Memo to: Qualla 2020 Committee Members

From: John Weiser

Ben Sherman

Date: February 28, 2014

Re: **Notes from February 25th meeting**

This memo presents the notes from the February 25th meeting of the Qualla 2020 Committee, which was held in conjunction with the Finance and IT Summit.

Meeting Attendees:

The meeting was attended by the following individuals from the Qualla 2020 Committee:

Chief Michell Hicks

Lynn Blankenship

Chief Justice Bill Boyum

Vickie Bradley

Paulette Cox

Albert Crowe

Missy Crowe

Bo Crowe

Sis Forkiller

Chairman Terri Henry

Hope Huskey

Marsha Jackson

Tammy Jackson

Karla Jamison

Amy Kaloneheskie

Lisa Leatherman

Jason Lambert

Wanda Lawless

Skooter McCoy

Andrea McCoy-Garret

Paxton Meyers

Steve Morse

Forrest Parker

Wilbur Paul

Kim Peone

Gloria Rattler

Sadie Reagan

Ray Rose

Skye Sampson

Tommye Saunooke

Rich Sneed

Jacob Reed

Demakus Staton

Russ Seagle

Perry Shell

Ryan Sherby

Bill Taylor

Angie Tharp

John Tissue

Alica Wildcatt

David Wolfe

In addition, there were many participants from the Finance and IT Summit who participated in the Qualla 2020 portion of the day as invited guests.

Qualla 2020 overview

This was the first of six meetings for the Qualla 2020 Project.

Ben Sherman began the meeting by noting the core Cherokee values:

* Prayer, Faith, Spirituality
* Group Harmony
* Strong Individual Character
* Sense of Place
* Honoring the Past
* Educating the Children
* Sense of Humor

The Qualla 2020 Project will be conducted in ways that incorporate and are supportive of these values.

The purpose of the Qualla 2020 Project is to diversify the Cherokee economy and reduce its risks so that it can better ensure the well-being of the Cherokee population into the future.  In order to do this, the Qualla 2020 Project will seek to mitigate the dependence of the economy on gaming revenues, and to develop and expand businesses in ways that uphold the core values of the Cherokee people.

There will be five additional Committee meetings

* Friday, March 21, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
  + - Yellow Hill Activity Center (Old Hardware Store)
* Wednesday, April 23, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
* Wednesday, May 21, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
* Friday, June 27, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
* Tuesday, July 15, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Task teams will meet by phone between Committee meetings to develop detailed action plans for Committee review. At the final meeting in July, the Committee will choose action plans to recommend to EBCI Administration, EBCI Tribal Council and Cherokee Preservation Foundation.

Suggestions for Diversifying the Qualla Boundary Economy

The Committee members brainstormed a range of potential suggestions for diversifying the Qualla Boundary. These were grouped under five subject areas, and the Committee met in small teams to review and refine the suggestions. For each subject area, the suggestions that were considered most important will be mentioned first, and then all the additional suggestions listed afterward.

Please note that the Finance Department and the Commerce Department will form a committee to explore the creation of a tribal enterprise structure. The Qualla 2020 Project will keep in close touch with this committee’s work, but will not include the committee as part of the Qualla 2020 activities.

*Support for* s*mall business*

Small businesses are an important part of the Qualla Boundary economy, and helping entrepreneurs to start and expand small businesses can be a key strategy for diversifying the economy. The participants in the meeting noted the following as the most promising approaches to supporting small business start-up and growth:

* Market research on unmet needs and market demand. Small business owners need good information on what the market wants, but often can’t afford in-depth market studies. Conducting studies of interest and demand for particular market segments as a group could provide useful information for business owners, enabling them to target their products and services more accurately.
* Streamlined process for getting started. The process of getting started – from acquiring all the necessary permits to signing a lease – can be daunting on the Boundary. Developing a more streamlined process for permits and leases could speed the growth of small businesses.
* Streamlined process for getting loans. Businesses often need access to capital, and being to access capital in a more streamlined way would help to support expansion and improvements in businesses.
* Affordable space. Participants noted that it can be hard for businesses to find space that is leasable and affordable on the Boundary.
* Education/mentor program. The EBCI has a unique opportunity to encourage young adults to consider entrepreneurship when they receive access to their per capital distributions in a lump sum. Education about business opportunities and a mentoring program for youth that are interested in business could help them to both see business ownership as a viable career path and to better understand what they need to do to succeed.
* Incentives to attract small business. Participants felt that more could be done to provide incentives and encouragement for small businesses to locate on the Boundary.

Additional suggestions also considered:

* Encourage more diversity in business – many types of businesses are not represented on the Boundary
* Provide additional financial literacy and business education training
* Reform the BIA lease process
* Increase access to venture capital (Southwestern Commission is working on this)
* Take a more holistic approach to developing small businesses
* Support and encourage home/cottage businesses
* Clean up unattractive areas in the community

Tourism and Attractions

Tourism is a mainstay of the Qualla Boundary economy. Finding ways to expand tourism, particularly tourism based on the Qualla Boundary’s unique cultural heritage and natural resource, is critical in any plan to diversify the economy.

* Increased focus on cultural tourism. The Qualla Boundary has a heritage stretching back thousands of years, and a culture that is entirely unique. Continuing to promote this unique asset will be key.
  + Support for cottage industry and craftspeople. This includes help with marketing and promotion, and also ensuring access to necessary natural resources
  + Tours of historic sites
  + Show past attractions and the future of culture and attractions
* Outdoors and natural resources
  + Increased promotion of fishing, birding, and wildlife viewing
  + Creation of a wildlife preserve
* Culturally based mixed use space to help/push downtown to upgrade
* Central tourism “platform.” This would be an on-line site as well as an in-person location on which a tourist could book tickets and get licenses/permits for all attractions – Drama, Museum, golf, fishing permits, hotel rooms, etc. This would help to ensure that existing customers get exposed to all of the opportunities and attractions that Cherokee has, promoting longer stays and increased spending on the Boundary.
* Marketing spending at rates that are comparable to competitors. Cherokee is out-spent by its competitors at a significant level, making it hard to continue to capture the “share of mind” of potential visitors.
  + Family focus – marketing should continue to emphasize the “family-friendly” aspects of the Cherokee experience
  + “Destination mindset” – marketing should emphasize the Qualla Boundary as a destination worth visiting in its own right, not just a stopping point on the way to the Park.

Real Estate

The participants in the real estate discussion divided the suggestions into two major groups: on the Boundary and off the Boundary.

*On the Boundary*

* Clarify and simplify the processes pertaining to real estate. These include:
  + Assessment
  + Appraisals
  + Legal structures
  + Incentives
* Create a shared vision. This would include clear expectations, goals and outcomes from real estate development and use
* Commit to land use planning that is adopted and supported widely. The Tribe needs to decide what the highest and best use is for specific areas on the Boundary, and then commit to bringing together the community in support of those uses. Planned communities and planned development will be important if the limited real estate on the Qualla Boundary is to be utilized to its fullest.
* Authority and funding. An organization needs to be designated to develop some of the currently unused or under-used parcels, and provide with both the authority and the funding commitments required to move forward successfully with development.
* Branding and marketing. Once there is a shared vision, land use planning, and authority and funding, the EBCI will need to brand and market the parcels and areas to bring in private investment and encourage owners to join in the process.
* Parcels to be developed include:
  + Casino lower parking lot
  + Elementary school site
  + Former high school site
  + Long Blanket site
  + Coopers Creek
  + Cherokee Crossing

*Off the Boundary*

* Expanding the number and types of housing available. Limited housing availability off the Boundary is a recruitment barrier for EBCI and for potential EBCI Enterprises. Housing to be developed would be mixed income housing, both rental and for ownership; rental housing funded through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (income based eligibility) would also be important, particularly for service workers at the Casino.
* Community development – creation of community buildings and assets outside the Boundary would help encourage investment and development by individuals, reducing some of the pressure on property within the Boundary.
* Income properties (cash flow). The Tribe could continue to diverse the sources of its income by investing in properties that generate income and cash flow. These could include housing, office and commercial real estate spaces. Real estate ownership would help diversify the investment portfolio of the Tribe.
* Development opportunities. The Tribe could actively pursue real estate development opportunities off the Boundary – bringing resources to where the demand is.

Government 8(a) Contracting

The meeting participants noted that 8(a) contracting offers the opportunity to grow in scale rapidly, and is a route that has been followed by individuals from many tribes. Potential opportunities include the following:

* Utilities contracting. This is a growth area, and includes providing services to utilities as well as providing construction and field service materials
  + IT services. This can include running a data center, delivering broadband, and providing security and communication services
* Architecture, engineering, project planning and design.
* Energy consulting and contracting.
* Manufacturing. This is an area in which many tribes have worked with considerable success.
* Multicultural diversification training. Participants noted that the federal government spends millions of dollars purchasing multicultural diversification training, and that the EBCI would be uniquely well positioned to provide this service.

Knowledge Industries

Three themes emerged in the discussion about knowledge industries: utilizing existing broadband infrastructure to support existing businesses; expanding the broadband and communications infrastructure; and, expanding the number of knowledge businesses and the knowledge workforce.

*Utilizing existing broadband infrastructure to support existing businesses*

* Create a database of tourism-based businesses and attractions and make it available on the web
* Groupon, TripAdvisor, etc: encourage local businesses to take advantage of web-based services such as Groupon and TripAdvisor that help generate new traffic for existing businesses and attractions
* Create wifi hotspots around town, and use them to provide RSS feeds and podcasts directly to mobile devices, providing interpretation and information about history, culture and nature.

*Expand broadband and communications infrastructure*

* Upgrade Cablevision; get high speed internet (fiber) to homes (“the last mile”).
* Buy Verizon and Frontier stock, and use stock ownership to advocate for more services and better coverage.
* Encourage companies to build more cell towers, and use the Tribe’s leverage to allow additional leases/co-location.
* Create nontraditional partnerships (Tribe, town, counties, utilities, etc.) to help expand the broadband infrastructure.

*Expanding knowledge industry businesses and workforce*

* Evaluate current tech strengths in the community, and decide what sites we want to specifically target for tech businesses.
* Work toward creating, supporting and attracting small knowledge industry/tech businesses.
* Provide education about opportunities in knowledge industry businesses.
* Partner with larger (international) companies to offer internships for students and put them into position to be hired after graduation.
* Leverage WCU programs (for example, engineering). WCU has committed itself to spur regional prosperity by supporting the Knowledge Economy.
* Video and film – step into the gap created by the cuts in the North Carolina film incentive program.

Sign up for Task Teams

Individuals signed up for specific task teams as follows:

*Knowledge industry/broadband*

* Ryan Sherby
* Hope Huskey
* Paula Wojokowski

*Small business*

* Gloria Griffin
* Demakus Staton
* Carla Jamison
* Russ Seagle
* Ray Rose
* Paula Wojokowski

*Government and 8(a) contracting*

* Gloria Griffin
* Forrest Parker
* Angie Votaw
* Jacob Reed
* Paula Wojokowski
* Jason Lambert

*Tourism*

* Forrest Parker
* Wilbur Paul
* Amy Kaloneheskie
* Lisa Leatherman
* John Tissue
* Paxton Myers
* Scooter McCoy
* Wanda Lawless

*Real Estate*

* Adele Madden
* Jason Lambert
* Albert Crowe
* Charlene Owle
* Melissa (Missy) Crowe
* Bill Boyum

Additional individuals may be recruited to serve on specific committees based on experience, knowledge and interest.