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Strategic planning session aims to find road map to economic success

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The idea that time is money is not lost on members of Flagler County's business community. But this past Tuesday, more than 100 business owners, elected officials and community members spent the day at the Hammock Beach Resort investing their time in the county's future.



Photo provided by Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity
 Local government officials, business leaders and community members gather for a group photo during a strategic planning session at the Hammock Beach Resort.

The event was a strategic planning session sponsored by the Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity and the goal was to map out future goals and objectives to grow the local economy, attract high-paying jobs and keep the region competitive.

Helga van Eckert, the department's executive director, said the planning session was meant to keep the community informed about efforts to attract businesses and build for the future.

"We want to engage the community in Flagler County's future and ensure that we continue on the path of success," she said.

The session was facilitated by Marilyn Crotty, director of the Scott Dailey Florida Institute of Government at the University of Central Florida. "You're here to work today," she told participants.

The schedule for the day kept participants busy, first breaking into 10 smaller groups to discuss specific topics and issues set out in the strategic planning materials.

The topics under discussion included agriculture, aviation, talent, health science, high technology, infrastructure, manufacturing, marketing, tourism and importing/exporting.

Scattered about the Ocean Ballroom at the luxury resort, the groups spent more than two hours discussing how their particular issue fit into the larger economic development puzzle before reporting back on their deliberations.

After the groups delivered their recommendations, UCF economist Sean Snaith offered his take on the economy, both local and national.

"Flagler County was the poster child of everything that went wrong," he said, referring to the Great Recession when the county had the state's highest jobless rate. Unemployment in Flagler has steadily fallen since then.

"Now you're a different kind of poster child — the good kind," he said.

Snaith said uncertainty over the Affordable Care Act and banking reform as well as interest rates have created “a fog that businesses cannot see through.”

Van Eckert said recommendations from the session will be compiled with the best ideas incorporated into the county’s economic development plans.

“Then we can develop goals and tasks going forward,” she said. “With the world changing as quickly as it has, we need to be responsive to those changes.”

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