

Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance

Strategic Priorities

These priorities were identified in the Envision 2030 Plan (2007) and the R.S. Smith & Associates Report on Primary Sector Company Research Targeted Industry Analysis (2007).

High Quality Workforce

Economic development's key sustainable ingredient is people with a strong work ethic and the skills to compete in the today's competitive economy. Professional positions are critical to community balance, survival and sustainability. State-of-the-art workforce training and development is crucial. Existing industries are at risk from global competition automation, relocation, and/or consolidation. The declining population in the region is a serious threat; aggressive steps to reverse outward migration must be implemented. The population of the city has remained stable, but there are significant declines in the region. There appears to be a number of single parents, which increases social challenges. There is also a lack of diversity in the workforce, especially at the professional level. The population includes a large percentage of low income people. The population is also aging. The number one ingredient required for economic and community progress is more people. Continued outward migration of seniors and young families will have a negative economic impact.

Infrastructure

Without modern infrastructure, a city's ability to grow and meet expanding needs is greatly challenged. Street renovation and maintenance must be well funded and sustained. Storm sewers must be updated to meet expanding community needs, and power lines need to be buried. Inadequate infrastructure is blight on any community.

Industrial Recruitment

Successful marketing of the community and region to prospective businesses requires a well coordinated, proactive and professional process. The lead generation process must be efficient and effective. GFDGA, the city and county must be able to act and respond in a rapid and well coordinated fashion to inquiries from site selectors and interested business prospects. All parties involved in this process must work collaboratively and have all of their goals and incentives in alignment. Developing a pro-business environment is crucial. Being connected and engaged with regional and state economic development organizations is important to effectively reach your full potential to attract new business and industry to the area.

Center for Biofuels, Renewable Energy and Agricultural By-products

Continued development of the Webster County Ag Park is crucial. Working closely with Cargill to attract additional over-the-fence companies must be a high priority. Fort Dodge and Webster County is in a very strategic location to take advantage of the potential for impressive job growth and wealth creation in the biofuels, renewable energy and agricultural byproducts arena.

Local-Regional Business Retention and Expansion

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics states that 80% of new job creation comes from the expansion of existing businesses, making it very clear that business retention and expansion must be a priority. Business retention and expansion is the springboard to job creation. The fact that local businesses are already invested in our community with established roots, means they are less likely to leave for “greener pastures.” A good business retention program will identify opportunities to encourage growth and give enough warning to recognize and react to threats. Investing time, energy and resources to business retention and growth is crucial.

Vibrant Retail Center

Fort Dodge is known as a retail center, but its reputation is declining. Fort Dodge retail addresses need-based shopping but lacks in emotional shopping. It lacks a critical mass of specialty shops. Shopping will continue to be a recreation and emotion activity. Fort Dodge must expand its retail base and diversity of retail businesses to maintain its position as a hub for retail shopping. There needs to be greater diversity of restaurants, as the ambiance of fine dining signature restaurants is missing, which diminishes the dining experience. Increasing preference and expectation of customers should be addressed.

Technology

Fort Dodge and the region must develop the reputation for being a state-of-the-art city for high speed telecommunications and technology. High speed, broadband information and technology must be available throughout the city and county. Wireless access, must be available across all geographic sectors of the community. Promoting technology and improving capacity for developing advanced manufacturing is critical.

Education

The number one attraction for families moving to the city and extended community is the quality and reputation of the educational systems and the preparation they provide students for the global economy and society. Promoting STEM and the advancement of innovation and technology in education is important. Developing a curriculum that fosters critical thinking skills and encourages the importance of higher education (two-year or four-year) is crucial for building a qualified workforce for the 21st century. All the educational organizations, the citizens and the community must work together and implement a unique educational system that begins with Pre-K and extends through college and beyond. Fort Dodge educational systems are negatively impacted by the inability of Fort Dodge to attract and sustain middle and higher income young families. Ongoing reduction in K-12 enrollment over past years has resulted in budgetary challenges within the school systems.

Healthcare

Support the development of a first-class regional healthcare system. Friendship Haven and Trinity Regional Medical Center are generally seen as positive assets although there are concerns about the potential for the hospital to meet future needs. There is concern about a shortage of quality doctors and healthcare workers and that Trinity does not currently offer many of the amenities desired by health care and other knowledge workers.

Quality Housing and Residential Development

To attract knowledge workers and younger families, we must be able to offer a multitude of quality housing choices, including a predominance of single-family homes, but also truly urban housing forms such as townhouses, condominiums, lofts and apartments. Housing also must be able to meet the different preferences of active retirees and seniors. Affordable housing needs must be met in greater measure by smaller accessory garage apartments, granny flats, lofts and apartments over shops or small clusters of multifamily housing. Older existing neighborhoods need to be updated with an extreme makeover. All neighborhoods, schools, recreation venues, parks, Downtown Center and other community assets should be connected to the Fort Dodge – Webster County Trail Network and its tributary walkways, bikeways, and green spaces.

Recreation and Entertainment

Continue to build on the vision to become a recreation destination by building on the City's and County's extensive park system and expanding the current trail system. These recreational venues can offer something for everyone. Work to connect all the areas recreational venues with a quality trail system that offers recreation for walkers, runners and bikers, and can be used by people of all ages. Continue to support the use of the natural resources in the county including the river trails that offer a wide range of activities include canoeing, rafting, kayaking, tube floating, fishing and swimming. The new Aquatics Park and possibly a new Community Recreation Center would be recreational center-pieces for the community. The Gypsum City Off-Highway Vehicle Park and Mineral City Speedway offers racing enthusiasts a wonderful entertainment venue. Support of community events and celebrations is an important aspect of community culture. Nurturing the advancement of the arts and cultural amenities can help build a sense of place.

Entrepreneurial Community

Building an entrepreneurial spirit and culture is essential. The majority of new jobs will come from new businesses, local businesses and small businesses that are growing due to new innovation and expanded production. An analysis of business and jobs by the U.S. Small Business Administration found that over a recent 15-year period, 65-70% of new jobs created in the U.S. came from small business. New business start-ups diversifies the economy, builds economic vitality, and offers young workers in the City of Fort Dodge greater opportunities so they won't ever leave the area. The majority of new jobs will be created through small business and entrepreneurial efforts of individuals. Alternative economic development strategies will become more important to job and opportunity creation.

Vibrant Downtown Center

The Downtown Center must be respected and be a focal point for new development to create new and much needed vitality. Older buildings can be transformed into green spaces, new facilities or rehabilitated and adaptively reused for a wide range of shopping, dining, working, and cultural attractions. The Downtown Center should become host of various community events with the goal of being the social and cultural heart of the community.

Transportation

The City must work proactively with Webster County, Mid-Iowa Development Association (MIDAS), and the Iowa State Department of Transportation toward a balanced, multi-modal and citizen-friendly transportation system. An efficient system of streets and roads, improved mass transit services, as well as more sidewalks, trails and bicycling facilities are critical components of the quality of community life and economic development. The public transportation system must serve the needs of senior citizens and others who cannot or choose not to drive a car. All roads must be well maintained. The important connectors to major transportation routes must be priorities because they serve as a positive draw to the city. The city must grow as a hub for commercial transportation. Highway 20 must be completed.

Collaborative Regional Partnerships & Government Relationships

Developing a culture of inclusion, collaboration and sharing rather than exclusion is critical when it comes to community and economic development. Growing, robust communities have learned they must think regionally to compete globally. Rural areas in particular, must focus even more on a regional approach to economic development in order to acquire the critical mass and synergies necessary to compete in the global marketplace. No longer can individual towns, cities or counties compete successfully in attracting investment and talent, qualifying for grants, growing diverse economic bases. Communities must become open to building new partnerships and collaborating on the important work that must be done. GFDGA must effectively reach out to county governments and other community leaders throughout the region. Becoming an integral partner with Mid-Iowa Growth Partnership is a crucial first step in building an effective regional partnership. Working closely with Mid-Iowa Development Association (MIDAS) is also essential for successful community and economic development. Cooperative relationships between city, county and regional governmental bodies are important to ensuring an efficient and effective system for advancing economic and community development.

Environmental Enhancement

Our community needs an "Extreme Makeover." Visitors to the City of Fort Dodge must become impressed by the attractive green spaces, trees and floral elements throughout the community, roadways and major streets serving the area. An "Extreme Makeover" and maintaining and enhancing the beauty of the city must be a priority. Modern garbage pick-up and recycling efforts must be implemented to be proactive in the arena. Dilapidated property must be cleaned up. Parks and public spaces must be appropriately landscaped and maintained. Historical building renovation/preservation must be encouraged. Community-wide promotions for beautification and clean-up must become an annual event.

Safety and Security For All

The issue of personal safety and security is very important to people of all ages. No matter where they live in the Fort Dodge community can be victims of crime. Improved crime statistics can help change the perception that crime is not being reduced. Many factors impact a person's perception of being safe and secure and the perception of a crime problem does not diminish in direct correlation to the elimination of crime.

Community Image

The image of Fort Dodge is not as positive as it needs to be around the state. It is viewed as rough, unsafe, blue collar community. This must be changed. The city is not viewed as progressive. Most city and community services are rated only fair to good. The appearance hurts the community's image. Investment in an internal and external marketing program is needed. This will require investment in an efficient, effective and collaborative process for a comprehensive approach to communicating with all constituents, stakeholders and the general public.

IMPLEMENTATION

The successful implementation of this STRATEGIC PLAN rests with the leadership of the Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance and the community's ability to work both independently and together. Each person, non-profit organization, governmental agency, business, and industry must take the initiative to explore their own resources and then, working with others, focus on a part of the vision they can legitimately impact. Individuals and organizations have a variety of funding sources available. By teaming with others as well as providing a part of the needed resources, the financial burden is shared and much can be accomplished.

Critical to the implementation of the vision will be support and financing from the three Ps (Private Enterprise, Philanthropic Funding and Public Funding). Specific strategies for funding the projects should include the following:

- Sustain the current tax base
- Increase the tax base by policy
- Increase retail traffic within the city
- Invest in preplanned infrastructure
- Collaborate with others
- Implement policy that encourages and sustains private investment
- Apply for targeted grants and appropriations
- Exercise bonding capacity
- Private giving campaigns

Each organization and business in the community should look for opportunities to contribute to the implementation by seeking funding through grants and appropriations in addition to the annual budgeting processes. Representative business and industry sectors should collaborate by addressing those parts of the plan with which they can assist in implementation. City, county and adjoining government agencies should place development and implementation of the STRATEGIC PLAN as a vital community and economic development strategy for sustaining existing and creating new community and economic development.

The most important ingredient that will determine the success or failure of development and implementation of the STRATEGIC PLAN is visionary leadership provided by caring and engaged citizens—individuals who have the skills, talents and abilities to make a difference in their community.