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REPORT

COMMUNITY SWOT ANALYSIS

COLUMBUS, NEW MEXICO



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DINING ROOM, MARTHA'S PLACE
COLUMBUS, NEW MEXICO

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COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Columbus, New Mexico is located at the Mexican border, 32 miles south of Interstate 10 at Deming, New Mexico and located in Luna County. It is situated in a farming valley, 3 miles from Las Palomas, Mexico, at an elevation of 4,160 feet. Based on the 2000 census, its population is 1,765, which is an increase of 175.4% from the 1990 census. Population of Columbus from the 1980 census was 414, 1970 census was 241, which means that the population is growing, significantly. Based on the 2000 census, Columbus has 886 males, 879 females. Median age is 28.2. 18 years and over is 1,074. 21 years and over is 1,005. 62 years and over is 221. Columbus has 720 total housing units of which 536 are occupied housing units. Of the occupied housing units, 397 are owner-occupied. 139 are renter-occupied. 184 are vacant housing units. The homeowner vacancy rate is 8.1% compared to Luna County at 3.4%. The rental vacancy rate is 15.8% compared to Luna County at 16.6%. The unemployment rate in Luna County as of November 2003 is 14%. Largest industry employers for Luna County include the agricultural industry, manufacturing, government, and retail trade. From the agricultural sector in Luna County, there are 192 farms whose average size is 3,143. The market value of agricultural products sold is \$49,067,000 and includes the 5 top commodities including vegetables (\$28,815,000), cattle and calves (\$10,501,000), hay, silage (\$2,591,000), and fruit/nuts/berries (\$1,194,000). Columbus is part of the Deming Public School district and only provides public education through the 6th grade. Students above the 6th grade are bused to Deming. Based on the population of 25 years and older, in Columbus 49.8% have less than a 9th grade education, 14.9% have attended 9th to 12th but did not receive a diploma, 14.4% have graduated from high school including equivalency, 10.6% have some college, but no degree. There are no post-secondary institutions within Luna County. The village has a mayor-council form of government which provides water, sewer, and solid waste municipal services. Its annual operating budget is \$1,158,856, with annual revenues of \$229,545, total GO bonds outstanding of \$229,482. It has 3 full-time police, 10 volunteer firefighters and a fire insurance rating of 7. The residential property tax mill rate is 30.85, nonresidential property mill rate of 25.64 and gross receipts tax rate of 6%. Columbus has access to Mimbres Memorial Hospital in Deming with 1 doctor and 1 dentist located in the village. The closest commercial airport is 65 miles away in El Paso, Texas. The mean travel time to work is 17.9 minutes. For 2001 in Luna County, the per capita personal income is \$15,565, the annual average wage per job is \$20,111. In Luna County, there are 403 business establishments, a drop from 408 in 2000. 2001 gross receipts from retail trade is \$115,944,000, a drop from 2000 which was \$125,660,000. There are no current gross receipt tax figures for Columbus.

SWOT DATA

STRENGTHS

Drug use among kids is low

Port of entry

Agriculture

- still wholesale, beginning to process, sort, & send onions to Wal-Mart
- expanded into growing onion seed (private investment in capital equipment)
- beginning to add additional value-added businesses to supply chain

Lots of water

Border Authority and Border Coalition is improving

Collaboration is increasing between Luna County and Columbus/City of Deming and Luna County have a good relationship

Hired a grant coordinator

Received \$2.5 million in CBDG funding

Border immigration doesn't stop in Columbus therefore doesn't increase health problems

Columbus has a great relationship with Las Palomas

- Columbus provides ambulance/fire

Have an industrial park including sewer & water connections

Electric Coop is a member of Tri State; no transmission issues

Valley Telephone ran a fiber optics line from Tucson to El Paso right through Columbus, therefore Columbus now has DSL

Designated as a colonias

County has developed Luna County Housing Corp

Columbus has a comprehensive plan

- used neighborhood meetings with citizen participation

Educational - have Mimbres Valley Learning Center

- funding for ESL & GED is improving
- folks involved in ESL & GED are touched by their effect in changing people's lives
- educating students in Las Palomas in English is great
- 3/4ths of kindergarten-6th students are from Las Palomas and are bused

Have infrastructure with no debt due to grant dollars

WEAKNESSES

Port is not used to capacity

Road to port on Mexican side of border is bad

Need Deming to create bypass for trucks

3/4 of houses in Columbus are connected to waste water

Lost several years of funding because of staff turnover and graft, which is being resolved with new mayor and staff

Problems with fluoride and arsenic in area, which is naturally occurring

Housing – migrant agricultural housing - are starting on Phase 2 in Deming

Las Palomas doesn't always pay for fire call (un-reimbursed costs are supplemented by grant dollars)

Industrial Park is privately owned - has a duty free shop

New fiber optic line - don't know what to do with it yet

Designated as a colonias - has caused "stereotyping" of area being impoverished

Housing - not enough dollars to assist housing organization to build capacity

Comprehensive plan needs to be updated

Task force that was part of original comprehensive plan has disbanded

Educational - only kindergarten-6th is offered to Columbus area students
Mimbres Valley Learning Center - not many classes are offered - doesn't have interest because of class cost
Need to build reserves for potential federal/state cutback because dependence on grants
Need to develop a community vision
Need to identify additional resources such as NMSU
Need resources to gather data
Economic development

- Recruitment efforts - develop target analysis to recruit types of business that match community needs
- Retention efforts- doesn't have to be elaborate, i.e. develop business help with resources such as SCORE

Difficulty in maximizing/developing synergy from data collection – difficult to implement programs based on data evaluation
Communication is critical - need to develop new partnerships

OPPORTUNITIES

Only 24-hour port of entry
Agricultural sector - growing on own
Water-lots and is of high quality
Fast growing city in New Mexico
Water use is being addressed
Plenty of electricity capacity and propane
President Bush immigration initiative - for economic reasons, area needs immigration workers from the border
Electric Coop has plenty of capacity with a 69 kilovolt transmission line all the way to the border

THREATS

Fastest growing city in New Mexico
Turnaround time with federal grants takes 2-3 years; state grants take 1 year
Agricultural expansion is stressing infrastructure with facility and water lines
Water draw down many be an issue or may be a well design issue
Illegal immigration is impacting ambulance costs
Designation as a colonias - causes businesses to not come to Columbus
Educational changes are in flux; outcomes are worrisome and uncertain
No updated comprehensive plan reduces chances of funding
Columbus/Deming teachers are poorest paid in state
Controversial Issue - One side: concern of educational quality (perception) of K-6 (designated as bilingual school which mean that teachers teach 1/2 day in Spanish and 1/2 day in English) - fear that kids are only being taught 1/2 day. Other side: this bilingual schooling initiative is increasing literacy in both languages
Heavily dependent on federal/state grant funding - need a plan to sustain funding support beyond grant funding cycles
Border closing because of terrorism - 9/11 tested the system in Columbus
Border closing would cause chaos

NEXT STEPS

Columbus is doing a good job with the constraints, barriers, opportunities and threats as a border community in New Mexico. A next step would be a community visioning process of determining what kind of community it would like to be in the future. This community visioning process would be helpful as Columbus needs to update its comprehensive plan and develop ideas to retain its current businesses. The port of entry is a plus, not only for the Columbus/Deming area but also for the State of New Mexico. Being a border community has a challenging side especially in immigration and educational issues. A next step for this issue is to explore any synergies that develop with Mexico since it has a close relationship with its southern neighbor, both formally and informally, through cultural, business, and family relationships. Government monies for water, sewer, and roads are helping the community to improve its infrastructure. With fiber optics and DSL in the village, there is an educational opportunity to help the area tie into educational and a communication opportunities via the internet but it needs some educational expertise to teach the community how to deal with it and expand this strength into economic development expansion. There are some colleges and universities along the Mexican border, such as [University of Texas-Pan American](#) or [Laredo Community College](#), that have a great deal of expertise working with communities in their service areas designated as colonias. The next step is to see if there are any lessons learned that Columbus can gain from expertise from these educational institutions. There is a concern about the public school bilingual teaching to ensure literacy in both languages, English and Spanish. The next step could be a community discussion to lower the uncertainty of educational changes and transition this as a perceptible threat into a strength as the community becomes literate and bilingual for firms needing fluency in both languages. The village is highly reliant on grant monies. The next step is to develop a plan to sustain the gains that it has enjoyed from grant investments when the grant funding cycles disappear. The community seems interested in developing collaborations and partnerships with outside organizations and open for economic and community development efforts to help the region grow, especially related to having a 24 hour port of entry. The participants were very interested in being part of a regional solution. The next step would be for the community to look for regional synergies with its external partners to sustain its rapid growth and economic development opportunities.