

Best Practice

Community Development Leadership

CONTACT

Village of Hazlet and RM of Pittville No. 169

P. 306.587.2843

E-mail. rm169@sasktel.net

Mail. Box 112, Hazlet, SK, S0N 1E0

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THE PRACTICE

The creation of the Hazlet Economic Development Committee (HEDC) was the beginning of the Village of Hazlet being "re-vamped". Community members came together, formed a committee and developed a plan of what the community needed and valued. The committee is committed to motivating and involving the community. HEDC organizes fundraisers, town beautification, service enhancement, and asset mapping.

The community of Hazlet, along with many other rural communities in the South West, was facing shrinking populations, dwindling businesses and community extinction. The school was losing students, and being threatened to close, houses were bought by outsiders and were moved out. A few community members did not want to see this community turn into a ghost town, so they formed a committee that involved members from all ages, different community organizations and anyone who was enthusiastic about keeping the community alive.

THE PROCESS

The first step was to create a committee with a focus on bettering the community. After a few months of struggling to stay focused the committee decided to have a weekend workshop with Colleen Christopherson-Cote from Coronach. She works as an Economic Development Officer and is extremely successful with enhancing the quality of life and outlook for rural communities. Colleen helped the Hazlet Economic Development Committee to develop a strategic plan. The plan outlined the committee's values, mission, expectations, goals and vision. Colleen also helped the committee to implement the plan, she set the HEDC in a direction for ultimate success. The HEDC also had monthly visits from a member of Community Futures Saskatchewan. Community Futures is a network that assists rural communities with sustainability, economic development and small business support. Members of Community Futures attended our meetings and helped us to develop an asset-mapping project and connected us with province wide opportunities such as heritage development presentation and grant opportunities. The HEDC was advised to hire an Economic Development Officer (EDO) in charge of grant writing, community promotion and project development, so they did just that. An EDO was hired in August 2009 and is currently working for the HEDC and will continue for another year. The HEDC headed up the asset-mapping project and sent out a community wide survey to individuals and organizations. The survey was to identify what direction the community wanted to go in, housing needs, heritage info, community business, assets and skills. The committee developed the survey;

each member took 10-15 people to deliver the survey too. We also included the students and had them distribute surveys. HEDC has had an overwhelming return of surveys, over 50% of the surveys were returned. The results of the surveys will be put together into a database that will be used for statistics, grants, community improvement and help direct the HEDC in their efforts. The HEDC continues to meet monthly and is always looking for new opportunities. Developing a large group of partnerships and contacts province wide and finishing current projects is the HEDC focus at this point.

THE RESULTS

The Village of Hazlet has a wide variety of measurable outcomes. The community has seen a 30% increase in population over the last 4 years. Three new houses have been moved into town, and a number of new families have moved to town. Another significant outcome is that our school has remained open. The student enrollment has increased from 40 students in 2006 to approximately 70 in 2010. The community has also received some grants. Hazlet received a grant to do renovations to our rink complex, Village beautification grant and an Early Childcare Service grant. The Hazlet Economic Development Committee (HEDC) also has had impressive return on our Individual Asset Mapping project. The population proves that they want the community to succeed by filling out our extensive survey about what the HEDC should focus their efforts on. We have had a lot of interest from local businesses on how to improve service and what they could offer. This spring the CO-OP will begin renovations on an historic building. They intend to offer this to the community as a historical center or ice cream shop. This is just one example of many, that proves Hazlet's community involvement. Another example would be the historic railway station that has been owned by a local farmer for many years. The retired farmer has offered to donate the building back to the community. There is a lot of action happening in Hazlet, the community is buzzing with ideas, plans and excitement to remain sustainable.

LESSONS LEARNED

The community of Hazlet has learned that anything can be accomplished when you cooperate and work together. We have used local skills, services and ideas to help keep our town alive. The Hazlet Economic Development Committee would recommend using all the support that is offered from the provincial government with workshops, ideas and consultations. We would also suggest staying in touch with your region. Communicating with surrounding communities helps to create partnerships and better the province. Sharing ideas and plans helps everyone to succeed in the battles rural communities face. Be sure to stay focused, our biggest problem is that we have too many ideas and excitement, Colleen Christopherson-Cote made it very clear to us that it is better to do 5 things well than 10 things poorly. We have tried to keep that our motto when planning our projects and ideas.