees.
3. Minority-owned businesses account for below average share of Delaware's employees and receipts.
4. Women-owned businesses account for below average share of Delaware's employee's and receipts.
5. There is no obvious lack of providers and programs, with an estimated 73 service providers offering 275 programs supportive of small business development.

Mr. Mix provided an overview of each of the three scenarios that would be discussed for the remainder of the evening: (1) Connecting people to resources; (2) Being a great distributor of funding and resources; and (3) Championing local and regional economies.

6:15 PM: Facilitated Discussion on Scenarios for the Division's Future

IPA Senior Fellow Bill McGowan led participants in a facilitated discussion on scenarios for the Division's future.

Scenario 1 was discussed first, with participants expressing sentiments including the following:

- Participants liked the idea that there would be a “go to” tool for business owners, but felt there should still be someone at the Division available to meet with business owners in person.
- Concerns were raised about the Division’s ability to implement the scenario, given the small staff size.

Next, Scenario 2 was discussed. Sentiments such as the following were expressed:

- Participants felt this scenario could build on scenario 1 by allowing business owners to find resources that best meet their needs, but Division staff would need to be skilled at vetting businesses to best provide referrals
- Participants felt that strong relationships with the financing community were necessary
- Participants expressed a preference for matching private dollars with public funds to mitigate risk

Comments on Scenario 3 included:

- Participants did not feel that there was a need to create a decentralized approach, as Delaware is such a small state.
- There were concerns that this scenario would result in a “New Castle-centric” approach.
- Some felt that the decentralization of services would impede access to services.
- People liked the idea that this scenario could provide municipalities with help in designing and implementing their local economic development strategies.

Time was allotted for public comments but no one wished to speak.

8:00 PM: The Community Listening Session was adjourned.