

# Dakota County Economic Development Strategy Phase 1 Activities (2007 and 2008)

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: Invest in Transportation and Transit Networks**

### **1. Encourage transit oriented development (TOD) on transit networks by working with cities to identify opportunity sites.**

- Continue to provide planning assistance funds (through the Rail Authority) for communities along transitway corridors to focus on TOD.
- Identify areas in the county's transit plan that could support new and/or increased transit services (i.e., Robert Street, U-More Park, Cedar Avenue).

### **2. Determine the feasibility of establishing transit connections to major employment locations in Dakota County.**

- As part of county transit plan implementation, research a potential program that expands the county's role related to transit facilitation, information and coordination with employers, communities, MVTA and DARTS.
- Collaborate with other organizations, coalition groups and/or through the Urban Partnership Agreement program to explore the costs and benefits of creating a Transit Management Organization (TMO) to serve Dakota County.. Encourage private sector participation and funding.

### **3. Work with cities and townships to identify local investments in transportation in relationship to economic development (as part of the comprehensive planning process).**

- Build upon and replicate proposed transit investments that are key components to economic development, such as Eagan's Cedar Grove redevelopment site.
- Work with cities and explore land use and zoning options which work more effectively with current highway access spacing guidelines. Analyze tax base, safety and transportation impacts.
- Develop an approach for integrating consideration of economic development into transportation capital investment decisions (e.g. economic development factors as well as safety and traffic factors). Present to the county board for their consideration during the Transportation Plan Update.

**4. Coordinate transportation and transit lobbying efforts between cities, townships and the county.**

- Continue to pursue funding for transportation priorities at the state and federal levels.
- Build upon existing cooperative lobbying efforts, including the I-35 Solutions Alliance, the Cedar Group, and the TH52 Freeway Partnership.

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: Coordinate Strategic Infrastructure and Land Development**

### **1. Explore ways in which the County and the CDA can jointly support the redevelopment of brownfield sites.**

- Evaluate ways to improve coordination between the CDA and the County's environmental services staff, using the cleanup of a 7-acre housing redevelopment site in Lakeville as an example.
- Work together on developing a pilot program that would identify a prioritized system of brownfield sites for redevelopment and a list of technical and funding resources.
- Develop staff expertise in brownfield redevelopment through training (CDA).

### **2. Coordinate a county-wide market study that estimates demand for commercial and industrial building space and land by 2030 in 5-year increments; track annual real estate market trends.**

- Use the CDA's recently completed a comprehensive housing needs study for Dakota County as an example of a county-wide study that was well received by cities and the county.
- In response to city interest, initiate a RFP process guided by a city/county workgroup, to retain a consultant to analyze the industrial land market, historic and projected absorption rates. The consultant will also assist the workgroup in exploring options to establish an ongoing real estate tracking system.

### **3. Analyze property tax implications of various development patterns in order to encourage the efficient use of land and infrastructure.**

- Include this study with the commercial-industrial market study, including the same workgroup discussion process.
- Add this to the RFP process, or initiate a separate process, if the workgroup determines that this type of information adds value to cities.

### **4. Determine if there is a role for the county in coordinating advanced telecommunications on a countywide basis; maintain telecom inventory through E-Commerce; identify public access sites.**

- Continue to examine and expand telecommunications capacity within Dakota County and the region (IT participates in a regional task force, the "Giga-group", with the City of Eagan, Thomson-West, Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, MHTA, and Chambers).

- Examine the pros/cons of having private telecommunications vendors having exclusive leasing of dark fiber to providers for expanding residential and commercial access to increased bandwidth.
- Explore public access responsibilities, the High Performance Partnership Project (HPPP) identified 197 public access nodes that will have 100 MB or greater access within 12 months.

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: Link Workforce Development and Economic Development**

- 1. Develop an annual Workforce Investment Board (WIB) workshop for city staff and elected officials on current/future workforce development activities in Dakota County.**
  - Provide cities with WIB information about its programs and services that can impact economic development activities, including business retention/expansion.
  
- 2. Explore the establishment of employment resource rooms at other sites to expand outreach beyond the county's two Workforce Centers.**
  - Evaluate whether smaller resource rooms could possibly be located at other sites beyond the two Workforce Centers in Burnsville and West St. Paul, such as public libraries or schools.
  - Enhance outreach to employers and employees with more visibility and accessibility.
  
- 3. Identify short-term training programs that are not eligible for federal financial aid which could address labor shortage challenges faced by existing Dakota County industries. Engage local industries and lenders to explore options for industry/occupation targeted scholarship or loan programs**
  - Build upon job training that takes place at DCTC and Inver Hills, which provides a significant resource to local businesses.
  - Explore options (other than county property tax dollars) to fund the loan or scholarship programs.

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4a: Create Prospect Response Capacity**

- 1. Identify the CDA as the first point of contact for inquiries that come to Dakota County related to economic development; clarify interdepartmental coordination.**
- 2. Designate the CDA as the first point of contact for economic development inquiries from local governments. Clarify processes for interdepartmental coordination.**

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4b: Enhance Image, Marketing and Branding**

- 1. As appropriate, partner with colleges, businesses, nonprofits, cities and others to support collaborative economic development efforts.**
  - Evaluate current or planned efforts by various organizations to brand or market Dakota County or the metro area as a place for business growth and development.
  - Identify ways to improve the overall image and perception of Dakota County as a place to locate and grow a business.
- 2. Evaluate the “Economic Development” location on the county’s web site to ensure that proper county information is provided, including referrals to other key websites.**
  - The CDA and County communications staff will work together to evaluate web site content in order to expand economic development information about Dakota County and corresponding links to other web sites.

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5: Provide Quality Workforce Housing**

- 1. Evaluate affordable housing opportunities within sites that are identified for transit-oriented development (TOD); consider early land purchases by the CDA; explore incentives to include affordable housing.**
  - Identify opportunities within those sites related to land acquisition and affordable housing, by the CDA and/or other housing developers.
  - Initiate a short and long-term plan for the CDA's involvement within TOD sites once they are identified in comprehensive plans.
  
- 2. Enhance the marketing of workforce housing through existing employers in Dakota County (led by the CDA).**
  - Obtain contact information on key employers throughout the county that may benefit the most from information on affordable housing opportunities for their employees.
  - Develop and maintain ongoing marketing of affordable housing to employers.
  
- 3. Support continuation of the county's affordable housing HOPE Program (led by the CDA).**
  - Obtain annual support from the Dakota County Board of Commissioners to approve levy funds for the HOPE Program.
  - Continue to evaluate its effectiveness and impact on affordable housing opportunities.
  
- 4. Support cities that need to address the maintenance of owner-occupied townhomes and condominiums (workforce housing) through the use of Housing Improvement Districts.**
  - Evaluate the need for Housing Improvement Districts that help multi-family development obtain a financing mechanism to complete building/site improvements (similar to one that was recently done in Eagan with CDA assistance).
  - Provide a program summary and technical assistance to cities that can benefit from this type of financing structure to improve housing conditions.

## **STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: Strengthen Development-Related Research and Policy Capacity**

- 1. Develop an annual economic indicators report for Dakota County that reviews economic trends, regional industrial market changes, and land absorption rates.**
  - Create reports that include additional economic trends, market data, and land absorption rates or add some of this data to existing reports.
  - Gather information on a regular basis from cities, real estate companies, county assessor, etc...
  
- 2. Evaluate how to incorporate return-on-investment and economic impact into transportation planning and investment decisions.**
  - Begin to document increases in market value of property adjacent to transportation projects as a way to assess economic return.
  - Test various measures that help determine whether transportation investments will result in a high rate of economic return.
  
- 3. Research best practices in transit oriented development (TOD) in order to link transit planning with workforce housing and development.**
  - Review successful examples of TOD throughout the nation in order to assess ways to link transit, housing and employment.
  - Find TOD examples, or parts of TOD, that would bring value to potential TOD sites in Dakota County.
  
- 4. Conduct workshops on various economic development topics.**
  - Develop a list of current topics and speakers for half-day workshops to public and private audiences.
  - Schedule workshops at least two times per year in Dakota County.