

HOUSTON COUNTY
Economic Development Authority
STRATEGIC PLAN - 2009 [Approved November 4, 2009]

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Introduction

The primary goal of the Houston County Economic Development Authority, is to foster a strong economic environment which supports businesses and cultivates growth, while supporting a stable economy.

Our mission is:

- to support existing businesses through retention and expansion programs, and attract targeted new businesses
- to serve as liaison between public and private economic development and planning organizations
- to recommend policies to County government that support the achievement of planned economic goals.

Background:

Economic Development in Houston County is not a new concept, but rather has taken on a different meaning. The County has recently added the first full time EDA staff, and this strategic plan is meant to be an outline for coordinating and developing the relationships and policies needed to help maintain a vibrant business environment in Houston County. One of the first questions which should be addressed is:
What is Economic Development?

Economic development can be tricky to define as there are many broad meanings but in our case as Houston County economic development, it means basically growing our local or countywide economy. While this may seem easy enough in definition, doing so can encompass many activities on the city and county levels.

Houston County has seven cities and many townships within its borders, and of those seven cities, three have an economic development board and/or paid staff working on economic development. The county, therefore will have some bases to work with, but one of our goals must be to work together with these already established organizations and work to coordinate the activities of each to be to the greatest overall benefit for the county as a whole. For the communities without a formal economic development organization, we will also work on their behalf to provide for economic development services on whatever level we are able to effectively do so. It is not the purpose of the County EDA to replace the need for these organizations, but rather to enhance them.

One thing we must be is proactive in every sense. We must be proactive in retaining the businesses we already have in Houston County by offering assistance and discovering what their needs and concerns are. We must be proactive in recruiting businesses, as it can be a competitive market and we need to ensure we have information on hand to quickly act upon potential relocations. We must also be proactive in marketing the

county as a whole, and ensure we have a constantly updated registry of information to offer to not only our businesses and government organizations, but also outside agencies and prospective businesses. In order to be successful, we have to be flexible and interact often with those in the business community.

This strategic plan is an outline for the county's action on economic development, and outlines eight major areas of focus. Beyond highlighting these eight areas of focus, the plan further sets forth many additional strategies, objectives, and goals for which the County EDA, together with the local EDA boards can strive to achieve.

While this is the adopted plan for Houston County, it cannot succeed without the participation of the many city governments, EDA, Chambers and other organizations within the county. Furthermore, this strategic plan must be well publicized so that citizens within the county are able to better understand the purpose and aims of this organization. Without unifying the various groups from throughout the county, this strategic plan will fail to accomplish its goals.

Strategic Plan Outline

1. Business Retention and Expansion

GOAL: Foster a strong relationship with the business community in Houston County, and to work together with the Chambers of Commerce, and other city organizations to help foster a strong business environment in the County. These policies will be designed to:

1. Keep quality businesses and jobs in Houston County
2. Facilitate growth and expansion
3. Develop good working relationships with businesses and other EDA organizations

Objective: **Work with other organizations to identify companies in the county and to make contact and receive feedback**

Strategy 1: Develop and maintain a business registry for the county

Strategy 2: Work with the Chambers of Commerce and local EDA boards to visit with local businesses throughout the year

Strategy 3: Develop an annual business survey which highlights the needs of the business community

Strategy 4: Publicize business incentive opportunities which are available to the business community.

2. Real Estate Development

GOAL: To maintain growth and affordability of real estate in the county and to ensure we stay competitive in the region.

Objective 1 **Create and maintain affordable housing in Houston County**

Strategy 1 Work together with USDA Rural Development and other housing organizations to ensure our citizens stay updated on potential help with housing.

Strategy 2 Create a housing subcommittee which stays active in finding ways to ensure housing stays affordable, and explores opportunities available to the county

Objective 2 **Develop a plan for organized growth in Houston County**

- Strategy 1* Work with local communities to develop an organized growth plan
- Strategy 2* Help communities in the County to find infrastructure funding to facilitate the growth of their town

3. Industrial Development

GOAL: To retain the industrial business base in Houston County, and to expand the industrial properties and businesses in the county. This program will also include redevelopment of vacant sites as well as new development.

Objective 1: Coordinate and develop industrial parks throughout the county

- Strategy 1:* Develop a registry of available industrial lots and buildings in the county
- Strategy 2:* Focus on retention and expansion of small manufacturing facilities in the county
- Strategy 3:* Promote the transportation and other infrastructure advantages the county has to offer

Objective 2: Work to develop the Houston County Airport as a development incentive for bringing industry to the county

- Strategy 1:* Lengthen the runway at the airport
- Strategy 2:* Develop new hangar space

4. Commercial Development

GOAL: Develop and maintain registry of commercial lots and buildings as well as office space available in the county and to develop commercial parks within the county. Work at retention and expansion of current businesses as well as recruitment of other businesses.

Objective 1: Work with the local communities to develop and maintain a registry of commercial lots and buildings available in the county

- Strategy 1:* Develop a registry of available industrial lots and buildings in the county
- Strategy 2:* Promote the transportation and other infrastructure advantages the county has to offer

Objective 2: Work with city government to develop and expand commercial parks in the county

- Strategy 1:* Work with city governments to find ideal locations for commercial lots
- Strategy 2:* Help city officials find funding for park infrastructure projects

Objective 3: Create new business opportunities in the county for entrepreneurs

- Strategy 1:* Work with local communities to create business incubators for the county
- Strategy 2:* Partner with area schools and universities to create ideas and opportunities for young entrepreneurs
- Strategy 3:* Be a resource for the local business community concerning funding streams for expansion and startup businesses

5. Workforce Development

GOAL: Create and maintain a competitive workforce to meet the needs of Houston County and the Southeast Minnesota area

Objective 1: Partner with local organizations to bring career oriented seminars, workshops and other educational programs to the county

Strategy 1: Work with businesses to receive feedback on what they would like to see for educational programs

Strategy 2: Develop a grant fund to fund scholarships for educational workshops and classes for the business community

Objective 2: Work with Minnesota Southeast Technical to bring more educational classes to the county for workforce development

Strategy 1 Work with the college to find funding for extra classes

Strategy 2: Do research to find out what kind of classes would be best attended in the county

Objective 3: Work to develop a university or technical school satellite facility somewhere in Houston County

Strategy 1 Find a target area the county is best suited to provide education for

Strategy 2: Coordinate with area universities to find an interest level in such a proposal, and work to find out the feasibility of having a school

Strategy 3: Help secure funding and support for satellite facility

6. Economic Development Funding

GOAL: To strengthen current, and find new opportunities to fund economic development for Houston County

- Strategy 1:* Compile a registry of all city and county economic development incentives which can be offered to businesses
- Strategy 2:* Research grant opportunities and forward them on to other organizations to gauge their interest
- Strategy 3:* Be a resource for organizations countywide for grants
- Strategy 4:* Work to expand the county revolving loan fund to further economic development
- Strategy 5:* Work to strengthen county and city economic development incentives
- Strategy 6:* Publicize and actively market all incentives, resources and economic development programs

7. Trails and Tourism Development

GOAL: To promote and expand the county trail system, organize various local groups and put forth a cohesive tourism agenda

Objective 1: Utilize the strengths of the county to attract tourists

Objective 2: Expand and connect the county trail network

Strategy 1: Work with local organizations to expand the trail network to tie into Wisconsin's at La Crosse

Strategy 2: Expand the county trails to tie La Crescent with Hokah and Houston

Objective 3: Develop a county tourism plan

Strategy 1: Outline the roles of each organization involved in tourism and marketing in Houston County to ensure efficiency

8. County Marketing and Promotion

GOAL: Promote the business and tourism environment of the county through technology, organizational cooperation and networking within the Minnesota state and regional organizational structure

Objective 1: Update and consolidate city, county and regional websites

Strategy 1: Further develop the county EDA webpage
Strategy 2: Develop, maintain and consolidate city and regional information onto the www.houstoncountymn.org webpage

Objective 2: Network and become members of statewide and regional organizations

Strategy 1: Attend relevant conferences and become a member of statewide and regional economic development organizations

Objective 3: Develop a county EDA newsletter to inform the county businesses or incentives, resources and other vital business and economic development issues

Strategy 1: Write a periodic newsletter informing our business base of possible incentives or resources pertaining to economic development

9. Agricultural Support and Development

Goal: Support existing agricultural enterprises in Houston County and offer ideas, facilitation, and funding avenues for new possibilities.

Objective 1 Support existing agricultural enterprises

Strategy 1 Work with University of MN Extension, area technical colleges and local farmers and businesses to offer seminars, field days, and tours of farms and businesses.

Objective 2 Promote new agricultural enterprises

Strategy 1 Promote cooperative ventures between towns and farmers to supply locally grown vegetables, fruits, and nuts.

1. Business Retention and Expansion

GOAL: Foster a strong relationship with the business community in Houston County, and to work together with the Chambers of Commerce, and other city organizations to help foster a strong business environment in the County. These policies will be designed to:

1. Keep quality businesses and jobs in Houston County
2. Facilitate growth and expansion
3. Develop good working relationships with businesses and other EDA organizations

Rationale: Businesses are an important aspect of any economy, large or small, and are major contributors to the local tax base. Business retention and expansion programs support these existing businesses, and therefore help to maintain and expand the county tax base. In order to help retain and expand these businesses, we must have updated information about each business, and compile data concerning strengths and weaknesses of doing business in the county. These policies will be designed to help keep good relationships among the business community, and also to identify problem areas, such as businesses which are considering closing or relocating.

Objective: Work with other organizations to identify companies in the county and to make contact and receive feedback

Strategy 1: Develop and maintain a business registry for the county

The county EDA will start by working with local organizations to compile a database on all businesses within the county. Information included in this database will be company size, location and industry. It will be updated annually, and gives EDA a good basis for developing good business relationships in the county.

Strategy 2: Work with the Chambers of Commerce and local EDA boards to visit with local businesses throughout the year

We need to set up agreements with the local EDA and Chambers in order to utilize the information about the business community. We need to be careful to protect our businesses information, but also share information when necessary. A visitation program, coordinated with the chambers and EDA boards will be a primary tool in determining which companies in the county we are at risk of losing to relocation or closure.

Strategy 3: Develop an annual business survey which highlights the needs of the business community

We need to develop an annual business survey which will ask many questions about the firm which can be used to update our registry on an annual basis. It will also ask many open ended questions which we can use to receive feedback about what is going well and what is not going well for businesses in the county. We can then use this information to

adjust our approach, or change directions on certain policies in order to become more business friendly

Strategy 4: Publicize business incentive opportunities which are available to the business community.

While developing incentives to offer businesses is important to our economic development program, we must also ensure that current and prospective businesses know about the benefits and resources offered by the county as well as the city EDA. We must develop a plan to publicize our programs. This should be done through our website, community profiles, newsletter as well as other forms of media.

2. Real Estate Development

GOAL: To maintain growth and affordability of real estate in the county and to ensure we stay competitive in the region.

Rationale: Quality and affordable real estate are important factors in luring outside businesses to the area. We must ensure we have an adequate supply of housing, and plan for the future by preparing land for residential use. We need to work with HUD and state organizations to find ways to help our citizens into affordable housing in the county. There are many resources available for homebuyers and we need to compile data on these resources and inform county citizens of their availability and help to distribute those resources.

Objective 1 Create and maintain affordable housing in Houston County

Strategy 1 Work together with USDA Rural Development and other housing organizations to ensure our citizens stay updated on potential help with housing.

The county EDA should team together with county financial institutions, and a housing committee to create and expand subsidy opportunities available through state and federal level housing initiatives. Through the newsletter and other forms of media, we need to ensure our citizens stay informed about the resources available to them.

Strategy 2 Create a housing subcommittee which stays active in finding ways to ensure housing stays affordable, and explores opportunities available to the county

Each community has its own needs and problems with housing. Therefore, a housing committee for the county should be created, which will explore funding opportunities and other resources available to the county to ensure we have an adequate supply of affordable housing in the county

Objective 2 Develop a plan for organized growth in Houston County

Strategy 1 Work with local communities to develop an organized growth plan

In order to facilitate growth which efficiently benefits the county, organized land use planning should be used. County EDA should work with each individual community to discuss and create an organized growth plan. This will include working with the planning and zoning department/board for future use designation.

Strategy 2 Help communities in the County to find infrastructure funding to facilitate the growth of their town

Many infrastructure projects bring a high price tag with them. Many times small rural communities find it difficult to find the funding to do such projects. Therefore, the county EDA should serve as a resource for finding funds to help local communities follow through with infrastructure projects which have a bearing on economic development for the county

3. Industrial Development

GOAL: To retain the industrial business base in Houston County, and to expand the industrial properties and businesses in the county. This program will also include redevelopment of vacant sites as well as new development.

Rationale: The businesses we already have in the county are very important to the overall economic health of the area. We need to make sure we have the information needed to help retain and expand that industrial base, which in turn will expand our tax base. Having an updated registry of relevant information to inform these prospective businesses will be very helpful to the county.

Objective 1: Coordinate and develop industrial parks throughout the county

Strategy 1: Develop a registry of available industrial lots and buildings in the county

An updated and steady flow of new information is vital to economic development programs. In order to draw new businesses to the county, we must have a readily available database of information which these businesses require. Therefore, the county EDA should compile a database of available industrial plots and buildings throughout the county, and continue to update this registry regularly. In order for this to work well, we must inform the communities of Houston County that the county EDA can be a resource for keeping this data in a central location. This information can then be uploaded onto the county EDA website as well as the mnpro.com website. With this information easily accessible we will be better prepared to lure businesses to Houston County.

Strategy 2: Develop a plan of when to use incentives for business projects

Currently the tax abatement program has one across the board step. Whether a company produces 1 job, or 100 jobs, they receive the same benefits. A taskforce should be created which will evaluate the incentive programs of the county, and create a more streamlined program, which incorporates steps in which businesses which create more jobs and greatly grow our tax base receive larger benefits.

Strategy 3: Focus on retention and expansion of small manufacturing facilities in the county

While working to bring in a large manufacturing business can be enticing. The county should work to bring in several smaller manufacturers. While large businesses can have a profound positive effect on the local economy when they come in, if such a business were to leave, it can have the same profound negative effect on the economy. By diversifying the tax base, we have better control over the yearly finances, and can reduce the blow of losing an employer.

Strategy 4: Promote the transportation and other infrastructure advantages the county has to offer

Transportation infrastructure can play a major role in a businesses plans. Houston County is ideally located near a major waterway, rail lines, highways and interstates. We are also close to major metropolitan areas and regional and international airports. Houston County EDA should promote our advantages in our location to outside businesses.

Objective 2: Work to develop the Houston County Airport as a development incentive for bringing industry to the county

Strategy 1: Lengthen the runway at the airport

Strategy 2: Develop new hangar space

Strategy 3: Work to bring a delivery service facility to the airport

4. Commercial Development

GOAL: Develop and maintain registry of commercial lots and buildings as well as office space available in the county and to develop commercial parks within the county. Work at retention and expansion of current businesses as well as recruitment of other businesses.

Rationale: The rationale behind maintaining a commercial registry and the development of commercial parks for commercial development in Houston County is similar to that of industrial development. We need to have an almost effortless and fast flow of information to give to prospective businesses and work quickly to help them make their decision to relocate or expand in Houston County.

Objective 1: Work with the local communities to develop and maintain a registry of commercial lots and buildings available in the county

Strategy 1: Develop a registry of available commercial lots and buildings in the county

Keeping a central registry of commercial lots and buildings which are available is very important, as noted about in the description about industrial lots. We need to be able to have information on hand to quickly and easily put together a presentation on why and how a business can easily relocate to Houston County

Strategy 2: Promote the transportation and other infrastructure advantages the county has to offer

Houston County is ideally located and in a good place to boast about its transportation infrastructure. We are near the La Crosse metropolitan area, Mississippi River, Interstates, Highways and rail lines. We need to work to further develop and maintain these transportation lines, as well as market the county's proximity to them.

Objective 2: Work with city government to develop and expand commercial parks in the county

Strategy 1: Work with city governments to find ideal locations for commercial lots

We need to work with each city around the county and gauge their interest in developing or expanding their commercial park. We also should be a resource for helping the various communities to find ideal locations for businesses to relocate to.

Strategy 2: Help city officials find funding for park infrastructure projects

Infrastructure projects can become very expensive, and cities may not always have the funds available, or the resources to locate and pursue grant opportunities to help defray the costs of such projects. The county EDA should therefore be a resource to each city to

help find and pursue funding for public infrastructure projects which may increase the appeal of the county to prospective businesses.

Objective 3: Create new business opportunities in the county for entrepreneurs

Strategy 1: Work with local communities to create business incubators for the county

Houston County EDA should work with local communities to develop business incubators and create programs which can help entice people to start a business in Houston County. We need to ensure that Houston County stays a competitive and business friendly in order to help draw new businesses to the area.

Strategy 2: Partner with area schools and universities to create ideas and opportunities for young entrepreneurs

As part of our business incubators and other incentive programs, Houston County EDA as well as the local officials, should team together with area universities and technical schools to help foster ideas and opportunities for young people finishing school to come to our county and start a business.

Strategy 3: Be a resource for the local business community concerning funding streams for expansion and startup businesses

Similar to helping communities create the infrastructure needed to attract businesses, Houston County EDA also should be a resource to the business community to help secure funding and take advantage of incentive programs available to them. Once the business registry is completed, this can be done through workshops in the county, as well as keeping businesses informed through a Houston County EDA Newsletter.

5. Workforce Development

GOAL: Create and maintain a competitive workforce to meet the needs of Houston County and the Southeast Minnesota area

Rationale: An educated and strong workforce in Houston County can put us at an advantage when pursuing new businesses or helping local businesses expand and stay in the county. Partnering with these businesses and individuals across the county to develop an educated workforce will be an important part of maintaining a strong economy and viable business environment.

Objective 1: Partner with local organizations to bring career oriented seminars, workshops and other educational programs to the county

Strategy 1: Work with businesses to receive feedback on what they would like to see for educational programs

This strategy can be accomplished through the administration of our annual business survey. By directly asking every business what they would like to see in educational programs, we can better gauge what to provide for the business community during that specific year.

Strategy 2: Develop a grant fund to fund scholarships for educational workshops and classes for the business community

If we are able to expand the classes offered through Minnesota Southeast Technical, or other college in the area, we should set up a county business scholarship fund, as these classes generally have some cost involved with them, and we are not able to choose what is available to fit the needs of the entire business community. Funds for such a program should be available through a private foundation in Minnesota.

Objective 2: Work with Minnesota Southeast Technical to bring more educational classes to the county for workforce development

Strategy 1 Work with the college to find funding for extra classes

While this is a difficult economic time, we may still be able to expand classes offered in Houston County, by asking in our annual business survey what the interest level would be for such classes. We will then have solid information to take to the schools when asking for them to expand classes in our area, and put us in a better position to get those classes here.

Strategy 2: Do research to find out what kind of classes would be best attended in the county

This is another objective which can be accomplished through the annual business survey. We may also want to hold a public forum in order to see if interest would exist outside of the business community, because there may be some individuals interested in attending such classes but the business owner is not. This strategy would then also coincide with others regarding workforce development, as we would then attempt to secure some funding to help people defray the cost of attending such classes.

Objective 3: Work to develop a university or technical school satellite facility somewhere in Houston County

Strategy 1 Find a target area the county is best suited to provide education for

As a board, and as a county, we need to determine a specific direction to go in regarding business recruitment. We should attempt to focus our recruiting efforts on a specific industry cluster which will play off the strengths of Houston County. By doing this, we can become a leader in that industry, and be in a better position to efficiently offer educational opportunities to the workers in the area.

Strategy2: Coordinate with area universities to find an interest level in such a proposal, and work to find out the feasibility of having a school

Once we focus our business recruiting and education efforts in the county, we will be in a good position to discuss the possibility of a university or technical college adding a satellite facility in the county, which would offer classes which focus on education geared toward our target industry.

Strategy 3: Help secure funding and support for satellite facility

We need to ensure we have enough community and county level support for such a facility, and then work with that institution to find funding and do feasibility studies if necessary.

6. Economic Development Funding

GOAL: To strengthen current, and find new opportunities to fund economic development for Houston County

Rationale: Funding will be an important part of this strategic plan. Without outside funds, especially in the form of grants, we would be unable to help fund many of these projects. Beyond finding funds to help with countywide projects, we should also be working with the individual communities to help strengthen their incentives and ability to help businesses start out.

Strategy 1: Compile a registry of all city and county economic development incentives which can be offered to businesses

Having incentives to bring businesses into the county is an important part of the business recruitment process. Therefore the county should have a centralized database and can act as a point of contact for prospective businesses to any city in the county. This ability should speed our response to these prospective businesses by allowing us almost instantaneous answer to any inquiries, especially when coupled together with other registry programs employed by the county EDA.

Strategy 2: Research grant opportunities and forward them on to other organizations to gauge their interest

Researching grant opportunities for the county EDA will be an important part of EDA funding for the entire county, but we should also work to forward any other funding opportunities that may not be suitable for the county, but may benefit other organizations in the county. By having a strong flow of information to organizations and businesses throughout the county, we will maximize our chances of finding suitable projects for a wider range of funding opportunities.

Strategy 3: Be a resource for organizations countywide for grants

Beyond simply researching and forwarding grant opportunities on to other organizations, the county EDA should also be a technical resource, to help other county organizations with ties to economic development, for the purpose of writing grants.

Strategy 4: Work to expand the county revolving loan fund to further economic development

The county's revolving loan fund is another great tool for economic development. Many of these funds are already tied up for the long term so EDA should work to

expand the revolving loan fund by finding more funds to supplement it. We should also work with the cities in the county to help them secure or expand their own revolving loan funds.

Strategy 5: Work to strengthen county and city economic development incentives

While the county and many towns already have incentives for businesses, we should work together to help strengthen these programs in order to maximize the incentives and benefits at a minimum cost to the city and/or county.

Strategy 6: Publicize and actively market all incentives, resources and economic development programs

While having EDA programs, incentives and resources are important to the overall economic development, they do no good if they are not known. Through the use of mailings, word of mouth and networking within the county, we need to work to publicize these programs so that businesses and organizations throughout the county are able to best utilize them.

7. Trails and Tourism Development

GOAL: To promote and expand the county trail system, organize various local groups and put forth a cohesive tourism agenda

Objective 1: Utilize the strengths of the county to attract tourists

Strategy 1: Work with businesses and bike/trails enthusiasts to find ways to draw tourists to the area using the trails system.

Objective 2: Expand and connect the county trail network

Strategy 1: Work with local organizations to expand the trail network to tie into Wisconsin's at La Crosse

Work regionally with Wisconsin and Minnesota trails organizations to find the most efficient and effective way of tying the Root River Trail into the Wisconsin State Trail system.

Strategy 2: Expand the county trails to tie La Crescent with Hokah and Houston

Work with the trails group and other city organizations to work with landowners, find funding and to prioritize what needs to be done to complete the bike trail and continue to improve the system in the future.

Objective 3: Develop a county tourism plan

Strategy 1: Outline the roles of each organization involved in tourism and marketing in Houston County to ensure efficiency

Work with the County Trails committee and local EDA and city organizations to develop a strategy for completing the bike trail through Houston to Hokah and on to La Crescent and into La Crosse. Further work with these groups to determine how best to utilize limited resources for the project.

8. County Marketing and Promotion

GOAL: Promote the business and tourism environment of the county through technology, organizational cooperation and networking within the Minnesota state and regional organizational structure

Objective 1: Update and consolidate city, county and regional websites

Strategy 1: Further develop the county EDA webpage

Utilize the county webpage for updated minutes, agendas and abatement/subsidy information for businesses looking at Houston County. Ensure this site stays up to date.

Strategy 2: Develop, maintain and consolidate city and regional information onto the www.houstoncountymn.org webpage

Develop www.houstoncountymn.org to be a portal to information pertaining to Houston County. Link all county, city and regional sites to this site, and keep an updated calendar of events for the county. Work together with area chambers of commerce to try to work on campaigns which will help local businesses and the local economy.

Objective 2: Network and become members of statewide and regional organizations

Strategy 1: Attend relevant conferences and become a member of statewide and regional economic development organizations

Attending relevant conferences is important to the further education of the EDA staff. It is also important to keep up to date on current trends and events going on in Minnesota. Therefore, the Houston County EDA staff and board members should go to relevant regional and statewide conferences. The EDA should also be members of these organizations to get updates on resources and opportunities available to the EDA and businesses within Houston County.

Objective 3: Develop a county EDA newsletter to inform the county businesses or incentives, resources and other vital business and economic development issues

Strategy 1: Write a periodic newsletter informing our business base of possible incentives or resources pertaining to economic development

Using the county's business email database, develop and maintain a periodic newsletter with information regarding resources and opportunities available to local businesses. It can also be a way to promote the local economy, and local events.

Input from businesses, chambers and other relevant organizations should be incorporated into this newsletter.

9. Agricultural Support and Development

Goal: Support existing agricultural enterprises in Houston County and offer ideas, facilitation, and funding avenues for new possibilities.

Rationale: The agricultural economy plays a vital role in the county. Ag service industries employ many people in our towns in addition to those who work on farms. A thriving agricultural economy creates thriving fuel, feed, fertilizer, implement, and repair businesses to increase the county's tax base. New possibilities also exist in creating local food infrastructure.

Objective 1 Support existing agricultural enterprises

Strategy 1 Work with University of MN Extension, area technical colleges and local farmers and businesses to offer seminars, field days, and tours of farms and businesses.

Topics covered could be financial planning, marketing, environmentally friendly construction and land use, or new technologies. The EDA should act as a facilitator to bring people and organizations together to share information with county farmers and ag businesses. Access to new ideas and the resulting shared discussion will enhance the viability of participants.

Objective 2 Promote new agricultural enterprises

Strategy 1 Promote cooperative ventures between towns and farmers to supply locally grown vegetables, fruits, and nuts.

Encourage local production and marketing of eggs, dairy products and meat. This would benefit the consumers of these foods with better nutrition and health and farmers with new income possibilities. Opportunities may also exist in cooperative growing plots and greenhouses.