

**Economic & Rural Development & Policy Committee
Fourth Meeting**

September 21 – 22, 2023

WNMU J. Cloyd Miller Library Forum Area

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS
OF RURAL NEW MEXICO
SPECIFICALLY LUNA COUNTY**

Presented by:

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Greater Luna County Economic Opportunity Council





Economic development is synonymous with the concept of cathedral thinking.

Having a far-reaching vision, a well-thought-out blueprint, and a shared commitment to long-term implementation of long-term goals brings about sustainable success.

With foresight and planning, future generations can enjoy the full realization of our efforts living in a vibrant and productive economy.

Challenge:

High unemployment/population loss/low wages



- **Unemployment for Luna County is 8.7% vs. 3.6% for the state.** Overall, the State through its economic development initiatives is improving, however Luna County has experienced higher than average unemployment rates when compared to the state for more than a decade. (July numbers from Labor Market Review 7-2023)
- **The county population is forecasted to dwindle from over 25,000 in 2000 to less than 22,000 in 2040.** (NMLFC Spotlight, April 2021)
- **Luna County has been declared as in a state of chronic poverty, with a poverty rate of 27.6%, that surpasses the national average of 11.6%, through four decennial census periods.** (US Census Persistent Poverty in Counties and Census Tracts May 2023)
- **Median household income is reported to be \$33,914, nearly \$21,000 lower than the state average and \$45,000 the national average.** (Census Quick Facts)

Solution:

The Council, as the designated Economic Development Office for Luna County pursues a program of work based upon their adopted Comprehensive Plan that is designed to offer new employment and community wealth opportunities.

- **Prioritization** of technical/trades education and certification opportunities at the county owned learning center.
- **Funding** infrastructure at the Columbus Industrial Park to attract new industry.
- **Creating** a broadband coalition and funding preliminary engineering to accomplish “Internet for All” in Luna County
- **Implementing** high-touch personal outreach in partnership with the DOH to get the most neglected populations connected to the Internet, distance learning and telemedicine.
- **Creation** of the new Film Office.
- **Removing barriers** to spur development of market rate housing
- **Breaking down cross-sector silos**, building intergovernmental partnerships and public/private partnerships, expanding capacity.

Solution continued:

The Council, as the designated Economic Development Office for Luna County pursues a program of work based upon their adopted Comprehensive Plan that is designed to offer new employment and community wealth opportunities.

- **Development** of a regional outdoor recreation asset inventory and job needs assessment.
- **Support** for designated open lands, trail development and Oregon Mountain Desert Peaks National Monument.
- **Provide leadership** for Leave No Trace sustainable tourism destination management principles.
- **Advocacy** in support of tourism destination development efforts expanding assets and access to the Florida Mountain Range and Cooks Peak.
- **Sponsor** the development of a tourism masterplan reflective of county values.

Outcome:



- Access to technical training and certifications such as welding, construction trades and fiber technicians allow unemployed and under-employed people to attain jobs with higher wages and benefits.
- Solving flooding problems, building new roadways and installing broadband in the industrial park creates demand from new industries that operate cross-border, especially agriculture and value-added operations such as meat processing.
- Access to affordable high-speed Internet supports and retains remote workers, improves online learning and sets the stage for attracting location neutral workers.
- New move-in ready housing improves recruitment outcomes for skilled workers such as teachers, nurses and public sector professionals.
- Enhanced outdoor recreation product development supports placemaking that improves the quality of life for locals, attracts visitors and supports the attraction of location neutral workers.



OUR FUTURE DEPENDS ON OUR ACTIONS



20 Years down the road,
the Luna County we have
is being shaped, or not shaped,
by what we do today.

Happy are those that dream dreams and are
willing to pay the price to see them come true.

— Leon Joseph Suenens

Goal:



Improve Technical Education

- Luna County will continue to seek funding and curriculum for local CTE, Career and Technical Education certification programs.
- Support resident demand for training and certifications required to attain higher wage jobs.
- Bolster local firms overwhelmed with service calls due to the inadequate number of trained or certified employees. (Current conditions impacts private sector bottom line and limits GRT collections.)
- Improve inadequate and untrained workforce to enhance attraction of new businesses and support entrepreneurial expansion.
- Prioritize our partnership with the SWNMCOG to continue entrepreneur start-up services through COSTARTERS.

Tactics:



- Develop relationships with businesses and inventory need for skilled workers needs.
- Focus efforts on development and attraction of new Career Technical Education courses.
- Partner with Western New Mexico University to add Drywall and Framing to the Welding CTE course offerings at the Learning Center.
- Collaborate with Motivation, Education & Training, Inc. (MET) for additional CTE courses, targeting CDL.
- Collaborate with Office of Broadband Access and Expansion (OBAE) for Fiber Technician curriculum and funding.
- Support Resound Networks curriculum for Fiber Optic Technicians.



Goal:

Ready for Industrial Development at the Border

New Mexico is significantly behind other states attracting Direct Foreign Investment and capturing other opportunities from nearshoring and supply chain strengthening.

- Leverage essential funding directed at the Border by the Governor and Legislature.
- Capitalize upon The Columbus Industrial Park as the only 24-hour border crossing in New Mexico.
- Collaborate with NMEDD & Border Authority to complete strategic planning.
- Improve Columbus Industrial Park infrastructure; roads, stormwater, power, water/wastewater, and broadband systems.
- Eliminate periodic flooding on the 1350 acres immediately north of the LPOE.

Tactics:

- Luna County will take the lead to build the Berm Project (\$19 million) and the associated infrastructure build out at the Columbus Industrial Park Phase 1(\$5.5 million).
- Partner with the NMEDD, and Border Authority to complete strategic planning efforts.
- Collaborate with the State and Border Authority to embrace opportunities to partner with Chihuahua and Mexico manufacturing operations related to electric vehicle supply chains and other industries associated with advanced energy and innovation.
- Focus on workforce development efforts key industries needed to support current and future industries (construction/manufacturing/broadband/new energy).

Goal:



Supply Affordable High-speed Broadband

- Improve Luna County availability for affordable high-speed broadband. (Defined by Congress as 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload).
- Eliminate one of the highest levels of digital distress in the country. (Currently nearly all Luna County residents do not have access to 25/3 Mbps service).
*Source: Finley Engineering Feasibility and Gap Analysis, August 2023
- Help businesses, health care providers, students and remote workers gain access to sufficient Internet speed.
- Improve economic development, residential health outcomes, and on-line education opportunities with high speed Internet.



Tactics:

- Support grant incumbents (Resound Networks, WNMC, Valley Telecom) as they work to implement their plans.
- Set regular cross-functional meetings with ROW partners (NMDOT, BLM, USFS and County Departments to eliminate barriers to successful implementation.
- Partner with Deming Public Schools and OBAE to support targeted student populations currently lacking service.
- Maintain close communications with OBAE and capture any qualified funding opportunities for targeted populations and anchor institutions such as the detention center.
- Conduct ongoing public engagement, service ACP recipients in partnership with the FCC grant and DOH.
- Identify solutions for the estimated 2000 households which will not be covered by any current broadband expansion grant award.

*Source: Finley Engineering Feasibility and Gap Analysis, August 2023

What IS won't be
What WAS isn't



It's not what we do that matters.
It's what we cause to happen.

Thank You



Greater Luna County
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