



Strategic Planning Community Outreach – Dickinson Chamber of Commerce

As part of the process of creating College of the Mainland's Strategic Plan for 2018-2023, Dr. Nichols will be meeting with various community constituencies. In these meetings Dr. Nichols will gather their input and feedback regarding six questions:

1. What are your perceptions of College of the Mainland today?
2. What are College of the Mainland's strengths?
3. Where do we meet your expectations?
4. What areas do we need to improve?
5. How can we partner with you?
6. Thinking of the future, what would a shared vision for College of the Mainland and the community look like?

On July 27 at 6 p.m., the first of this series of community meetings was held with the Board of the Dickinson Chamber of Commerce at the Chamber's office. In attendance were five board members. Also attending were several COM Cabinet members, a COM Trustee, Dr. Nichols and Dr. Walker to facilitate the discussion, and supporting staff to document the meeting. Overall, the Chamber Board members were positive about College of the Mainland and related positive experiences they and their associates have had. Several potential points of action were identified as a result of the discussion related to the six questions. Three main themes emerged from the discussion: **Communication, Partnership, and Services.**

Communication

Comments about the importance of "keeping the lines of communication open" were made throughout the discussion. The community participants noted a lack of published information about COM activities and events. One area in which communication was noted to be lacking was in regards to recent theater productions on campus in contrast to previous times when community participants felt there had been frequent notice and advertisement of the productions occurring on campus. The community participants believed there should be more advertising and publicity to inform the community when productions are running. Publicity in terms of Continuing Education course offerings was also found to be lacking. Some of the attendees had taken Continuing Education and Senior classes in the past and noted that they had not seen brochures for course offerings in some time.

In general, there is an overall need for greater levels of communication regarding what is happening at COM, its current involvement in the community, and the reasons behind certain decisions or courses of action. Attendees had questions about what, if any, Trustees represent them, as well as if COM has any involvement with the school districts.

There were also questions regarding when the pool will be repaired and reopened. Dr. Nichols explained that the Board of Trustees had already decided that the pool will not be reopened and gave the rationale as to why along with potential future alternatives.



The issue of taxing district vs. service area was also brought up, with Dr. Nichols explaining that the taxing district is not subsidizing the non-taxed service area locations.

The attendees were also informed that the *Torch* magazine will soon be published and will hopefully fulfill some of the identified communication needs.

Partnership

There was a strong and consistent message from the Chamber Board that Dickinson wants a strong, visible connection with College of the Mainland, specifically a physical building or location that COM uses in Dickinson. Dr. Nichols mentioned that the most pressing need for a physical location is currently the Gulf Coast Safety Institute. The Chamber President offered to begin a search for an appropriate location and assist with negotiations in that regard. The Chamber also expressed that the businesses in the area would like to be able to utilize classes and training, but due to time constraints it is difficult for them to do that. Dr. Nichols discussed the possibilities of non-credit program classes and training, where if Dickinson businesses or the Chamber organized a class and location, they could pay a flat fee for an instructor to come to them.

The Chamber also expressed a desire for COM to have a program housed in Dickinson. Dr. Nichols responded that this is a possibility, but it would need to be a unique program not currently in existence and something that would draw students from other locations. There was discussion regarding what that program could be, such as Hospitality or advanced manufacturing. A community development coordinator was recently hired who will be identifying areas of possible growth in Dickinson. The possibility of economic partnerships with Dickinson was also discussed. A Chamber member also made a suggestion of creating some kind of Recruitment center in Dickinson where community members could talk to a knowledgeable employee or volunteer about what COM has to offer.

The Board was pleased to hear that representatives from COM's Cabinet will be attending the Dickinson Chamber meetings and the Dickinson Rotary Club, as well as other Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs in the service area.

Services

There was discussion about services that College of the Mainland offers and what other services might be needed. The community participants reported that the former swimming pool was something the community enjoyed and offered great classes for senior wellness. Dr. Nichols explained the current plan of action regarding converting the old pool space and the possibility of creating a new and modernized swimming and water therapy space in the future in conjunction with Allied Health programs. The Chamber participants also had questions about COM's involvement in and services offered to the school districts in the area.

A Chamber member related her son's experience at College of the Mainland. The member reported that while her son felt well supported academically, he felt that he was missing out on the "young experience." The son did not feel there was a focus on students his age (more traditional college age). He felt a lack of student activities and places he could go between classes to connect to other students



his age and have the “college experience.” He is now at San Jacinto and also feels that he will have a better job prospects due to the connections that his program there offers.

Summary and Next Steps

In general, the Chamber participants had many positive things to say about College of the Mainland and several people in attendance had personal positive stories to share about their experiences in the past. They expressed appreciation for COM and think that it is a positive thing for Dickinson to have so nearby. They appreciate that COM takes an active interest in partnering with the high schools and recognizes the need for skills and training to support industry. The Chamber members were also pleased to be involved in this process and felt positive about the direction COM is heading. They firmly believe that Dickinson is at the beginning phase of an upswing and revitalization and want COM to be a part of that.

Below are next steps and action items.

Next Steps – Action Items

General

- Theater publicity and advertising
- Continuing Education/Senior class brochures
- Pool – communicate what was decided and why, potential future alternatives, Senior wellness programs
- Taxes – Taxing vs. Service area – communicate how this works, taxing district not subsidizing non-taxed service area
- ISD involvement – publicize
- Student Life – young/college experience

Dickinson

- CE classes and training for local business
- Physical presence in Dickinson?
- Potential GCSI location
- Recruitment center staffed by volunteers
 - o At the Chamber location to start? 1-2 days/week
- Unique program(s) that could be housed in Dickinson
- Economic Partnership
- Strategic Plan inclusion of Dickinson location/focus