

Mayor's Column for the November 30, 2011, Evansville Review

Just over one year ago, the City of Evansville joined Thrive, the eight-county Madison Region economic development agency. The Evansville Chamber has also joined Thrive. Thrive includes Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Rock, and Sauk Counties. It was formed in 2007 by the Madison Region Collaboration Council of business, government, non-profit, and academic leaders to “grow the Region’s economy in ways that preserve and enhance quality of life.”

There are other regional economic development entities in Wisconsin, such as the New North, an eighteen-county collaboration that includes the Fox River Valley, and the 7 Rivers Alliance in the La Crosse area that includes western Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota, and northeast Iowa. The different regional organizations promote cluster industries important in their areas. The importance of the regional economic development organizations was underscored this year when early discussions about the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, the replacement for the State Department of Commerce, identified the regional organizations as the likely avenues for funneling economic development funds throughout Wisconsin.

The three target industry sectors that have been the focus of Thrive are agriculture, biotechnology, and healthcare. Thrive recently recognized that the impacts of the Great Recession have reduced our ability to use our significant strengths and assets to increase economic opportunities in the Madison Region. Thrive leaders determined the necessity of uniting the 90 existing economic development plans in the Region by development of a comprehensive economic development strategy that will enable our region to compete successfully in the global economy.

Advance Now is the Thrive initiative to draft a comprehensive economic development strategy for our region. It is a four-phase process started in September 2011. The strategy is expected to be completed in spring 2012. The Advance Now initiative is partially funded with a \$97,500 Economic Development Administration grant. With its focus on incorporating local economic development efforts into a region-wide strategy for best use of resources and assets, involvement of local communities in the Advance Now Strategy is critical.

Phase I includes a competitive assessment of demographics and economic trends with comparisons to the metro areas of Lincoln, Nebraska; Des Moines, Iowa; Austin, Texas; the State of Wisconsin; and the United States. A region-wide on-line survey of 1,537 individuals, 12 focus groups, and 12 one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders complemented the statistical findings.

Phase II will use the competitive assessment results to undertake target cluster analysis and marketing review. The results will be a refined list of existing and emerging business industry clusters and identification of best practice marketing endeavors in use.

Phase III is the drafting of the Advance Now Strategy, a five-year consensus roadmap for the Madison Region economic development. The Strategy will assist Thrive in obtaining a federally approved Economic Development District designation, with subsequent additional funding opportunities for the eight-county Region.

Phase IV involves development of an implementation plan for accomplishing Strategy objectives and goals, with measurement of results.

The results of Phase I, the competitive assessment, were presented at a Community Leadership Summit held on November 10, 2011, at Monona Terrace in Madison. I attended this meeting, as did representatives from the Evansville Chamber. Sharing my table at the Summit were Bob Borremans, Executive Director of the Southwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board; Vic Grassman, City of Janesville Director of Economic Development; Amy Charles, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Job Service Director for Southwest Wisconsin; and representatives from the Madison College and the Wisconsin Manufacturing Extension Partnership.

The assessment found areas of strength and identified regional assets. It also brought into focus significant challenges. Occasionally, there were remarkable disparities within our eight-county Region. Here is a sampling of assessment results.

- “Educational attainment is exceptional and increasing” in the Madison Region. In 2010, 34.5% of our working population had a bachelor’s degree or higher. 92% of our workers had a high school diploma or equivalency.
- Innovation, fueled by UW-Madison, is a dominant regional asset. Total UW research and development expenditures exceeded \$1 billion in 2010.
- “Not all sectors fared poorly during the Great Recession.” Between 2005 and 2010, regional employment increased 19.4% in the agriculture sector; 9% in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector; and 9.9% in the health care and social assistance sector. It is noteworthy that these are the cluster industries that have been the past focus of Thrive.
- “Health care access is extensive and quality is world-class.” Our area has a low proportion of uninsured residents.
- “Socioeconomic disparities within the Madison Region are dramatic.” Per capita income in the Janesville MSA (Metropolitan Service Area), which is defined as Rock County, is nearly \$12,000 less than the Madison MSA (defined as Dane, Columbia, and Iowa Counties). 2010 figures:

Madison MSA	\$43,959
Janesville MSA	\$32,102
Wisconsin	\$38,432
United States	\$40,584.

- “The Janesville metro suffers striking housing value challenges.” The median home price in quarter two of 2011 for the Madison MSA is \$213,760; for the Janesville MSA it is \$102,311. In August 2011, Rock County had the highest rate of foreclosures in the Madison Region.
- In 2010, the Madison Region had the lowest rate of small business loans and more businesses entering bankruptcy (except for Austin, Texas) than the comparison geographies.
- “The Madison Region is served by extensive infrastructure networks, but some still lag in competitiveness.” The Dane County Regional Airport is in the top 10 of the 100 busiest U.S. airports in terms of expensive airfares. The Madison Region lags the U.S. and Wisconsin in resident access to DSL and broadband service. In Sauk County, only 61% of residents have DSL access.

The Advance Now competitive assessment provides a compelling call to action to leverage our region’s assets and address our weaknesses and growing regional disparities. The competitive assessment executive summary and the full competitive assessment report can be found as www.advancenow.thrivehere.org.

Phase II results will be presented to the Thrive community on January 18, 2012 and I plan to attend.

Thrive representatives will attend the 6:00 p.m. December 20, 2011, Economic Development Committee meeting at City Hall, at the invitation of the City and the Chamber. Thrive will discuss the Advance Now initiative, the competitive assessment findings, and answer questions.

Community Announcements

Winter parking regulations are in effect from November 15 until April 15. From 1:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m., parking is allowed in non-restricted areas on odd-numbered sides of streets on odd-numbered calendar days and even-numbered sides of streets on even-numbered days.

It is the season of charitable giving. If you are able, please give consideration to local non-profit organizations. Evansville Community Theater, Evansville Fund, Evansville Community Partnership, Evansville Grove Society, Creekside Place, Evansville Youth Center, Evansville Care Closet, Excellence in Education Fund, and AWARE in Evansville are some of the local options for giving.

The AWARE Love Light Tree lighting ceremony will be held on December 2 at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall.

The 28th Annual Holiday Craft Fair will be held on Saturday, December 3, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the J. C. McKenna Middle School Gym.

Community Thanks

Our city thanks the Evansville Fund Board and the many dedicated donors to our community foundation. The Fund provided more than \$6,000 in grants to deserving local projects and activities that benefit our citizens. The award ceremony was held on November 15, 2011, at the Heights at Evansville Manor.