

The "Insights" column was designed to give leading experts in site selection a platform from which to express leadership ideas, to raise concerns, or to offer advice for both sides of the site selection/economic development dynamic.

Re-Brand Your Region for Success

By Sarah Rubin

As the realities of the global economy begin to sink in, many communities find themselves at a crossroads. Certainly as a nation we have a broad range of industries, but think about how many communities rely on only one plant or one industry cluster for employment, which on a larger scale is the scenario of Detroit. This arrangement may make sense from a population density perspective, but how does it ensure the standard of living and longevity of that particular community? No matter how great of a role a company has played in the lifeblood of a community, when business models, regulations or product demand changes, to remain viable a company must look out for itself. How can communities protect against this yet attract businesses at the same time? The development of a globally aware strategic plan is needed. Such a plan would include many of the elements already in place in a community; a tactical shift in marketing, a redefined vision and an ongoing, honest assessment of what is working and what is failing.

THINK STRATEGICALLY. Communities need to think globally while developing locally. Essentially examine what your community's strongest attributes are. Is it workforce availability, educational attainment, access to infrastructure, quality of life, etc.? Use these to determine the framework of your strategic plan. It is very important to understand what community attributes and assets provide the greatest competitive advantage. For a strategic plan to be effective it must be a living, breathing document which is constantly evolving. In my experience, out of date, naïve, regressive approaches to development, and attitudes that automatically see change as a negative hinder business and deter growth. The way to make any plan an even greater success is to adopt a "can do attitude." I've seen communities with significant handicaps, focused leadership, and a dollop of

money work wonders. When money is the limiting factor, the plan covers a larger territory becoming a regional priority.

BRAND THE REGION. Whether your community is small, medium or large it is important to coordinate with neighboring communities in your efforts. Regional development partnerships can be an effective resource to ensure that there is a collective benefit without duplicating activities. It is a great way to cohesively brand your region and effectively attract and/or maintain industry presence. Branding your region is like preparing for a job interview where it is your responsibility to convey what you can provide not what you are looking for, through both your strengths and weaknesses. Be flexible with development tools, but know the legal boundaries. You would be surprised how often a community considered outside the mainstream prevails in securing a project by being creative.

Attracting a diverse set of industries strengthens a community by minimizing the negative repercussions associated with industry specific downturns. Cutting a lat-

eral slice across industry sectors and identifying the community's strength (e.g., workforce specialization) maximizes opportunities while minimizing the downside risk. A regionally cohesive approach will build on the community's strength and in the case of workforce specialization, ensure long term jobs.

You may be thinking the theory sounds great, but has this strategy been successfully applied in communities? The answer is: "Yes!" The following is a case example that illustrates the success of implementing both of the approaches discussed above.

Project Logistics: A rural community with great interstate access and an available skilled workforce located about 40 minutes from a large metropolitan area was in competition for a project with multiple sites in three other states. The community presented their strengths and listened to what the company would need to ensure the success of the project at that location. The community collaborated with the state and local government agencies and workforce entities to coordinate the pieces needed to secure

the project and then creatively enhanced their position by addressing minor concerns. Their efforts were successful.

Remember if we think globally while developing locally, we can greatly influence the longevity of our communities. **T&ID**

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About the Author

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