



*Evansville Economic Development Project*



**Evansville  
Economic Development Plan**

*Final Report*

Prepared by:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

The Evansville Economic Development Committee (“EDC”) contracted Whalen & Associates, Inc. in June, 2007 to design and facilitate a process that would result in an Economic Development Plan (the “Plan”). The project fulfills an action item of Evansville’s Smart Growth Plan. The Smart Growth Plan on page 133 states that Evansville “needs more commercial and industrial development to permit the City to reduce its relatively high property tax rate without reducing services.” (The related action item is #9 on page 213.) The project’s planning team consisted of Mayor Sandy Decker, City Administrator Dan Wietecha, Chamber of Commerce Promotional Director Bridgit Larsen and consultant Judy Whalen.

### THE PROCESS

- EDC used a series of **information gathering activities** to provide data from which the Plan would be developed including:
  - **Focus Groups** – Five focus groups were conducted involving 26 representatives of agribusiness, manufacturing, retail, service and construction/development.
  - **Phone Survey** - 135 businesses were identified to be contacted by the UW-Whitewater Small Business Development Center (SBDC.) Thirty-three phone surveys were completed as of January 20, 2008.
  - **Summit** – The Economic Development Summit was conducted January 12, 2008 to provide business representatives the opportunity to provide further input into the topics that should be addressed in the Economic Development Plan. 94 people participated in the Economic Development Summit. A total of 58 local businesses were represented. The Economic Development Summit identified the strategic issues for the next step, the **Task Forces**.
- EDC appointed five **Task Forces**, composed of 32 community volunteers, to develop the goal, objectives and action plans for the five key strategic issues:

- Workforce Development
  - Downtown Revitalization
  - Intergovernmental Relations (This topic was later changed to: Business, Community and Government Relations).
  - Marketing
  - Entrepreneurial Environment
- 
- The **Task Forces** presented their recommendations to the Economic Development Committee April 17, 2008.
  - The **Economic Development Committee** met three times to review the task forces recommended action plans, met with selected task force representatives to gain more clarity, and also met with representatives of the Evansville Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors before finalizing the Economic Development Plan.
  - The **Economic Development Committee approved the Plan** on July 23, 2008.

### **KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES**

Five key strategic issues are addressed in this Plan. These are: (no priority assigned to order)

1. Workforce Development
2. Downtown Revitalization
3. Business, Community and Government Relations
4. Marketing
5. Entrepreneurial Environment

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The goals and objectives for each key strategic issue are:

- **Workforce Development**

**Goal:** To develop and nurture co-operative working networks to secure the resources to build an adaptable and skilled workforce with a positive work ethic and a strong sense of personal responsibility.

**Objective #1:** Access and utilize existing business networks

**Objective #2:** Maximize the use of existing education-based networks

**Objective #3:** Maximize the use of community-based organizational networks.

**Objective #4:** Maximize the use of government networks

- **Business, Community and Government Relations**

**Goal:** To develop a cooperative, intergovernmental, straight-forward, and clearly defined process to reach out, attract and retain a broad economic base for Evansville.

**Objective #1:** Research options that would enable Evansville to form a “stand-alone” Economic Development Alliance.

**Objective #2:** Improve Web internet tools for use by the members of the Economic Development Alliance.

**Objective #3:** Expand outreach between governmental bodies, i.e. local, county, and state.

**Objective #4:** Review city regulations so the regulations and process of adhering to the regulations are streamlined, simple, user-friendly and communicated in an easy to understand manner.

- **Downtown Revitalization**

**Goal:** To create a healthy, vibrant and walkable downtown by expanding and attracting employment, shopping and social activities

**Objective #1:** Host a downtown retail start-up fair to connect entrepreneurs with information on maintaining an existing business and opening a new business and acquiring funding.

**Objective #2:** Develop a pilot business for the principle objective of creating a template for new business start-ups.

**Objective #3:** Form a steering committee to develop a user-friendly manual for city government and the public that lists a menu of low-cost tools and strategies for revitalizing Evansville’s central business district.

**Objective #4:** Create a green business initiative to form the “Allen Creek Collective,” a green business mall in downtown Evansville.

■ **Marketing**

**Goal:** To promote Evansville’s businesses, services and recreational opportunities to residents, non-residents and businesses.

**Objective #1:** Improve marketing to local and surrounding communities

**Objective #2:** Make Evansville a “destination location.”

■ **Entrepreneurial Environment**

**Goal:** To facilitate the interaction of entrepreneurial people, ideas, and resources.

**Objective #1:** Create a better networking environment for local businesses.

**Objective #2:** Develop greater access to high speed internet services

**Objective #3:** Create a Business Resource Center for the City (both web and brick & mortar)

**Objective #4:** Develop incentives for existing and start-up businesses

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

### **KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES**

Five key strategic issues are addressed in the Economic Development Plan. These are: (no priority assigned to order)

1. Workforce Development
2. Downtown Revitalization
3. Business, Community and Government Relations
4. Marketing
5. Entrepreneurial Environment

### **ACTION PLANS**

The following action plans are the outcome of the work of the task forces and the review and discussion of the Economic Development Committee.

One theme is common across the Task Forces and points to the obvious area for the EDC to focus to accomplish the goals of the five Task Forces in the most efficient and comprehensive manner. Evansville needs a funded, centralized entity to direct economic development activity and move this Plan forward.

EDC believes that its primary action must focus on creating the structure for some kind of partnership with the City of Evansville, the Economic Development Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, the Redevelopment Authority, Evansville Community Partnership and/or others (identified as an “Alliance”). The goal of the Alliance will be to reduce redundancy and inefficiencies in the action being taken already within the community and to focus community leaders on a shared vision for Evansville’s economic future.

This Alliance would include a person or, perhaps, entity who would be a centralized resource and who would be responsible for implementing many of the Task Force objectives. For example, the Alliance would coordinate retail fairs, market Evansville’s economic opportunities, work as a conduit between the City of Evansville and prospective businesses, work to promote Evansville’s community development as a way to attract businesses and develop incentives for businesses.

Other communities have this type of centralized person or entity in place including Main Street Programs, Economic Development Corporations, and hybrid actions such as in Milton, Wisconsin. EDC does not have the information necessary to decide what structure would work best for an Alliance in Evansville. Therefore, EDC's first action step is to explore and identify various options and make a recommendation to the City Council by December of 2008.

While researching Alliance structures, EDC will undertake the following strategic actions immediately:

1. **Workforce Development:** EDC will work with the Evansville Community School District to investigate opportunities for a RISE Grant program to parallel the framework of the Department of Public Instruction's Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills program. EDC will prompt this investigation by October 1, 2008.
2. **Downtown Revitalization:** EDC will work with the Chamber of Commerce to collect an inventory of available store fronts downtown. EDC will request that the Chamber of Commerce complete this inventory by October 1, 2008.
3. **Business, Community and Government Relations:** EDC is taking on the work necessary to make a recommendation to the City Council for an Alliance, as described above. This process is central to achieving the goals of this Task Force.
4. **Marketing:** Improved signage in Evansville, primarily "way-finding signs," is in progress. The signs are expected to be installed by October, 2008.
5. **Entrepreneurial Environment:** EDC will work with the Chamber of Commerce to start an Inventors & Entrepreneur's club in Evansville, with the goal of holding the first meeting by October 1, 2008. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce is working with the Eager Free Public Library to inform the community of the business resources available at the Library. A public meeting regarding these resources is scheduled for September, 2008.

These are the first steps for implementing the Economic Development Plan. Full details are included in the Appendix. EDC expects to charge the

Alliance, once it is active and empowered, with the primary responsibility for implementing the full Economic Development Plan. EDC anticipates that the Alliance will be composed of a variety of community organizations and that it will operate with the assistance of EDC, as needed. The Alliance will be accountable to the EDC for implementation of the Economic Development Plan.

## **OUTCOME MEASUREMENT**

The Economic Development Committee will lead the progress review process of the Plan by:

- Requesting quarterly progress reports on the various strategic issues.
- Meeting with selected “champions” or others involved with implementation of the goals, as needed, to more fully understand progress or adjust action plans as needed.
- Discussing the overall progress of meeting the Plan’s goals and objectives at least once every six months.
- Reviewing the overall strategy at least once a year.
- Using the Action Plans as a guide for topics for agendas for the Economic Development Committee meeting agendas.
- Requesting measurement assessments from the appropriate parties.

# APPENDIX

- **Focus Groups Report**
- **Phone Interview Report**
- **Summit Report**
- **Task Forces Report**

