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City manager lays out 10 steps to economic development



Rick Daniels

NEEDLES — Rick Daniels, Needles city manager, gave a presentation on his point of view of economic development and how it needs to be done to help the city recover during the city council meeting Nov. 12.

Daniels said there's been a lot of talk of economic development and there's a striking need for it in Needles. He also said he wanted to define economic development because there are a lot of things that get attributed to economic development but are not.

He said it's defined as any activity that raises the overall wealth of a community. Economic development is a private investment, not government, he continued.

It's about the purchase of goods and services such as homes, meals, hotel stays and hard goods, Daniels said. It's important to bring money in from outside the community, he added.

Once money is brought into the community, it'll pass six times, he said. It'll go from the hotel, to gas stations to the grocery store. The question is how to get people to spend their money within the boundaries of Needles.

It's also about exporting goods, he added.

The government's role is intervention in the market place to facilitate and expedite private investment, he said. The government is supposed to promote the area.

Daniels said it's important to work with surrounding areas but then to sell Needles hard to others. There also needs to be dependability on the part of the government because business won't come if setting up is too difficult.

Daniels called location the yin and the yang of the Needles' situation. There are opportunities for Needles by being in the Tri-state area but there are also pitfalls.

Benefits include being close to the Colorado River, Interstate 40 and being the Gateway to California. He said those things are irreplaceable.

Pitfalls include being so close to states that have less government red tape and have lower taxes, he said. Geographic isolation is also a setback for Needles.

Daniels emphasized the importance of the fact that Needles' population has flatlined. Bullhead City, Laughlin, Lake Havasu City, Mohave Valley/Fort Mohave have all grown rapidly, he said. The economy in Needles has stayed flat and without certain actions, it will stay that way, he continued.

Daniels laid out 10 actions for the city to adopt at a later time. The first is to create a single plan of action, he said. All the groups, such as the Needles Downtown Business Alliance, Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation, all need to be on the same page, he continued.

Action two includes continuing to clean the city. He said it's important for the community to be physically attractive to businesses and visitors.

Action three is to continue to keep a low crime rate, Daniels said. Families decide to live in places based on how safe they feel.

Daniels said the fourth action is to support existing businesses by attracting tourists. One way to do that is through attractions such as Route 66. He talked about how key the historic roadway is to creating traffic through Needles.

Supporting existing businesses by attracting new residential growth is action five. To support existing business, the city needs more people, he said. The typical story around this area is "I came to visit, I liked it, I stayed," Daniels explained. If there are more customers, that will help existing businesses.

Having good healthcare options and services is action six. It's important to have good medical care or people won't live here or spend time here, Daniels said. The senior center and the hospital are key components to action six.

Action seven is recruiting retail and other tax-producing business. That's the primary way

the city is funded is through its sales and property taxes, he said. There needs to be a mix of national and regional retailers to help attract residents and visitors.

Action eight is marketing the low energy rates. Daniels said Needles' rates are incredibly low in comparison to other neighboring cities. This could attract other business.

The last two items deal with education. He talked about how businesses will locate to cities if there's an educated work force.

It's important to have a healthy, successful school district so employers know the workforce is educated but also because mothers are the ones who decide where to move to, Daniels said. They want their kids to be in good schools so it's important that Needles' schools are successful.

This also goes for the Needles Center of Palo Verde Community College. The city has a real advantage by having that center in town, Daniels said. There are a variety of business skills students can learn via the center.

"When you think of educated communities, you think of prosperous communities," he said.

Daniels emphasized the importance of partnerships within and around the community. It's about the convergence of interests between the community and private investment, he said.