BRECC – WY Notes -10.23

Background: I was chosen to be on the NACo (National Association of Counties) BRECC (Building Resilient Economies in Coal Counties. Renee Regal, former Becker Economic Development and also selected to be on NACO BRECC provided you an update to the June meeting in western Virginia. Below are my notes. For those that attended the ETAC meetings and were a part of the ETAC plan, you will recognize some very strong veins of thoughts in MN’s plan to what you read below.

* Importance of Place-making to bring people and businesses to a community
  + Appealing downtowns
    - Facades
    - Coffee shops and places to eat
    - Places to shop
    - Entertainment – from ongoing events (theater) to annual festivals
    - Beautiful places for people to gather. From Holiday lighting, flowers, trees, benches to sit, walking paths, etc.
  + Housing (apartments and vacation rentals) for downtowns
  + Use what you got to bring people to/visit/spend money in the community (WY used its vast paleontology as a basis for an event) maybe some will stay or start a business. Or make something up (this made me think of Pease, MN – their annual Pickle Days. Its brings allot of people to Pease for their annual festival.)
  + Target industry development. Taking an approach to focus on only certain industries to bring to a communities versus spreading yourself thin.
  + Important to work with your utility. Leveraging their resources – staff, economic development, grants, expertise, ask them to assist on areas that need help. Ensure that they are a part of collaboration and partnerships.
* When Nuclear Comes In. (or any other large industry)

The location of Kemmerer, EY is small. 2000 population. They have a very large coal power plant and an adjacent coal mine. Recently Bill Gates announced that he is working on a small nuclear plant. What they learned:

* + Educate the public on the new industry.
  + How will the industry impact current industries/bring other related industries. They feel nuclear will not only impact electric generation, but the nuclear medical device world
  + Work with Higher Ed for skill development for the new industry.
  + Work with the State, County, City, Regional Eco Development org, etc to message, for funding packages, licenses and permits, etc.
  + Infrastructure is important. Know what you have for when the company comes. Know what your community needs.
  + Planning is critical. Comprehensive Plans, update zoning codes. Revisit periodically – 5, 10 and 20 years out.
  + Communities need to reach out and work with their State
  + Do you have a communications point person? Kemmerer receives numerous calls and emails regarding the new industry – they did not plan for this.
  + Shovel Ready sites are needed. However, this designation is not consistent through-out the US (the ETAC also determined this need and concern)
  + Communities need to know their identities. What is your vision of your community? Staff know the community stats, the electeds need to know also when mtg with businesses.
  + Business Retention and Expansion is a great foundation for economic development. Know your local community’s businesses and products. Leverage current business’s expertise with new businesses needs.
  + Build partnerships: Local, County, Non-Profit, State, Chamber and Business
    - These bonds can attract businesses
  + Access Federal Partners
  + Rocky Mountain Power (the MN Power, Otter Tail and Xcel Energy equivalent) is funding a grant writer to assist the impacted communities access Federal/ other funds.
* Not every community is ready to move forward. Some are still trying to prevent closures. Some are grieving.
* Housing
  + They had a summit in which developers, builders, local & county government all met on the housing needs to see how to address.
  + They were trying to figure out how to create housing w/o governmental funding
  + Outcome – City had a housing study completed.
    - This study triggered a transportation and school needs study.
    - All the plans further helped the community plan.
* Funding
  + Wyoming worked with local businesses to help find match money for Federal grants
  + Need to argue your funding needs – even if denied.
  + See the IWG – Getting Started Guide.
  + In WY, they have a Senator that has a grant person on staff that will find grants for communities, argue for the community why projects are not funded,

An item not discussed, but witnessed:

-The need for a strong leader. In Kemmerer this was clearly the Chamber President. She was a local business owner, ran the Chamber, has a small AirBNB in the community’s downtown – the only place for someone to stay downtown. She really got people working on ways to improve the community – working on façade’s, welcoming new people and businesses, annual events, and needs assessments.