



**RICE COUNTY  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
2011/2012 WORK PLAN**  
*Approved June 14, 2011*

**INTRODUCTION**

The Rice County Economic Development Department was created as a result of the Committee #3 – *Countywide Economic Development* – recommendations in 2006. The purpose of the Committee was to explore the potential for a Rice County economic development entity and recommend an organizational structure to the Rice County Board of Commissioners. Upon completion of the tasks assigned to the Committee, Committee #3 recommended the creation of a County staff position with the primary goal of assisting in the creation of new quality job opportunities and additional commercial/industrial tax base within Rice County. In 2007 – the Rice County Economic Development Department was created.

The goal of the department has been to work collectively with the Rice County communities to ensure that a pro economic development culture exists in order to expand the tax base and create quality jobs. Initially, much attention has been focused on building collaborations, partnerships, relationships, and coalitions. This has resulted in a robust network of public and private partners that jointly work together on specific economic development projects and goals. Because economic development does not happen in a vacuum, but instead takes the cooperation of many organizations working towards the same goal – relationship building and teamwork will continue to be a core focus of the Rice County Economic Development Department.

The following “Economic Development Department – 2011/2012 Work Plan” is a plan that outlines specific initiatives that will be pursued on an ongoing bases, as well near-, mid-, and long-term initiatives that will be implemented in order to achieve Rice County’s economic development goals. This work plan accounts for the accomplishments and successes that have been realized since 2007, incorporates the economic development goals of the Rice County communities and how Rice County can assist with those efforts, works to establishes Rice County’s name and reputation as a place to do business, and prepares the County to take full advantage of development and growth opportunities as the economy recovers.

There are many advantages to doing business in Rice County. It is the role of the department to identify, promote, and implement strategic steps to take advantage of the county’s assets and promote economic development countywide per the direction and support of the County Board.

**MISSION  
STATEMENT**

*Rice County Economic  
Development –*

*Working in partnership  
with our communities  
to foster an  
environment that  
welcomes economic  
development as a  
means to expand the  
tax base and create  
quality jobs,  
benefiting the county  
as a whole.*

There are certain aspects of economic development that are continuous, and therefore cannot be assigned to a timeframe. These activities and initiatives are the core functions of the department. They help build the foundation and set the stage for Rice County’s involvement in improving the economic climate and environment through expanding the tax base and creating quality jobs.

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC TASKS	UPDATE / STATUS
<b>Technical Resource &amp; Assistance</b>	<p>As the economic development field becomes more complicated and competitive (due to changes in state and federal regulations and the overall economy), it is increasingly more important and necessary to be knowledgeable regarding available programs, updates on rules and regulations, and recent legislative actions. Not all Rice County communities have dedicated economic development staff, so in an effort to promote and encourage economic development projects in Rice County, the County can assist all communities by serving as the clearinghouse of information, as a technical resource for programs and regulations, and as an extension to their economic development staff providing technical assistance on specific economic development activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize existing automated email notification system to provide updates, notices, deadline info, etc. to community representatives as they are made available.</li> <li>• Update the “data center” and other components of the County’s economic development pages on the website to ensure that all information is accurate and up to date.</li> <li>• Continue to provide specific assistance to communities upon request.</li> </ul>	
<b>Build Collaborations &amp; Partnerships</b>	<p>Economic development does not happen in a vacuum, but instead takes the cooperation of many organizations working towards the same goal. An important goal in Rice County is to improve the tax base and create quality jobs – <i>fostering an environment that welcomes economic development</i>. This can be done in many different ways, but the most efficient way will be to build relationships with key players and stakeholders, and then work in cooperation with one another.</p> <p>A network of public and private partners has been established and relationships have been developed with the Rice County communities. Rice County will continue to work with these partners, as well as work with the Department of Employment and Economic Development, State Representatives, other counties, and other entities and organizations involved in economic development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend City EDA meetings on a regular basis (monthly, quarterly, etc.) to stay abreast of the economic development activities in each community.</li> <li>• Meet individually with representatives of partner organizations at least annually to maintain and strengthen relationship and to explore collaborations.</li> <li>• Take a more active role in MAPCED – the Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers.</li> <li>• Conduct at least one countywide workshop with business leaders and government representatives to discuss Rice County economic development initiatives.</li> <li>• Maintain key memberships that lead to business development (i.e.: CVN).</li> </ul>	

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC TASKS	UPDATE / STATUS
<b>Developer Requests &amp; Business Assistance Responses</b>	<p>Responding to questions and requests about available land, incentives, and programs is an ongoing activity and a core function of the department. When a developer, site selector, or business calls inquiring about locating in Rice County, it is essential that each request is followed up on in a timely and efficient manner. Rice County must be completely objective when requests are received, and employ systems that allow each community an equal opportunity to respond to the inquiry. Rice County's role will be to coordinate and facilitate such requests and the responses and/or support community response efforts – depending on the individual situation and depending on the origination of the request.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the “available land” online resource to ensure that land included in database is current and up to date.</li> <li>• Research/explore participation in the statewide MNPRO database, which was launched in spring 2011. This could potentially result in cost/time savings since the administration of the database would be a DEED/MnCAR function and individual brokers, etc. could list/maintain own property listings.</li> <li>• Maintain list/files for all business inquiry and corresponding responses.</li> </ul>	
<b>Business Champion</b>	<p>The various different government regulations and processes can sometimes seem overwhelming or appear to be an obstacle to development. While working with business prospects over the last few years, the need and request for assistance with understanding the processes and helping navigate the government requirements has emerged. Rice County has the ability assist the businesses and serve as a liaison.</p> <p>The purpose of the “Business Champion” will be to assist with various applications (loans, permits, etc.), subsidy requests, and the general navigation of processes – upon request – to ease the potential burden of doing business anywhere in Rice County.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtain copies of all application forms from cities and economic development partners.</li> <li>• Maintain a complete list of contacts in all city departments to share with business prospects.</li> </ul>	

The following initiatives have been identified as “near-term.” These initiatives have been included in the current year budget, and are considered essential activities/projects/products to be pursued *now* as a means to achieve the County’s economic development goals. These initiatives will set the stage and prepare the County for mid- and long-term initiatives.

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC TASKS	UPDATE / STATUS
<p><b>Countywide Marketing &amp; Promotion</b></p>	<p><i>Marketing and promotion of Rice County as a whole for economic development purposes</i> has been identified as an early initiative for promoting cooperation among Rice County communities. Rice County is in the position of being able to market the unique attributes of each of the communities – with a coordinated message. In 2010, a Rice County Marketing Plan and brochure were completed. The Plan identified strategic memberships, conferences, and advertising opportunities to promote Rice County as a place to do business. The brochure and accompanying ad campaign focused on highlighting the strengths of Rice County and articulating the characteristics that make Rice County distinct/unique. 2011 will focus on the implementation of the marketing plan and advertising campaign.</p> <p>In addition, the online video project will be launched in 2011. This will include a series of seven one-minute videos, housed on the County’s website that will highlight Rice County’s quality of life and economic development opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate recently completed marketing brochure information (including branding) into the County’s economic development website to portray a consistent look / message between print and online materials.</li> <li>• Create a “case-study” and/or “business/project highlight” section on the website and update throughout the year. This will provide fresh content and promote Rice County.</li> <li>• Join strategic organizations to increase exposure with the development community. Key organizations include MNCAR, SIOR, and PositivelyMinnesota.</li> <li>• Implement 2011 marketing plan – to include print advertising, PR articles/ profiles, booths at conferences and business expos, speaking engagements.</li> <li>• Explore the participation in the National Wind Show as a guest of DEED’s and/or other relevant national shows.</li> <li>• Complete scripts, filming, and launch of online video project. Upon completion of the project (summer 2011) – coordinate a PR campaign to unveil videos to cities, chambers, and development community.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Policy &amp; Program Creation</b>	<p>The use and need for public participation in economic development projects is becoming more common. One reason this is the case is because the downturn in the economy has resulted in a tighter credit market, which impacts the ability of private industry to secure the financing needed to get projects done. Local governments are asked to help offset costs that would otherwise make projects not financially feasible. Both the County and the Rice County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) have adopted Business Subsidy Policies, the County has participated in economic development projects utilizing tax abatement, and the County, through the HRA, has awarded loans to projects (ie: SAGE). It is anticipated that there will be additional requests for the County’s financial assistance and participation in projects in the future and also the need for different financial assistance programs (revolving loans, etc.).</p> <p>To ensure that the County has the necessary tools to encourage and assist with economic development projects, an evaluation of the programs that exist through the county, communities, and economic development partners should be completed. This will identify any gaps and needs for specific program development.</p> <p><i>The decision as to whether or not to get involved in providing direct business assistance will be a County Board policy decision.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review existing Rice County policy and program guidelines to ensure that the policies are adequate and competitive. Depending on the results, policy modifications may be recommended to ensure relevancy.</li> <li>• Generate an inventory of existing programs. Meet with communities and partner organizations to understand what tools they currently provide and what “gaps” they feel exist. Utilize this information to develop proposed economic development financial incentive program(s).</li> <li>• Develop revolving loan program guidelines and review criteria.</li> <li>• Work with the Rice County Board of Commissioners and the HRA Board to approve loan program policy and guidelines.</li> </ul>	

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC TASKS	UPDATE / STATUS
<b>Transportation &amp; Corridor Planning</b>	<p>“Rice County views I-35 as a conduit to economic activity for the County and its communities.” As documented by the Rice County Committee #2, the I-35 corridor is a primary transportation route between Texas and Minnesota, with tremendous carrying capacity and economic opportunities.</p> <p>Currently in Rice County the economic development potential has not been fully realized for this major transportation corridor. In late 2010 the County Board participated in an I-35 Corridor Review. The result was a work plan to guide and promote new development that will take advantage of the significant transportation asset. Specific tasks were identified and responsibilities for completion of the tasks assigned to various County departments. These tasks will help the County take steps forward to realize the advantages of the I-35 corridor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Developer’s Roundtable(s). The purpose of these meetings would be to discuss appropriate types of development within the corridor, and to market development within the corridor.</li> <li>• Discuss Extension/ Implementation of Utilities to the Highway Commercial area. Working with the Planning &amp; Zoning Department, Staff will contact communities, townships, and developers that may have an interest in working on a long term plan of serving the corridor with centralized utility services. These meeting will lead towards the creation of planning documents for these improvements.</li> <li>• Discuss corridor development goals with communities. Meet with each community to discuss commercial/industrial development goals for the purpose of identifying types of development that are appropriate for the corridor.</li> <li>• Discuss corridor development with neighbors. Engage the surrounding landowners in a discussion of issues, concern, and opportunities for development. This may be accomplished through a 1-35 / CR 1 neighborhood survey using online survey tool.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Business Retention &amp; Expansion</b>	<p>It is always in the best interest of a community to retain local businesses. National statistics indicate that 60 to 80-percent of job creation occurs within existing business sectors. Therefore, it is imperative that Rice County is aware of issues affecting existing businesses so that we can work to provide the businesses the support that they need, connect them to necessary resources, and respond quickly to issues.</p> <p>However, businesses are busy running their businesses, and multiple business visits can potentially be an annoyance – negating the reason for the visit. A better approach is to coordinate visits and participate in existing business retention and expansion efforts. The coordinated efforts will enable the County and local communities to more easily address the needs of businesses and participate in providing solutions to existing issues for these businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively participate in existing Business Retention and Expansion programs (i.e.: Grow Faribault).</li> <li>• Obtain lists of businesses being visited by local governments – so not to duplicate efforts.</li> <li>• Visit 1-2 Rice County businesses annually.</li> </ul>	
<b>Workforce / Labor Market Analysis Update</b>	<p>The quality and abundance of workforce has been a key factor in recruiting businesses to Rice County. We pride ourselves in having an educated workforce, and a labor market that pulls from multiple surrounding counties. However, recently “workforce” has been concern for both existing businesses and prospective businesses.</p> <p>To better understand the labor market and countywide workforce, Rice County will commission a countywide labor study that utilizes available census and employment data to provide a comprehensive and realistic snapshot of the area workforce. This analysis will be fashioned after independent studies done by businesses (such as the workforce analysis Moventas prepared) and will address the questions often asked by businesses. Upon completion, the countywide labor study will be a tool that all of the Rice County communities can utilize when working with existing and prospective businesses to address any workforce issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop scope of work to be included in the updated workforce/labor market analysis.</li> <li>• Identify and hire company to conduct update based on scope of work.</li> <li>• Upon completion of project-share study results with the Rice County communities (potential topic for countywide workshop with business leaders and government representatives).</li> </ul>	

The following initiatives have been identified as “mid-term.” These initiatives have not been included in the current year budget, but are considered activities/projects/products to should be pursued as soon as possible in order to achieve the County’s economic development goals. These initiatives build upon the stage that was set with the near-term initiatives, and advance the offerings and programs of the Economic Development department.

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC TASKS	UPDATE / STATUS
<b>Website Enhancements</b>	<p>The website is often the first source of information for anyone (existing businesses, business prospects, site selectors, brokers, etc.) looking to gain knowledge about a community. Therefore, it is important that the website provide relevant and current information.</p> <p>The Rice County economic development web pages were created in 2007. Since that time a number of things have changed, and while the basic information has been updated, it is time for a thorough review of the overall information on the website and identification of improvements. The goal is that the website remains state-of-the-art with all current and cutting edge information included in a very user-friendly format.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of existing data on the Rice County economic development website.</li> <li>• Identification of improvements and enhancements to the existing web pages.</li> <li>• Proposal for upgrades to the website.</li> </ul>	
<b>Broadband Initiatives</b>	<p>Broadband is a critical utility for economic development and overall quality of life. High quality (fast and cost efficient) broadband enables job growth, health care, education at all levels, efficient government services, etc. To make Rice County a more appealing place to live and work, especially as the reliance on internet expands, there may be a need to strengthen the broadband availability and capability in Rice County.</p> <p>The county government is exploring connectivity for county related activities and Dakota County has taken a very active role in broadband. There may be an opportunity to leverage these activities and explore the need and feasibility of expanding broadband throughout Rice County. This initiative would look at the work that has been done, identify how to gage the need and market for broadband, and explore opportunities to leverage existing efforts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the Rice County IT Director to better understand the focus of the IT department in relation to broadband.</li> <li>• Survey Rice County communities to better understand if there is a gap/need for better broadband coverage for business.</li> <li>• Explore the potential for a feasibility study for broadband.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Rice County Logo Update</b>	<p>A logo is an identifier. The existing Rice County logo has been in use for a number of years and has served its purpose. However, the logo itself does not identify Rice County without words being added to it.</p> <p>Recently an attempt to update the logo was undertaken. The proposed logos did not capture the Rice County image, and therefore the logo was not updated. There has been continued desire to update the logo so that the Rice County logo adequately and professionally portrays the County as a whole.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with a design company to update the Rice County logo.</li> </ul>	

The following initiatives have been identified as “long-term.” These initiatives have not been included in the current year budget, and are not considered essential activities/projects/products to be pursued now. However, they are ideas and concepts that have been discussed, and they have economic development implications. By identifying long-term initiatives in the work plan, initial steps can be pursued that are necessary for the activity or projects to move forward in a timely and efficient manner.

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	SPECIFIC TASKS	UPDATE / STATUS
<b>Expanded Marketing Plan</b>	Rice County’s marketing efforts have continued to pay off. Since completing the Rice County marketing plan and implementing selected marketing recommendations, the awareness of Rice County and our economic development potential has expanded. It will be important to continue to explore additional means and avenues to market the opportunities and potential for development that exist throughout the County.		

**I-35  
Development /  
Planning**

Currently in Rice County the economic development potential has not been fully realized for the I-35 corridor. In late 2010 the County Board participated in an I-35 Corridor Review. The result was a work plan to guide and promote new development that will take advantage of the significant transportation asset. Specific tasks were identified and responsibilities for completion of the tasks assigned to various County departments. These tasks will help the County take steps forward to realize the advantages of the I-35 corridor.

Future year tasks include updating the infrastructure phasing plan. A preliminary plan for the installation of centralized facilities and the modification to surrounding infrastructure (road improvements) was prepared as part of the AUAR for the corridor property. This information requires updating – as a result of previous tasks including discussions with communities/townships/developers regarding interest in the corridor, and interest in implementing centralized water and sanitary sewer facilities.

This task would require the solicitation of RFP’s.