

# Horizon Project Planning Process

## Strategic Issues/Process Drivers

(broad, critical issues that cut across most Action Planning Teams work)

### 1. Education and Workforce Development

Education and workforce training drives a competitive workforce. The workforce in Elkhart County is of major concern, as it is not prepared for the new economy; it is not prepared for the knowledge economy. Elkhart County ranks behind other nations, states, and counties in many areas of educational achievement.

It is true that the skills necessary for tomorrow's worker have changed dramatically, and that tomorrow's world will require not only high ability levels in reading, writing, and math, but in creative thinking, problem solving, communication, and in personal leadership skills. The development of a world-class education system begins with pre-school programs of the type that can be observed in many of nation against whom we compete.

#### Sample Goals:

- Create a world-class K-12 education system
- Develop a 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce

#### Sample Objectives:

- Develop and implement world-class performance standards and quality improvement standards
- Increase parental educational options: Choice? Charter? Tuition credits?
- Provide access to a rich menu of higher education and training to future and incumbent workforce
- Improve the quality and quantity of Elkhart County's future workforce by providing attraction and retention services and incentives: mentoring, loans/grants as incentive to stay in county.

#### Sample Benchmarks:

- Increase the combined ISTEP scores of Elkhart City High Schools students by 10% with the next 3 years
- Increase the number of individuals accessing adult education programs by 15% per year (see Northern Indiana State of the Workforce 2002 Report)

### 2. Expansion and Diversification of the Economic Base

Elkhart County has always had one of the most dynamic business environments in the state of Indiana, and the job growth of Elkhart County over the last ten years has been outstanding. However, Elkhart County has also seen a dramatic drop in its per capita income, or wages earned per hour worked. We feel that much of its recent growth has been in "relatively" high pay, but low skill jobs, the pay for such jobs will continue to decrease when measured against the national per capita income averages in the future. To build a dynamic business environment that is beneficial to the companies in Elkhart County, our families, and our communities, we must attract businesses that need skilled laborers, which will pay above average wages, and will promote outstanding productivity through commitments to capital investment and advanced manufacturing techniques.

Business development incorporates a three-pronged strategy - new business development, business retention and expansion, and business attraction. Plans should be based upon the answers to some key questions: What are our core industry sectors/businesses? Which of these can we expect to remain strong in the technology driven environment? What creative 'incentives' can we use to help them remain competitive? What is it that caused these businesses to grow and stay in Elkhart County? How can we focus on maximizing those community attributes in a targeted industry attraction effort?

We must grow in a way commensurate with the needs of our community, but that growth should be done with the proper sense of balance to the needs for stability and other society objectives. Therefore, it is our intention to grow with those companies that exhibit a strong sense of social responsibility to their employees, community, and our surrounding environment.

**Sample Goals:**

- Build a diversified economy based on regional economic strengths, with companies that exhibit a strong sense of social responsibility to their employees, community, and our surrounding environment and can move Elkhart County into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Create a tourism development strategy that builds upon local strengths to attract the expanding baby boomer travel sector (Amish, Hispanic culture, natural/rural environment, education/health/fitness, etc.)

**Sample Objectives:**

- Create a unified, countywide economic development organization
- Establish a competitive, financial incentive policy and an on-going county economic development fund
- Establish a Business Retention and Expansion Program targeting major employers and technology based growth companies

**Sample Measures:**

- Increase the Elkhart County per-capita income to 100% of the U.S. rate by 2012 (currently 92.3%)
- Increase the average hourly wage by 15% by 2012 (current average \$14.57 hour)
- Maintain a minimum 30% of the workforce in manufacturing employment (currently 45%)

### **3. Entrepreneurialism**

Elkhart County has always had an entrepreneurial and dynamic business environment. Unfortunately, many of the backbone industries that once formed important manufacturing clusters in our county are gone. Our remaining clusters are (RV, mobile home, boat) which are still viable and attract many suppliers and sub-suppliers. However, they are currently low users of technology and not necessarily the drivers of a white collar, knowledge based creative class.

Experts still tell us that the majority of new jobs are created by new or existing business and the majority of those are created by new start-ups. We must encourage the creation of small entrepreneurial businesses that will become the backbone of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy, by creating an entrepreneurial business climate where new innovative business concepts can be incubated and developed.

Venture capital availability, technology transfer from universities, and public/private sector partnerships can help create the companies that will produce high skill, high wage jobs, which must become the heart of our economic growth.

**Sample Goal:**

- Create an entrepreneurial business climate in which new, innovative business concepts can be incubated, developed and funded

**Sample Objectives:**

- Expand the use of incubator concepts currently being used
- Develop sources of alternative financing for business start-ups and growth companies

**Sample Measure:**

- Increase the number of business start-ups by 15% annually through the next 5 years

**4. Individual Standard of Living**

It is important to remember that the ultimate purpose of all community and economic development efforts is to create the highest possible standard of living for all citizens. In this regard we are currently experiencing a disturbing nationwide growth in the gap between the haves and have nots and the commensurate decline in the size of the middle class. What are the reasons that so few are making that move up the economic ladder? Can anything be done at the local level to reverse this trend?

What can Elkhart County do to optimize the opportunities for all our citizens to achieve self-sufficiency and reach their full potential? We can expand the opportunities for advanced education or specialized skill training. We can expand childcare services to meet the current demand giving a single parent the opportunity to take job training or obtain a job. We can address the lack of transportation options for those who need them.

The working poor often hold two or three jobs per family and still have no health care benefits or access to affordable childcare. One unemployed or underemployed member of the labor force is a lost or underutilized community asset and a potential drain on community resources. Despite the ups and downs in the economy we are still predicted to have a workforce shortage in the future and the primary sources of new workers are most likely to be women and immigrants.

Our community faces both the opportunity and the challenge of fully integrating the existing community culture with Hispanic and other cultures. An inclusive, multi-cultural society indicates understanding, acceptance, and celebration of difference – in a word, an environment where a multi-national or high-technology companies would feel comfortable locating and their diverse workforce would feel comfortable living.

**Sample Goals:**

- Develop a social services system whose aim is to remove barriers to self-sufficiency while providing an efficient and effective system of support and services for those who are temporarily or permanently unable to fulfill their own needs.
- Create a proactive strategy to integrate all community cultures through partnership efforts in cultural understanding, education, community development and celebrations of diversity.

**Sample Objectives:**

- Form a multi-cultural, community wide group to identify the barriers to self-sufficiency, the possible mechanisms for overcoming them and the opportunities to work together as a community for the benefit of all.

**Sample Measures:**

- More minorities in leadership roles
- Broader participation in all culturally related holidays, festivals
- Increased numbers of individuals moving from dependence to independence

**5. Community Development and Land Use Planning**

In attractive, well-organized communities, intelligent land use planning proceeds good development, avoids the dissension and ad-hoc decision-making that typifies the development process in so many communities. Creative policies and development regulation enables the compatible development of

industry/manufacturing, residential areas, tourism locations, agriculture and downtowns while maintaining visual appeal and protecting the natural environment.

The redevelopment/reuse of previously utilized land (brownfields) enables communities to preserve valuable farmland, remove visual blight and rebuild vibrant downtowns. There is considerable evidence that the members of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce can, and do chose attractive communities rich with social, recreational and entertainment opportunities, and a high level of diversity and overall quality of life. This ‘creative class’ is confident they will have no problem securing employment because these communities are also home to a large number of companies needing their skills and abilities. What does Elkhart County need to do to attract or grow more of those companies and retain or attract the best and brightest?

**Sample Goal:**

- Create a combined, comprehensive countywide land use plan that enables the compatible development of industrial, commercial, residential, recreational and agricultural while preserving green space, maintaining visual appeal, and protecting the natural environment.

**Sample Objectives:**

- Adopt countywide agricultural preservation policies
- Determine urban service boundaries
- Mesh business expansion and location activity with a brownfields redevelopment strategy

**Sample Measure:**

- Reduce in the rate of farmland loss

## **6. Government, Taxes and the Regulatory Environment**

Indiana and Elkhart County face the challenge of maintaining an appropriate balance between the state’s revenue needs, a competitive tax climate, and investing for future growth. A proper tax structure must meet those needs, and support progressive economic development efforts, but those efforts cannot be centered on an individual city or county, but rather our whole economic region. The challenge is to create a progressive tax and regulatory environment that enables businesses to develop, expand and compete in the global economy.

Regulations are essential for protecting businesses, workers, public health, and the overall quality of life in Elkhart County. There is a sense that, better land use planning and regulation is necessary, but these regulations must be crafted in such a way as not to hinder the entrepreneurial spirit or business development. Crafting a healthy balance is of vital importance. There is also a need to reorganize our local governments- such efforts are often hindered by statutory and constitutional provisions. These hindrances must be identified so we can understand what prevents government reorganization and rationalization.

In the near future external resources will be even sparser and un-funded mandates (i.e. new surface water requirements) will demand more coordination and collaboration in order to optimize limited resources, eliminate duplication and remove inefficiency.

We should also look at ways the private and public sectors can compete for the opportunity to improve services and results for taxpayers. We should support and advocate using business expertise and innovative information technology systems to improve inter-government coordination of forms, procedures, etc.

**Sample Goal:**

- Create an environment in which regulatory entities view business as a solution partner, governments are empowered to reorganize to meet modern day demands for services and share solutions, costs, and revenues for the benefit of the entire county

**Sample Objective:**

- Create an Excellence in County Government Coordinating Council

**Sample Measure:**

- An overall reduction in the government and/or business costs

**7. Infrastructure**

For Elkhart County to grow and prosper, it must have modern infrastructure systems. This means protecting the remaining north/south transportation arteries that we have, particularly County Road 17, as well as other major arteries in and out of the county, such as the 20 Bypass, State Road 15, and State Road 120. We also need to increase utility and sewer capacity commensurate with the growth of our economy, along with improving fiber optics, Internet backbone, hubs, and other methods of facilitating state of the art telecommunication. Today's infrastructure includes institutions of higher education and research and development facilities that provide opportunities for technology transfer and new product and business development.

It may also be important that the business development committee encourage better land use programs, including the encouragement of a county industrial park, situated at an appropriate location within the county, encouraging local governmental units to participate in the costs of, and revenue from this endeavor.

**Sample Goal:**

- Design and develop a county and regional infrastructure that will meet the utility, transportation, and telecommunications needs of Elkhart County residents, visitors, and current and future businesses

**Sample Objectives:**

- Develop solutions that will ensure local community capacity to upgrade sewer, water, waste disposal etc.
- Partner with regional planning commission to identify and address regional infrastructure issues

**Sample Measure:**

- Measurable improvement in high-speed access to the Internet