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City of Ashland, Wisconsin

601 Main Street West — Ashland, WI 54806 — www.coawi.org

CITY OF ASHLAND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
2018



FACILITATOR

Kevin Stranberg, Memorial Medical Center

Stakeholder Participants

Mike Bailey, W.I.N.

Mike Bebeau, Xcel Energy

John Beirl, Ashland Plan Commission

Steve Bitzer, WITC

Kent Dumonseau, Memorial Medical Center

Kim Dwyer, Ashland Area School District

Jay Emmert, Coldwell-Banker Realty

Rick Forsythe, Ashland Business Alliance

Betsey Harries, Ashland Area Development Corporation

Keith Hiltz, Ashland Area School District

Brandon Hofstedt, Northland College Center for Rural Communities

Matt Hulmer, Bretting Manufacturing

Gary LaPeau, Ashland Chamber of Commerce

Cory Larson, Deltco Mfg.

David Martin, Deep Water Grille

Mary McPhetridge, Ashland Chamber of Commerce

David Mettill, Ashland City Council

Mari Kay-Nabozny, Northwest WI Workforce Investment Board

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Tom Wojciechowski, UW Extension

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City of Ashland Staff

Mayor Deb Lewis, City of Ashland

Mary Garness, City of Ashland Administrator;

April Kroner, City of Ashland Planning & Development Director

Rose Spieler-Sandberg, City of Ashland Assistant Planner

Megan McBride, City of Ashland Assistant Planner

BACKGROUND

The economic development effort is an outgrowth of the City's Comprehensive Plan, AUTHENTIC ASHLAND, adopted by the Ashland City Council in 2017 that called for a specific Economic Development Strategic Plan to be developed for the City. The working group make-up was chosen with the goal of generating greater collaboration among key community stakeholders, and assembly of a diverse committee of business and educational representatives.

The working group met three times during 2017, including March 31, May 19, and October 27. At the first meeting, the group established a definition of what economic development in Ashland means, and discussed what the City may have in 2022 if it is successful at implementing economic development strategies. Three primary areas of focus were identified, and sub-committees were formed for each of the focus areas. Each sub-committee met separately to discuss topics from the initial meeting and were tasked with creating corresponding action steps for the large group. The primary areas of focus identified by the large group were: 1/ Business Creation and Growth, 2/ Workforce Development, and 3/ Area Promotion and Advancement. At the subsequent large group meetings, the members reviewed the action steps identified by the sub-committees and made amendments, prioritized strategies, and discussed the approval process and methods for public education and dissemination.

CITY OF ASHLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

***PROVIDING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE BUSINESSES CAN BE CREATED
AND GROW, WITH A STRONG AND QUALIFIED WORKFORCE AND
PROMOTION OF QUALITY OF LIFE.***

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS

Business Retention and Growth Mayor Lewis, John Beirl, Dale Kupczyk, Cory Larson, Mary McPhetridge, Rose Spieler-Sandberg

Strong and Qualified Work Force Mary Kay-Nabozny, Rose Spieler-Sandberg, Tom Wojciechowski, Steve Bitzer, Mike BeBeau, Matt Hulmer, Kim Dwyer

Promotion and Advancement Mary McPhetridge, Gary LaPean, Jay Emmert, Mari Kay-Nabozny, David Mettillie

CITY OF ASHLAND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

STRATEGIES & ACTIONS By FOCUS AREA
BUSINESS RETENTION & GROWTH
A. Efficient System for Approval of Permits
1) Code/process review to simplify and clearly define processes and information
2) Review and adoption of best practices in other vibrant communities
3) Create a “one-stop” shop location for businesses where questions and processes can be efficiently managed
4) Develop a flow chart that clearly shows what projects need what approvals
B. Consistent Messaging between Agencies Regarding Relevant Information
1) On line “road map”
2) Packet of information available to potential businesses/entrepreneurs
3) Vital economic stakeholders all give out same information
C. Create an Accessible Inventory of all available land, retail/office space in the City and share with all stakeholder groups
D. Perform an analysis of existing business opportunities and potential linkages between users and producers in our community
STRONG & QUALIFIED WORKFORCE
A. Strengthen Connection/Partnership between businesses and the regional schools
1) Give students access to training/technology/resources
2) Inform parents
3) Strengthen connection between students and Young Professionals
B. Community Employment Needs Assessment (Industrial/Business; Retail/Service)
1) Training stackable credentials for entry positions
C. Inventory/Gap Analysis of Needs/Amenities for Workforce (Skills Gap)
D. Talent Attraction
1) Conduct “Bomerangs” Survey
2) Strengthen housing market
3) Promotion/Support of lake and amenities
PROMOTION & ADVANCEMENT
A. Conduct an Amenities Inventory
B. Link Information Between Major Players
C. Effort to reach all different generations
D. Countering Nay Sayers
E. Year Round Accessibility to Amenities in all Seasons

ASHLAND'S CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Since the inception of the economic development strategy process in 2017, much progress has made in changing the long-standing perception that it is difficult to start a business in Ashland due to lengthy and arbitrary review processes that were not well understood. Although there have been occasional bumps in the road, the overall trajectory is positive.

WHAT DOES THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE SINCE MARCH 2017 LOOK LIKE?

Connections Are Being Made: Key stakeholder groups are collaborating on projects, meeting, and problem-solving. (Examples: Downtown trash & recycling containers, bike racks, Ore Dock Sign, Addiction Task Force, Day Care Initiative, Lake Superior Science and Education Center Initiative, Parking Task Force, Business After Hours)

Communication is Improving; Collaborative Partnerships Between the City and Several Key Entities Have Been Sought; and Efforts to Improve Them Are Ongoing: AADC, Northwest Regional Planning, WHEDA, WEDC, Bad River Tribe, Ashland Chamber of Commerce, Ashland Business Alliance, Cities of Washburn and Bayfield, School District of Ashland, Northland College, WITC, Memorial Medical Center, State and Federal Government representatives, medical community, faith community.

Development is Happening:

New Housing: Lipka Apartment complex built on north side of Ashland High School on Beaser Avenue; Beaser Fire Station converted into 4-plex; Former CN Depot (Chequamegon Court Club) on Chapple Avenue converted into tri-plex.

New Services/Amenities: Chequamegon Humane Society, St. Luke's Chequamegon Clinic, NorthLakes Clinic on Main Street, Crossroads, School District of Ashland Field House and facilities improvements.

Existing Business Expansion is Happening: Key manufacturers report expanded sales and hiring, downtown retail holding its own, others innovating, MMC expansion(s).

New Businesses are Choosing Ashland: Kwik Trip, Cobblestone Inn & Suites, Burger Barn.

Downtown Ashland is Transitioning into a Service Center and Place-Based Artistic Activities Hub: Downtown retailers are developing niche-based marketing to draw and retain customer base; unique downtown activities create a sense of place downtown; ie: Tree-Lighting; Downtown Days; Expansion of Murals; Farmer's Market, Movies & Concerts in the Parks, Custom Artistic Trash/Recycling Containers; Custom Lake Superior Bike Racks, etc. More services are being offered in the core downtown.

Young and Talented Entrepreneurs and Professionals are Replacing Retiring Boomers

IMPLEMENTATION /LOOKING AHEAD

Work has commenced towards achieving the strategies and actions. The strategic partners will continue to work together to develop and implement the actions in the coming years, and will come together annually to check on progress, celebrate accomplishments, and reassess the strategies and actions based on changing conditions. Sub-Committees will continue working independently as needed, and update the large group. The City's Planning & Development Department will take the responsibility of monitoring achievements and ensuring that entities are contributing to the successful implementation of the strategy.

Barriers identified by the group towards implementation include the role of structural poverty factors in addressing unmet needs, along with staff and financial constraints that may hinder completing actions as quickly as desired.

The next step identified includes educating the community on strategic economic development goals, and generating "buy-in" and consensus from constituent groups so that all are working in collaboration.