

## **Sandstone Economic Development Strategies 2003 – 2007**

The City of Sandstone and its Economic Development Leadership Committee has devised the following long-term vision and major economic strategies as part of a five year economic development strategic action plan.

### **VISION**

Insert draft vision statement here.

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2003-2007**

The Sandstone Economic Leadership Committee identified ten (10) strategies and supporting actions as follows:

- ***I-35 Interchange Development***
  - ***Mission: To develop the I-35 freeway interchange as a unique, two pronged development site consisting of a major new lodging development and significant outdoor recreation retail / service center.***
    - Differentiate this interchange from any other north of the Twin Cities.
    - Recruit a major outdoor recreation/sporting goods retailer to anchor the development vision. This development will need a large-scale retailer such as a Cabela's, Galayan's, Gander Mountain, Bass Pro, or combination of outdoor recreation outlet stores to create the critical mass to support this niche development.
    - Build a business attraction and marketing strategy around the theme – "Sandstone... the Northwood's Recreation Gateway."
    - Prepare a concept development design to help the community and prospective companies visualize how the interchange could be developed for this niche market. Use as a promotion and attraction tool.
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- ***Sandstone High Performance Industrial/ Business Park Development***
  - ***Mission: To develop the former airport site into the premier, rural eco-industrial park in Minnesota providing sustainable new business growth, jobs and new private investment for the area.***

- Attract the proposed waste to energy facility as the initial anchor business and co-generation energy source to support a sustainable, high performance industrial park in which businesses seek superior financial performance through collaborative resource use and efficiencies strategies.
- Work with the public and business community to address issues of uncertainty and insure that critical questions are asked and addressed as part of the Sandstone Waste to Energy Project predevelopment due diligence.
- Hire a qualified consultant to assist in completing a resource flows market analysis and economic feasibility determination of potential business development targets that could take advantage of the proposed anchor project and its resources. Target businesses, workforce skill needs and special financing resources would be a desired outcome of this assessment. Develop appropriate strategies to position and attract key opportunities and begin marketing to coincide with the facility design and development process.
- Secure a Greater Minnesota Business Development Public Infrastructure Grant and/or other eligible development financing to provide infrastructure to support the new project and future business developments within the business park. Take advantage of any special sources related to sustainable community and business development.
- Secure designation of a strategic portion of the business park as a state designated, JOBZ – Tax Free Sub-Zone providing a competitive incentive to attract and grow new business development.
- Determine ways the Sandstone Waste to Energy Project can support existing businesses and public or non-profit organizations in the immediate area, and assist in establishing those relationships as a direct benefit and retention strategy i.e. federal prison, Pine Medical Center and Gateway Clinic, and others.
- As part of the business park design process, identify and institute design standards to guide future developments in the park.
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- ***Medical Cluster Retention and Development***

- ***Mission: To recognize and support the retention and continued development of the city's growing medical cluster as an important local and regional service center and valued component of Sandstone's existing and future economic base.***
  - We will seek a briefing on the hospital's planning needs and offer to conduct a joint public kick-off of a collaborative visioning effort with the hospital team. This planning and demonstration of community support is a key action we must take to support future cluster development.
  - Hospital expansion (where, when, how can we help?)
  - Land and building needs?
  - Assisted living facility development support
  - Market and support the medical cluster (health fair, school projects tie-in, logo and slogan to support the cluster)
  - Investigate the potential for creation of a professional medical services center in the vacated elementary school
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- ***Downtown Enhancement and Redevelopment***

- ***Mission: To support and maintain the vitality of the downtown first and foremost as a community focal point providing a safe and attractive place to shop, enjoy the arts, recreation and entertainment amenities, and secure basic public and private services. Its secondary role will be as a recreation and entertainment center to meet the needs of the visitor and traveling public.***
  - Encourage building owners and businesses to "show-off" their sandstone building materials and historic architecture by removing facades and providing historic information on our unique buildings and their previous uses.
  - City will provide low interest financing using the existing storefront revolving loan fund possibly in conjunction with a local lender and state grant to support business redevelopment efforts. The City, Chamber and Housing and Redevelopment Authority will work together to investigate eligibility/fundability of a State Small Cities Development Grant for housing and commercial rehab in and around the downtown area.

- City and Chamber will work together to assess the level of support for the establishment of downtown building design standards. If appropriate, setup a process and engage community leaders in the design of such standards.
- The City will establish a multi-year Public Areas Capital Improvements Budget to enhance the public areas of the downtown and promote green space, desired public amenities and visually improve the area. With this commitment in place, the intent is to challenge the business community to join in the process and work collaboratively to make significant improvements over a multi-year time frame. State Transportation Enhancement matching grant funds could be one source to make public streetscape improvements.
- To help address existing and future downtown parking needs, the City will assess ways to enhance the use of the City parking lot including signage, lighting, crosswalks needs, etc. This process can involve the Chamber and surrounding businesses in the immediate area.
- As part of a more formalized business retention effort, the Chamber will work with the downtown business community to conduct a shoppers survey to better assess patron needs and potential new product and service growth opportunities.
- City and Chamber will monitor the significant building turnover potential and take steps to insure that the economic development vision and strategies are reflected or adjusted as necessary. Over 50% of the existing downtown buildings could change ownership and primary use within the next several years. This is a significant situation that needs to be monitored on a continuing basis.
- Work with the school district and students to determine needs, interest and sources of financing for a new community youth center.
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- ***Tourism Development***

- ***Mission: Build on the natural, historical and cultural amenities the City has to offer the traveling public and promote more tourism related visits into the community and downtown area.***

- Design, plan and secure designation of Highway 23 from downtown Sandstone to Duluth as a new State Scenic Byway.

- Market and promote the historic and recreational amenities of this travel corridor in cooperation with other communities and interests along the Scenic Byway.
- Maintain the public lands along the Kettle River as a community open-green space transition area, which supports the wild and scenic characteristics and values we want to retain. Public access and use for passive outdoor recreation is encouraged. We will play an active role in MDNR State Park policy development for the river area.
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- ***Business Retention and Expansion***

- ***Mission: To insure that as a community we make every effort to support, retain and grow the businesses and non-profit organizations that comprise our economy.***

- Support the Chamber of Commerce in developing a formal business and non-profit organization call/retention program wherein we regularly call on businesses to confidentially discuss their situation and future needs.
- Provide up to date information on the array of technical and financial resources that are available to support businesses and organizations through a variety of public and private sources including the City's revolving loan fund.
- Take immediate action to address the needs of businesses that are in transition or have known problems. Several have been identified during the strategic discussion process and need attention by the City, Chamber and others as soon as possible.
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- ***Education and Workforce Development***

- ***Mission: To strengthen the ties between secondary and post secondary education resources and our business and non-profit organization needs for a skilled and available workforce.***

- Involve students, administrators, businesses and non-profit organizations in a workforce roundtable discussion on how we can connect with each other's immediate and long-term skill and training needs. This initial

dialogue should provide the basis for defining further strategies, resources and actions to be pursued. The intent is to build on the positive relations already in place between the high school and community employers. We will build on this strength and anticipate future workforce development needs related to the medical cluster, eco-industrial/business park (target tenants), and retailing. Other business needs through the Chamber business call program should be communicated and made a part of this effort.

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- ***Housing Development***

- ***Mission: To provide a range of housing opportunities that can meet our community housing needs, support economic growth, and retain and grow the population and tax base.***

- Support development of the assisted living facility to help meet current senior needs and open up the existing housing stock for others.
- Further investigate with the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) the availability and eligible use of existing development funds, and begin exploring ways to complete a more detailed housing needs assessment and target additional housing development resources for affordable housing.
- City will identify public and private land available for housing development and determine any barriers and actions that could be taken to address these issues. Make this inventory information available to the HRA and potential area housing developers to encourage interest in the community.

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- ***Intergovernmental Relations***

- ***Mission: To reach out to the surrounding townships, communities and East Central Regional development interests to discuss common issues, share our strategic focus and identify ways to partner and collaborate.***

- Meet with the township supervisors to review our economic strategic plan and seek their involvement and support. Discuss the need to create some minimal land use controls to protect our interests and future investments.

- ***Leadership and Collaboration***

- ***Mission: To build on the positive outcomes of this strategic planning process, and further engage the community's public and private leadership in a collaborative effort to implement and achieve these strategic priorities.***

- Share this strategic plan with the community, finalize and set up a process to lead and monitor/evaluate our progress on a continuing basis.

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SANDSTONE

Sandstone is a quietly growing rural service center providing year round jobs in professional services, health care and education, correctional services and retail/recreation/entertainment. We are known as a "healthy," livable community. Our population has slowly and steadily increased both within the community and surrounding townships. This growth has provided tax relief, sustained our schools and maintained quality public services desired within the area. We have leveraged public and private resources to support three priority development areas in the community: freeway interchange, business park, and downtown redevelopment area. We have also retained the Kettle River frontage as an open and undeveloped transition area sustaining the wild and scenic characteristics that we value and enjoy.

Within the targeted development areas, the freeway is unlike any other interchange along I-35 with a new hotel and developing outdoor recreation retail cluster, which includes a major anchor store. We have become known as the "Northwood's Starts Here" a theme we have marketed to support the outdoors cluster and retail/recreation/entertainment niche in the downtown and riverfront areas. Highway 23 has been designated a State Scenic By-Way and historic travel route to Duluth generating more traffic in the downtown and interest in the community and builds on our Gateway focus. The Business Park has developed as a rural eco-industrial park providing needed tax base and sustainable, higher paying jobs. The key to our success thus far has been our vision of managed growth, active public and private leadership, communication, collaboration, action, investment leveraging and hard work.

We have maintained a viable hospital and clinic and added an assisted living facility, all part of the growing medical services cluster. We have also integrated business and school relationships including class offerings with surrounding higher education facilities that are targeted to existing and future business needs. These changes, coupled with a new youth center, have helped to support our young people and a desire to encourage retention and long-term interest in the area. We feel we can take care of the needs of our youth, families and seniors if everyone works together. An increase in business and public employment has led to new housing starts and the assisted living facility created more turnover in the housing market. This has encouraged family growth and support for the schools, health care facilities, professional services and the downtown area. Our "community attitude" has changed and we have retained the quality of life desired as we work to balance a rural service center - bedroom community role.