

Currituck seeks ways to boost local economy

By Cindy Beamon
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CURRITUCK — Boosting Currituck's economy may take some creativity, said members of two advisory boards meeting together last week to discuss possibilities.

The suggestions from the Economic Development and Tourism advisory boards hit on a wide range of ideas for stimulating the local economy.

Mike Martine, owner of Eye Candy Digital Video in Moyock, suggested the county work harder at attracting movie-makers to the region.

County Manager Dan Scanlon said some companies are asking if there's a market for less expensive vacationers' lodging on the north side of the Wright Memorial Bridge.

A couple of advisory board members proposed one-day excursions to the mainland for Outer Banks vacationers. If businesses packaged several attractions together and provided transportation, vacationers may bring more business to the mainland, they said.

Ray Meiggs, executive director for the Whalehead Club, said attractions at Heritage Park are already packaged to boost business. Heritage Park is also adding new attractions during spring and fall to boost tourism in the off-season, he said.

A new event, "Wine and Swine" this September will offer visitors a good excuse to visit during non-summer months, he said.

One of Currituck's economic challenges is finding ways to expand business on the mainland as well, several board members said.

The county needs to seek more ways to diversify its income, said Economic Development Advisory Board member Elizabeth White. One major storm could wipe out tourism, Currituck's major source of income, she said.

"How can we bring some of that marketing effort over to the mainland? I know it's not going to be easy," White said.

Not all board members were convinced that Currituck's recent construction projects on the mainland would attract visitors to the county.

Advisory board member Paul Robinson doubted if the new recreational complex in Maple would draw visitors with its out-of-the-way location.

"I don't know how valuable that money is, being spent where it is," said Robinson.

He said offering incentives to a business like Weeping Radish in Grandy for a new distillery might offer a better return on the county's investment.

Commissioner Butch Petrey, ex-officio member for one advisory board, said softball and baseball tournaments in Maple will draw people and dollars to the area.

One drawback, another board member noted, is there's no hotel for those visitors to stay.

Luring a hotel to the mainland appeared to be one of the popular suggestions.

County Manager Dan Scanlon said attracting a hotel may not be as easy. Even offering free land as an incentive is not be enough, he said.

"The demand has to be here first before they will come," said Scanlon.

First the county has to prove it has the enough business year-round to support the enterprise. Even then, companies may be unwilling or unable to invest the up front money to build, he said.