

OP ED – from Joe Conaway, Chairman, Sussex County Economic Development Action Committee

Suggestions that may help

Back in June, I hopefully provided some background information as to the Sussex County Economic Development Action Committee. With our diverse talent pool of volunteers whose work experience in Economic Development numbers well over 100 years, we have and will continue to bring jobs and businesses to Sussex County. But without your support our efforts will fall well short of our goals to provide job opportunities for our young people. One statistic that continues to haunt me is one that tells us the Sussex County and the Delmarva Peninsula continue to lead the nation in the highest outmigration of 18 to 25 year olds. THIS TREND MUST BE STOPPED. In my own family two of my four children have left their home county to find work elsewhere. The other two work in education which I submit is the largest group of professionals in Sussex County. But not everybody is cut out to teach and moreover, not everybody should go to college. That's why our efforts must bear fruit.

Towards that end, we believe that our education system must step up to provide the job training programs that are needed. In Sussex County there are a number of programs that are doing just that. The Cape Henlopen, Woodbridge and Seaford School Districts, to mention only a few, offer vocational programs that could address the needs of our young people. Delaware Technical and Community College continues to be the shining light when it comes to opportunities for job training. Sussex Tech High School should lead the way in these endeavors. The recent unpleasantness in the district must be corrected so that they can become the training facility that was envisioned when the vocational school districts were created many years ago. This school must move from the best academic high school in Sussex to the best technical training facility in the State. OUR CHILDREN DESERVE THE BEST.

We must develop strategies that provide for the future of our young. The health field and the tourism industry are two job areas that must be expanded. Training programs available now must be updated and expanded to support these industries. More importantly, the salary in those fields and all others must be upgraded. It is no longer acceptable to point to these salaries as "good" for this area; these fields must provide salaries that are competitive with these positions elsewhere. We in SEDAC point to our quality of life to promote Sussex, but that is not enough. Salaries at the appropriate level will help to keep our young people here. Salary levels should be another tool in our efforts to keep our treasures here.

Let's look at the problems we are facing in housing. Affordable Housing, by definition, means homes priced at or under \$250,000, is not available in all parts of the County. The Sussex County Planning and Zoning Commission is wrestling with a new Comprehensive Plan for 2018. One of the issues that they have heard over the past year of public meetings and comments has been the need for more affordable housing. These comments have come mostly from the Eastern side of our County, yet every time an affordable housing community is planned, great opposition is developed against such a proposal. We can't have it both ways. If we need these

homes, then we must support these applications. The same thing is true when it comes to quality commercial development. The great hue and cry is that we need to have such shopping here but again, when the applications are presented, opposition forms overnight.

Both of these types of developments bring with them job opportunities and, although I am not naïve enough to believe that all development is good, it would be a breath of fresh air if opponents of these developments would offer suggestions for improving the applications instead of a blanket, “not in my backyard”.

Training, salary improvements, housing and job opportunities are part of the solutions needed if we are to sustain Sussex County as a “Place to be”.