

Butler Eagle

Common vision could drive county's economic growth

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Are the principles of community organizing and economic development compatible? In Butler County we're about to find out.

In a presentation Monday night to Zelienople Borough Council, Nick Neupauer, president of **Butler County Community College**, laid out his vision for prosperity through unity — the Butler County Unified Plan.

If the county's economic groups are more unified, its economic development could go from good to great, Neupauer said.

“What I found out doing my research is — and this is not meant as a criticism of anybody — but the right arm doesn't really know what the left arm is doing in a lot of cases in Butler County,” he said.

In the interest of economic unity, BC3 is pursuing the Butler County Unified Plan, beginning with a study and planning process for economic development. The plan will aim to unify a number of interest groups and agencies under a common vision. The study by Fourth Economy, a Pittsburgh-based consultant, will begin in January and take nine months to complete.

Whether or not it was his intention, Neupauer's plan embraces three tenets of community organizing, introduced by the father of modern community organizing, Saul Alinsky, in his book “Rules for Radicals.” The three tenets are:

1. The first rule is that there are no rules. Consider new approaches to old problems and challenge the existing power structure.
2. People and money represent power, but true power comes from organized people and organized money.
3. The community organizer's role is to identify common objectives along with any barriers to the common objectives. This is done through a series of one-on-one interviews with a multitude of community leaders.

The source of these principles is not as important as the fact that they are proven effective, particularly in the pursuit of political and social agendas. At least two counties in Pennsylvania — Blair and Indiana — are applying these principles in a unified agenda for economic development.

According to its website, Fourth Economy's consulting process involves doing interviews and

surveys with business and community representatives, analyzing data to identify trends and making recommendations that include connecting partners and focus on solutions.

Some aspects of the plan include identifying the county's advantages and barriers to growth, investing in infrastructure, addressing business retention and creating an organizational structure for implementation and communication.

Participants include BC3, Slippery Rock University, school districts, county commissioners, the Community Development Corporation, county planning commission, county redevelopment authority, representatives of agriculture, businesses, the Butler County Tourism and Convention Bureau, Butler County Council of Governments, Butler County Association of Township Officials, Butler Health System and chambers of commerce.

The program's success might depend on how many more business and community entities join this growing list of participants in pursuit of a common vision for prosperity.

— T.A.H.