



Minutes from June 2, 2016 Quality of Place (QOP) Kick Off Meeting

In attendance at the Chamber office:

Larry Wickert (SCEDF / North Judson)

Diane Thalmann (SCEDF / NIPSCO)

Jane Anderson (Bass Lake)

Tyler Maffitt (WKVI)

Joan Ludwig (Chamber)

Rachael Herbert-Varchetto (SC Leader)

Rachel Lenig (Community Foundation)

Jerry Gurrado (Chamber / SCILL)

Ron Gifford (SCEDF / SCILL)

Debbie Mix (Starke County Chamber / SCEDF)

Rick Anderson (Pres Bass Lake Property Owners)

Pam Stalbaum (County Council)

Carol Blastic (Bass Lake)

Ted Hayes (Hospital / SCEDF)

Jake Lippner (EMA / Woodstarke)

Miranda Ray (SCEDF photographer)

Ron Gifford welcomed everyone to the kickoff meeting.

Larry Wickert gave a brief background of the SCEDF quality of place (QOP) board initiative, including the importance to Starke County's economic development efforts. The QOP initiative is being led by a subcommittee of the SCEDF marketing committee, in partnership with the Starke County Chamber of Commerce, and chaired by Debbie Mix. Larry shared that the number one criteria for companies looking to expand or relocate is the availability of quality workforce. He noted that the current trend with younger people is for them to decide where they would like to live, and then they look for a job. QOP is simply making our county a place where people want to live, work and play. This will enhance Starke County's ability to provide quality workers for companies, leading to increased opportunities for all.

Debbie Mix shared insight from two sessions on QOP that she recently attended. One was hosted by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA). The other was put on by the Northwest Indiana Forum (NWIF) and was entitled "For the Love of the Region", which was based on the book "Love Where You Live" by Peter Kageyama. Focus was on ways communities, counties and regions are addressing QOP. Debbie gave some examples that other communities have done, including a social media program, dinner with your neighbor involving local restaurants, "Mice on Main" scavenger hunt, signs placed in local parking lots encouraging walking to nearby attractions, dinner on the bridge, county tee shirts and county festival tee shirts. A traveling 7-foot sign painted by local groups was one idea that originated at the NWIF event. Debbie encouraged us to come up with our own ideas that will work for Starke County.

Diane Thalmann suggested that we might consider two or three things that we can accomplish and be successful at this year. She commented that there are many good things already going on in Starke County and perhaps we might consider identifying some of those and work to help make them better.

A lively discussion ensued covering ideas that might make Starke County a better place to live, work and play. From that discussion three general themes emerged:

- **Bass Lake Beach** – Years ago the Bass Lake Beach was THE summer place to go in Starke County. People came from all around, including Chicago. The Beach was sold and is no longer the jewel it used to be. Discussion centered around how we would like to see the Beach and how are we going to help fix it.

It was decided that those interested in this topic would meet separately with Debbie Mix and the Bass Lake Park Board to pursue this discussion further.

- **Young People’s Group** – While many young people think that there is nothing to do in Starke County, in fact, there are a lot of things going on. Under the leadership of Jake Lippner, September 10, 2016 will be the third year for Woodstarke, an outlet for arts in the County. Other ideas to expand on this one weekend were tossed out, including movies in the park and a weekend music fest in North Judson. As Jake said, “I saw that things could change. We need to stop focusing on the negative . . . and be proud of what we have.”

Those interested in growing this young people’s group will get together at our next meeting and continue to build on ideas that were generated. It is open to all ages!

- **Promotion** – A big part of the discussion centered on how many good things Starke County does have . . . our festivals, trails (esp. in North Judson), new B&B’s and rentals at Bass Lake . . . and how we just haven’t got the word out about these things. There would be interest from people as far away as Chicago if they were aware of these opportunities.

Those interested in creating an action a plan to help get the word out about activities going on in Starke County will get together at our next meeting.

Larry Wickert wrapped up the kickoff meeting. We set **our next meeting date for Thursday, June 16 at 6:00 pm (Central) at the Starke County Economic Development Foundation (SCEDF) office.** Everyone is encouraged to bring along another person to join us.