

## **1999 Annual Report Executive Summary**

### **Empower Lewiston Enterprise Community**

Empower Lewiston, the nonprofit corporation formed in 1999 to administer USDA funds awarded when Lewiston, ME was designated an Enterprise Community (EC), is pleased to report on its activities for 1999. Following the format required by the USDA, a brief summary follows.

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**MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** The Lewiston Enterprise Community's (LEC) initial Strategic Plan, with 26 individual strategies, was deemed completed in September 1998 and on January 13, 1999 Vice President Gore announced the new EZ/EC designations, including Lewiston, ME as one of the 20 new rural enterprise communities. While the LEC did not receive any federal EC funds in 1999, an amazing amount of planning and other preparatory work took place during the year. This report groups the strategies as they were for planning and implementation work by the five standing implementation committees of Empower Lewiston (EL), the nonprofit corporation established in 1999 to administer the USDA funds. This Executive Summary concentrates on the nine strategies selected for the first two-year workplan, although it briefly notes accomplishments in some of the others.

Education, Employment and Training Committee ((EETC), five strategies; four for first two-year workplan): Strategy 1 (WERC First) involves increasing the number of hard-to-employ LEC residents able to work by addressing the myriad socio-economic barriers facing residents. The Committee nearly completed work on hiring a resource coordinator at Faithworks, and identified resources and services for zone residents and workers. They are also looking at teaming up with other agencies who offer van transportation, a key element for success. Strategy 2, Youth Opportunity Center, will provide alternative learning opportunities for non-traditional learners and at-risk youth. The Committee identified a building in the census tracts that will be renovated and worked on a grant application that could provide renovation funds and further coordinate partners' programs and services. Strategy 3 called for increased production and expanded employment at Faithworks by purchasing equipment that enables them to keep up with the demand of their two largest suppliers. They received a \$150K grant in late 1999 from a private foundation. Strategy 4 (a health care summit) was driven forward by some preliminary planning with the Sister of Charity.

Neighborhood Improvement Committee ((NIC), seven strategies; one for first two-year workplan): Strategy 6, included in the first two-year workplan, calls for the creation of a Neighborhood Center, centrally located in the LEC, to provide access for residents to a variety of services. During 1999, a building was identified and given by the city of Lewiston (COL) to the Lewiston Housing Authority for removal.

While the other strategies were not included in the first two-year workplan, there was progress on a few. The city completed demolition on 12 properties during this time (Strategy 9, Acquisition/Demolition). In the summer of 1999, the Downtown Neighborhood Association, with help from residents and volunteers, cleaned up Pierce St. Park. Donated flowers were planted by neighborhood children, and the park was the site of a Back to School Block Party that attracted 200 residents while children in K-6 were given school supplies (Strategy 11, Neighborhood Beautification and Cleanup; about \$800 in donations/contributions). The Mayor's Housing Summit took place in October 1999; approximately 120 members of the public attended and provided input on problems and solutions.

Culture, Recreation and Natural Resources Committee ((CRNRC), six strategies; two for first two-year workplan): Strategy 13, a Cultural Learning Center (with classrooms, computer lab, etc.), was advanced through successful funding raising of \$600K to renovate and furnish Phase II of the library space, and \$10K for the preliminary engineering work; much of this was accomplished by Friends of Lewiston Public Library fund raising. Strategy 14, the visitor center/heritage museum, saw the development of an ambitious complementary proposal by L/A Excels to create this facility in the Mill area, creating awareness of Lewiston's industrial heritage and cultural diversity; major efforts are planned for 2000.

The other four strategies were not included in the workplan, yet some progress was still made. Strategy 15, the bicycle and pedestrian transportation system, saw completion of Phase I construction in 1999 (about \$275K). Strategy 16, greenspaces development, saw progress as land was acquired through housing demolition. Strategy 17, the Lewiston/ Auburn Railroad Park to create more open space and preserve history, moved forward as the COL spent approximately \$100K to purchase playground equipment, benches and landscaping.

Mayor's Downtown Renaissance Task Force ((MDRTF), six strategies; none for first two-year workplan): The Task Force addresses strategies dealing with a non-profit center, a government center, safe access and lighting, zone parking, a downtown Master Plan, and plans for St. Dominic's and St. Peter's sites. While none was included in the initial workplan, 1999 progress included laying the groundwork to hire a downtown development manager, the relocation of the District Court in downtown and the initiation of a process for city matching grants for building improvements. Significantly, the Downtown Master Plan was adopted in late 1999 and is now on the COL's website. Related to this was significant economic activity totaling \$1.686 million in grants and loans to the Neighborhood Networks Program (computer training), the Photographic Arts Center, Maine Wool and Design, and the L/A Hockey Arena.

Community Participation Committee (CPC), two strategies; both for first two-year workplan): The CPC and overall LEC were successful with its two critically important projects. Strategy 25, Seeds of Change, concerns working with residents of the LEC to develop their rights and responsibilities and includes hiring community organizers/advocates, annual meetings with residents, mentoring for individuals, families and apartment complexes, and quarterly meetings with landlords and tenants to improve the quality of life. EL Board members met with various residents on several occasions in 1999 to provide assistance on effective participation. The in-kind value of the time of the board members, and of police officers who also provided information and experiences on organizing, was approximately \$1740. They also began the process to hire a community organizer.

Strategy 26 calls for Zone Administration. 1999 saw the formation of a 21-member Board of Directors (with eight seats for residents of the two census tracts forming the LEC); 20 board meetings (with a \$1500 donation from St. Mary's for meals for these evening meetings); submission of the articles of incorporation and adoption of bylaws; a board team-building session facilitated by an outside consultant (July 12; \$600 consultant's charge was paid by St. Mary's Hospital); the development of the first two-year workplan (including a public hearing on the workplan on September 8), along with several meetings to hear groups' presentations to assist with ranking projects for the limited funds; signing of the Memorandum of Agreement; and the selection in late December of an Executive Director (the in-kind value of donated meeting space and the time by search committee members was approximately \$3300).

**LEVEL OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:** The Empower Lewiston Board of Directors held their first meeting on April 12 and conducted 19 additional meetings during the year (the earlier Steering Committee met three times in early 1999 to facilitate the creation of the Board). The organization's bylaws specifically allocated eight of the 21 Director slots to members of the two low-income census tracts forming the LEC. The Board conducted a public meeting on September 8, 1999 on the LEC's first

two-year work plan; approximately a dozen attended this meeting.

The EETC met 17 times during 1999 and the NIC met more than 12 times. The CRNRC met as a group a few times in early 1999, but since then has mostly conducted outreach and individual meetings with various strategy partners. The DTF met several times to provide insights for the city's master plan, which encompasses several aspects of the various EL strategies; the plan was adopted in late 1999. The CPC met several times to determine how to keep the community informed and locate and nominate individuals for EL participation. A particular contribution was the publicity the group developed so that the profile of the EL mission and strategies were highlighted during the city's second annual Pride Day (Oct. 16), an event attended by hundreds of residents of the LEC. In addition, some board members meet with the Downtown Neighborhood Association to help grassroots groups develop skills in conducting meetings and in other organizational activities.

**PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES:** More than 65 organizations have been working with the LEC, several on more than one of the strategies; despite that large number, 1999 saw the addition of a new partner, the University of Southern Maine/Lewiston-Auburn College. Financial support provided or leveraged by LEC partners, discussed specifically in the Major Accomplishments section, totaled more than \$2.83 million in 1999. This includes: \$172 in grants, nearly \$8K in donations and in-kind services, and about \$2.65million in leveraged loans and contributions from Empower Lewiston partners and the Federal government. In addition, the board held a public hearing on September 8 to solicit public input on the first two-year workplan; Board members and strategy partners used the occasion of Lewiston's second annual Pride Day to increase awareness of EL's overall efforts; and the Board's bylaws calls for eight seats for census tract residents.

**PROBLEMS/OBSTACLES:** A major problem for the LEC was the delay between its designation as an EC and the receipt of federal EC funds, as well as the need to revise the strategies to reflect the smaller funds associated with the EC (vs. EZ) designation. While the LEC used this time wisely to refine strategies, determine funding priorities and establish a nonprofit corporation to administer the USDA funds, it did dampen the enthusiasm of some participants, who were anxious to move from the planning stage to actual implementation. This spilled over to a decline in some levels of community participation. Also, with the large number of strategies and of partner organizations, better coordination and communication among the groups is necessary.

**SOLUTIONS:** A major solution is the hiring of a full-time Executive Director. In 1999, the LEC was able to rely on the formidable work accomplished by COL staff, the Steering Committee/ Board of Directors, and volunteers with the 65 partner organizations. However, given the large number of strategies, task, individuals and partners involved, having one full time individual will undoubtedly assist with attaining many more goals during 2000. To retain its grassroots approach, Empower Lewiston created the Community Participation Committee specifically to increase public participation in all EL committees, programs and events. The LEC made arrangements for training on the functions of a board, which was appropriate as many Board members were new to the situation; the participants' consensus was that it greatly improved communication and cooperation on the Board.

**BEST PRACTICES:** Hiring a facilitator to provide a one-day training (July 1999) on functions of members of a Board of Directors proved invaluable. Most participants, from a wide array of backgrounds, said the training greatly increased their understanding of their roles and how to be effective through cooperation with other Board members. Another key aspect is thorough and ongoing outreach, hence the allotment of eight board seats to residents of the LEC and the formation of the CPC as mentioned earlier. Each EZ/EC undoubtedly has rich resources in both its individual citizens and groups.

**PLANS/PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE:** During 2000, EL will develop the next two-year workplan, refine the Strategic Plan, update the Benchmark System, and distribute federal EC funds to participants and partner organizations for implementation of various aspects of those strategies. EL will also work diligently to increase the participation of residents of the two LEC neighborhoods. Over a longer time frame, the group will endeavor to obtain additional funds from various public and private sources for leveraging in carrying out the strategies, as well as to update and add strategies to reflect both successes and changing needs.

**AUDITED FINANCIAL REPORT:** This section is not applicable, as no EC funds were received in 1999. The first appropriate audit will take place following the end of EL's first fiscal year, September 30, 2000.