RICHLAND COUNTY

Strategic Activities Development and Implementation Plan

PREPARED BY FISHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES TEAM:

Andrew Vitaliti, JD Pisula, Ozoda Uralova, Pavithra Joshi and Paul Privara

The challenges facing Richland County are coming from many angles. The vast number of competitors include other counties in Ohio, counties throughout the U.S., and countries around the world. There is currently not enough tax revenue to pay bills in the county, and the population is decreasing overall. Meanwhile, the county is not attractive enough to keep young professionals in the area. There seems to be a lack of collaboration between entities in the county. Many of the entities have plans, yet follow through is lacking when it comes to completing their visions. Part of this is due to a shortage of resources that burdens the county and the entities. Commercial blight is scattered throughout the county and needs to be addressed. The local employers have needs that the current workforce skill and education levels do not satisfy. An article by Endeavor (a global non-profit) states the following: "Endeavor tracked more than 100 of the most common descriptive words that entrepreneurs used to answer the question, 'Why did you choose to found your company in the city that you did?' Tax doesn't make the top 50, falling below 'rent,' 'park,' 'restaurants,' and 'schools.' In fact, it barely manages to edge out the word 'girlfriend.' Of the top ten most popular words, 'lived,' 'live,' and 'living' all make the cut. 'Talent' takes the first slot." This leads to the belief that that while tax cuts may very well be helpful, they are not the final answer.

The competition has an immense variety of ideas that should be monitored for answers. Some of these ideas are as simplistic as advertising small, safe communities. Other more detailed ideas include free land for relocating families, money for down payments on homes, job-match assistance, development of a friendly regulatory arm, and downtown streetscaping such as in Boca Raton. The competition has already been working on items that can help accomplish our goals. Martin County in Florida is analyzing the costs a desirable business would pay if it moved to Martin County compared to the costs of moving to other counties. Elmore County in Alabama has organized a Youth Workforce Council to improve communication between education and industry to solve the current workforce education versus the industry needs for the workforce.

Collaboration among the numerous entities in Richland County could be extremely valuable. Some of the prime candidates are the RCDG, Richland County Commissioners, all of the Mayor's offices, Regional Planning Commission, the various Chambers of Commerce, economic development coordinators, and downtown Mansfield. The list goes on and on for the possibilities of collaboration among the entities.

How can Richland collaborate? A unified marketing campaign could send the same consistent message. Ground rules could be made to discourage the poaching of new businesses. Highlighting each area's strengths to sell as a whole will make the county more attractive. There could be meetings for board members from different entities to work together. The important part of the collaboration of entities is to develop an understanding that a business in the county will help everyone else in the county.

Another form of collaboration is the towns and cities working together.   North County, California is a great example as five cities combine efforts to compete with San Diego. Oceanside, Escondido, Carlsbad, Vista and San Marcos — are approving a five-year memorandum of understanding to help govern and coordinate their partnership. A few quotes from the mayors include "The philosophy is we promote our North County region first and our cities second" and "The cities acknowledge that intra-regional competition may be counterproductive to regional economic development". The branding effort is modeled after similar agreements among cities elsewhere, including the Gateway Cities Council of Government founded 15 years ago in southern Los Angeles County. "This is more about providing good customer service as a region to businesses." "It's about finding the best location for them and their employees."

In summary, each town or city can fight the battle alone, or they can choose to be stronger together. A base package of what the county can offer new and existing businesses needs to be established. The competition will continue to offer up ideas - resources should be pooled together to examine and then vet the ideas. Collaboration efforts must be made between entities to take advantage of the resources that are currently underutilized and enhance the relationship between the rural and urban areas of the county.

Richland County needs a vision statement to focus the groups on one message. We propose the following:

"In Richland County, our vision is to be the most business friendly county in the state -- based on our synergies of public and private sectors, our strategic location, and the big city amenities with a small town feel."

Each time a decision needs to be made, the question should be asked whether it supports the vision of the county.

Complete Streets

Changing one-way streets to two-way streets in downtown Mansfield has been discussed for some time. The increase in walkability is an attractive part of completing the streets for young professionals who are thinking of moving in and around downtown. The completed streets would improve business visibility and storefront exposure on the streets involved. With the numerous variables that effect a downtown, it is impossible to exactly measure the impact on business. However, there is a survey of city leaders that have seen the change in their own cities[1].

Issues relating to completing the streets have a lot of self-interest and bias that should be removed when looking at the overall picture. Everyone seems to have an opinion regarding the issue when it is discussed, so it could be described as an emotional topic. Legitimate concerns have been noted, such as possible restrictions on the ease of travel to the Industrial Park if the changes are made.

Some positives include the stress relief for visitors and tourists that would occur when a street is closed. In the survey, 22 cities that changed their downtown to two-way streets rated the results in regards to business development and downtown livability afterward. Of those 22 cities, 21 reported positive results while one had a mixed result. It is important to point out that zero reported negative results. Completing the streets also allows for new business sprawl beyond the square.

The implementation plan should begin by eliminating self-interest opinions in the decision making process (Immediate). The initial step is identifying a champion for the project that carries influence and will support it through its completion (Months 1-2). Next, several options should be designed for an engineering study that could eliminate significant issues, such as keeping a path open to not upset flow from the industrial park (Months 2-3). Additionally, this engineering study should be completed to see which options are feasible (Month 3-4). Once these have been completed, an educated decision can be made for which option has the greatest return for the city overall (Month 5). The city can then move forward based on those results.

---

[1] http://www.raisethehammer.org/article/1605/a_business_case_for_conversion_from_one-way_to_two-way_streets

Development of a Wayfinding and Parking Redesign

Downtown Mansfield is the heart of Richland County. With historic buildings, high-density infrastructure, and existing cultural attractions, there is no better opportunity for urban-style living between Columbus and Cleveland. We see the redevelopment of downtown as a key piece for attracting young professionals and positioning Richland County as a 21st century community. Between Downtown Mansfield Inc., developers, and other community interest groups, there is a substantial group of people that deeply care about the future of downtown and want to see it reach its potential. Young professionals and baby boomers alike, there is a growing population of people that want to live in an urban environment that is affordable, walkable, and filled with commercial activity. It is the opinion of this group that downtown Mansfield has the unique characteristics which could allow an urban-living environment thrive in a predominantly rural county.

While downtown Mansfield is certainly much better off than it was in the recent past, its best days have not been seen in nearly 50 years. There is a large stock of underutilized property that is prime for redevelopment. Additionally, there are developing districts that are young and still being defined. However, we have received consistent feedback that downtown needs more housing stock, more businesses, better parking, and improved wayfinding.

Based upon our discussions with locals and research conducted independently, we propose distinct long-term and short-term goals for downtown. In the long-term, we have determined that it is paramount that more housing stock is developed in downtown. People want to live downtown, and there are ample opportunities for redevelopment. Unfortunately, redevelopment requires substantial risk by private developers, and these risks must be effectively mitigated by removing uncertainty and incentivizing development. The other long-term goal we have identified is to foster a more walkable and livable environment. To obtain this goal, we recommend that the one-way streets be converted to two-way and a greater emphasis be made on obtaining the right type of commercial activity. Ideal business for a livable downtown includes a grocery store, bars/restaurants, and destination retail.

We realize that the long-term goals are lofty and require the coordination of many moving parts. Furthermore we recognize that there are already members of the community that share this vision and are diligently working to achieve these goals, but hit periodic roadblocks. *For this reason, we have concluded that short-term wins in downtown are essential for long-term goals to be reached.*

With this in mind, we recommend and immediate focus on attainable short-term wins in order to facilitate an environment where the idealistic long-term goals can be reached. In the short-term, we recommend that 1) parking is improved and 2) wayfinding is improved.

Parking needs to be easy, transparent, and predictable. Based upon feedback received from discussion, we have learned that ample parking exists, but the quality and cost is inconsistent. We recommend that a comprehensive parking plan be developed with the goal of making parking in downtown as simple as possible (see Appendix for outline). The first step of this plan is to take inventory of existing parking options. Key characteristics that should be captured include: most visited destinations, cost to park, lot/space ownership, quality and condition of the lot/space, payment options (cash, card, monthly, etc.), signage, and overall convenience. Some of this information may be easy to obtain from previous studies, while other pieces of information may require outreach and research. Upon completion of the first step, an objective assessment of the current parking state in Mansfield must be compared with best practices. There is a wealth of information on best practices in parking management available on the web, as other cities have pursued this initiative. Upon conclusion of this analysis, the third step is to formulate a plan that outlines the future state of parking in downtown Mansfield. Stakeholder buy-in is critical from the city, business owners, and property owners. We recommend that a clear vision be developed so that it is easy to communicate the benefit to all stakeholders. *From initial data collection through stakeholder buy-in, we believe that this strategy can be fully developed and ready for implementation within one year.*

The second, and potentially more important short-term goal, is to improve wayfinding in downtown Mansfield (see Appendix for outline). While this may not seem necessary, a cohesive wayfinding strategy is an effective tool to help locals and visitors alike not only make their way around downtown, but also stumble upon unknown treasures. People should be able to park once and feel comfortably oriented enough to make it around downtown by foot. Improved signage is an easy fix, but

less obvious tactics such as sidewalk maps, landmarks and banners can be even more effective. In the development of an wayfinding strategy, we recommend that the first step be a survey of most commonly visited destinations, entry-points, parking locations, promotable (or under-promoted) destinations, foot traffic, and pedestrian-friendliness. With this information in hand, we again recommend that best practices be studied. Like the parking plan, there is a wealth of information available and we find a recent study for the city of Austin, Texas to be especially helpful. Existing road-side signage should be evaluated and repositioned with those arriving by car in mind (e.g., Where do they come from? How do they know where to park?). Banners should be used to provide a sense of place and of unforeseen activities or destinations (e.g., What is going on right now? What else can I do?) Finally, sidewalk maps should have the pedestrian explorers in mind and should promote side-trips (e.g., What is worth crossing the street for? How long is the walk? Where can I buy X? What is worth seeing?). Additionally, strategically place landmarks, such as a park, monument, or carousel can draw people to locations unwittingly. Each type of signage serves a purpose and focuses on three different layers of the commuter experience. *It is our opinion that the initial survey, best practice research, and signage strategy should be developed in one year.*

As mentioned before, we recommend that a focus on short-term wins in parking and wayfinding be an immediate focus because they will improve the overall quality of the downtown experience. With an improved experience, a better environment for residential and business development will manifest over time. Accountability for these projects is key and after implementation, on-going feedback and adaptation will be necessary.

A park once, pedestrian friendly downtown Mansfield will foster an environment for residential and business development that will make the heart of Richland County the most business-friendly and livable place between Columbus and Cleveland.

Leveraging the Richland County Land Reutilization Corporation

The Richland County Land Reutilization Corporation (RCLRC) was created a little over a year ago and has carefully grown over the last year. A board is in place, a mission has been defined and individuals have been empowered to see that RCLRC is a success. While the land bank concept is new to Richland County, there is a long track record of successful land banks around the country, especially in the midwest (e.g., Cuyahoga County, Detroit). *We recommend that the RCLRC be leveraged as a tool for economic development within Richland County.*

A land bank makes sense for Richland first and foremost because it already exists. Resources have been dedicated to this initiative, and less additional political capital is required for this initiative as compared to any new initiative. A land bank makes sense for Richland because it can help "stop the bleeding." RCLRC should be used as a tool to jump-start gentrification, and is a first step for improving quality of life and business-friendly conditions. Finally, a land bank makes sense for Richland because when effectively managed, land banks have a proven track record for success.

We believe that a successful RCLRC is key for the long-term county economic development goals of increasing median income, growing population, and enhancing employment opportunities. RCLRC addresses each of these goals in the same way -- by providing an effective way to provide a fresh start for a decaying or blighted property. Less blight improves neighborhoods. Better neighborhoods foster a higher quality of life. Higher quality of life retains population. Likewise, for commercial/industrial properties, less blight improves the marketability and opportunity for a property. With greater marketability, there is greater possibility that the property could be put to productive use. Based upon conversations with Richland County leadership and research reviewed by this consulting team, we propose the following steps be taken to continue the strategic growth of RCLRC.

In the short term, meaning within the next year, we recommend that RCLRC take steps to increase exposure of its projects and efforts. Taking credit for successful projects is key for improving public understanding and building momentum. Suggestions here include, pitching stories to local print/online media and prioritizing projects with greater visibility. Secondly, we recommend that a partner be identified

for rehabilitation projects. RCLRC does not do rehabs and rehabs fall outside the core competencies of RCLRC in its current form. Based upon conversations with stakeholders, potential partners include Habitat for Humanity and the Heritage Home Program. Third, we recommend more creative-use projects. Creative-use projects include neighborhood gardens and green space which provide positive externalities to the community far beyond a vacant lot.

For the medium term, defined as between 1 and 2 years, we recommend that RCLRC plan for alternative funding sources, pursue alternative incentive structures, enhance relationships with developers, and leverage GIS. The most common pitfall for land banks is a funding deficiency. Funding sources need to be diversified to ensure long term success for the land bank. In addition to current state and local funds, we recommend that federal level funds, fines, and private sector funding all be explored. On the flipside, alternative incentives for property redevelopment to ensure that most properties are put to productive use should be pursued. Suggestions here included tax abatements or tax increment financing. Concurrently, relationships with land developers need to be fostered as means to eliminating communication or relationship barriers to redevelopment. Finally, we recommend county and state level geographic information systems (GIS) be leveraged in order to provide greater transparency of land bank targeted properties and opportunities for acquisition. With greater transparency, the public can more easily research and identify properties.

In the long term, meaning within 2 to 5 years, we recommend that RCLRC expand its operations into industrial and commercial properties. Although less common, industrial land banks operate similarly to residential land banks and have the potential to provide a much larger economic impact. An industrial/commercial initiative needs to be laser-focused on properties that are prime for redevelopment or currently impede redevelopment in its vicinity. Our recommendations: 1) take inventory of potential acquisitions, identify owners, and property-specific challenges; 2) engage a feasibility study that encompasses funding sources, existing research, lessons learned in Cuyahoga County, and private sector input; 3) develop a unified mission that considers the takeaways from the feasibility study; and 4) take time to educate the public of the initiative so that maximum project impact can be made.

A land bank is not a panacea. But, we do believe that it is a great tool to have in an economic development tool kit. Shortfalls that leadership must be cognizant of include: 1) a lack of funding; 2) a lack of a unified mission; 3) an inability to adapt with best practices; and 4) a lack of community support. We believe that the short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals presented herein provide the framework for what can become the best non-urban land bank in the country. With can-do leadership and capable management, the RCLRC can play a crucial part in making Richland County.

Light Industrial Sites

The industrial sites in Richland County are very important opportunities for both local businesses and new businesses. These companies will bring both population and jobs and will serve as a major source of economic development in the county. In the current state, there are some challenges with these light industrial sites. First, for many of these sites, companies submit information requests that ask for detailed information on a number of characteristics. Unfortunately, much of this information has not been collected. Secondly, while many of the public servants have done a good job on marketing these sites and building relationships, there has not been a clear marketing campaign. The goals should be to ameliorate these problems.

First, in order to develop a marketing campaign, the RCDG will need to hire a full-time employee who can be dedicated solely to the marketing of the industrial sites. This person should be a long-term hire so that he or she will be able to develop relationships with site selectors. The implementation plan for this is as follows. First, a job post should be created online, and the search process should begin within 1 month. Next, the RCDG should secure funding for this individual within 3 months. This money can come from the Richland County Foundation, various government entities, and private individuals. In particular, since this person will serve to promote all the sites in the county, then each government entity can help contribute an equal amount to the pay. Each government can spend what it would on the promotion of these sites and divert it to the funding for this person. After the funding is secured, the RCDG should continue to evaluate applicants and then hire the employee within six months.

This employee will be able to complete a number of tasks to develop the industrial sites. First, this employee can work to develop and foster relationships with local businesses. Already, several employees in Richland County do this. However, this employee can expand on what they are doing and

meet with scores of local businesses every year to determine what their needs are and how the light industrial sites can serve those needs.

Secondly, this employee will work to develop relationships with site selectors. These individuals are in a sense the end consumer of this marketing campaign since they are connecting the businesses to the sites. By having these relationships, the employee will be able to keep the sites of Richland County in the site selector's frame of reference. The funding of this is minimal since it is already in the labor cost for the employee.

The second plan relates to data collection. As was mentioned before, not all of the data required by companies has been gathered. The implementation plan is as follows. First, in 1 month, all the data that will be required by companies should be determined. Second, in 6 months, this project should be given to the new staffer. This staffer will then collect all the data necessary from 6 months to 1 year. Finally, at the end of 1 year, all the data should be entered into a database for ease of access.

The third plan relates to online marketing. The implementation plan is as follows. First, within 3 months, the RCDG and economic development coordinators should determine what online listing services should be used (LoopNet, Costar, Showcase, etc). Then, in 4 months, the light industrial sites should be posted onto those listing services. Finally, in 6 months, this project will be handed off to the new staffer, who will then continuously update those listings to better appeal to site selectors. Site selectors will not be interested in listings that are not up-to-date. Thus, Richland County needs a dedicated employee who will keep these listings current.

Online Resources

Online resources are an essential resource in today's world. They are a powerful tool of communication and sharing of information both about business and about ongoing events. As such, it is very important to maintain up-to-websites since both businesses and young professionals use them as a primary resource for information. Additionally, these resources are often a first point of contact for outsiders.

Currently, the Richland Source serves as an online newspaper in the area that provides information. Additionally, the public entities of Richland County have websites. Many of these websites have recently (within the past couple of years) gone through updates. These updates are essential to appear professional to the outside world. However, the staff in the county often do not have much time to dedicate to providing daily content to these resources. Thus, much more can be done to use these resources and attract businesses and young professionals.

The first plan relates to the hiring of a countywide web media coordinator. This person will be a shared resource that can update the content for each public website and make it more appealing for mass consumption. The implementation plan for this includes the following steps. First, the RCDG should secure funding from various public entities that will be using the shared employee in 1 month. Second, the RCDG should post the job online and should post this job at the local colleges also within one month. Third, the RCDG should hire this full-time employee within six months (at the end of the school year). Finally, this new employee will be tasked with continuously updating the websites. Since this employee is a shared resource, each public entity that utilizes this employee's services should pay an equal share to this person's salary. The impact of this person will be two-fold. First, by making the websites more professional, the employee will attract more businesses and more users for the online content. Secondly, this person will be enable other public employees to devote their time and energy to other functions.

The second plan relates to a social media campaign. In our discussions with the Richland Young Professionals, the team learned that many young professionals use social media as a way to learn about community events in the county. A Facebook page should be created that serves as a central resource for posting all the community events that are occurring in the county. The implementation plan is as follows. A Facebook page should be created, and then staff can start researching community events and posting them on the website within 1 month. Additionally, in 2 months, the staff should research ways to boost this page and various posts by advertising through Facebook. This will enable the post to reach hundreds more people, and the advertising can be targeted. This boosting will approximately cost $1000 per year. This job function, while it can be started immediately, can be given over to the web media coordinator in 6 months who was hired from the preceding proposal. The impact will be that residents, young professionals, and visitors will know be able to quickly learn about community events. Because of this new central resource, more people will be better connected to the county and will be excited to live there.

Finally, the third plan relates to web site optimization. This is important because it will cause users to find select websites at the top of their Google searches and will thus attract more users to websites used by Richland County. In order to do this, each public entity should meet with its website company to discuss search engine optimization within 3 months. Then, a master plan for optimization should be created in 4 months. Finally, this master plan can be given to the web media coordinator in 6 months, who will then begin to execute the plan and boost websites.

There will be several impacts from these plans. As previously mentioned, the hiring of a new employee will allow other public employees to focus on other issues. Additionally, this new dedicated employee will be able to update the websites regularly, make them more professional, and attract both businesses and individuals. Also, the social media campaign will enable there to be a central hub for community event information. Lastly, all these proposals will, in the long-term, increase population, employment, and income, and will help connect the rural and urban parts of the county together.

Kehoe Center

The transformation of Richland is not a question of one day. In order to decrease unemployment, retain the youth and increase their education level, it will require significant investments into the attractiveness of the county in general and Mansfield in particular. We believe that the most important steps should be taken in improving the downtown area and make the city an interesting place for young professionals to stay by building more housing in the area.

We see Kehoe center as an anchor to control the changes in the long run as well as a medium to improve the current problems of Richland, such as unemployment and poverty level. Kehoe Center is a unique hub to influence and work with three major groups for economic development:

- Existing companies and businesses in Richland
- Students of high schools, NC State College and training programs
- Externally financed new business entities/Minority business

After doing some research, we have witnessed that Chamber of Commerce and RCDG is doing a great job with business entities, while Kehoe Center administration is focusing all the efforts on all students.

Awards for young professionals from RCDG[2], Economic Club activities in Chamber of Commerce[3] and internship programs at Kehoe Center[4] are a good start for strengthening the relationship of three major groups mentioned above. We also believe that the potential for Kehoe center is much greater than it is now, so we have come up with several short and medium-term activities that should be implemented to achieve the ultimate goal for the county. Since the three major groups for influence should be directing all the efforts, we have worked out the projects for each group as a base point.

1. The statistical analysis of all people employed in Richland county indicates that over half of population are working at private companies, so this bring the projects with <u>existing companies in Richland</u> to the top of the list. There are three major projects that can be carried out with this group, including:

    a. Business cluster development and cooperation enhancement. Business clusters are becoming a major part of any economic development campaign today because by clustering, the small companies can enjoy all the economies of scale that have been available only for large companies. According to Business Dictionary definition, a business cluster is "*A network of connected businesses, suppliers, and associates in a specific field that are all located in the same geographical area. Clusters are thought to provide increased efficiency and productivity so businesses can be competitive on a national and global scale*"[5]. So Kehoe center can be a center for those networks since by sticking together, firms are able to benefit from such things as the neighborhood's pool of expertise and skilled workers, its easy access to component suppliers (Toyota's suppliers generally cluster round the mother company's factories, wherever they may be), and its information channels (both formal ones like trade magazines and informal ones like everyday gossip in neighborhood bars).

    b. Continuous education and webinars. The Economic Club at Chamber of Commerce conducts a series with speakers in different fields and supports all activities with companies in the area. Kehoe center can invite and host prominent speakers from academic

---

[2]http://www.richlandsource.com/business/rcdg-highlights-young-professionals-in-under-awards/article_e1f3d450-3daa-11e4-8fc0-001a4bcf6878.html

[3] http://www.mrachamber.com/foundation/chamber_foundation.aspx

[4] http://www.ncstatecollege.edu/cms/media-custom/PDF/Trustees/2014/Convocation_Presentation_Summary_082714.pdf

[5] http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/business-cluster.html

community and be a venue for major events. In addition to this, webinars in different fields for professionals of common sphere (accounting, tax, lean practices) can be conducted and carried out through the outreach centers of Kehoe, which are located in all major municipal centers of Richland. By creating the conditions for the continuous education, Kehoe will bring the businesses together and encourage the unified efforts to improve the economic development and solve the area problems.

c. Kehoe Center can develop R&D projects with students. NC State College offers a wide array of degrees, which can have a practical application for businesses. Kehoe center can start an initiative group of students to offer the companies solutions in their operational activities. After all companies are contacted by Kehoe, the few interested ones will provide details of what the problem is or what efficiency they are looking for. By working together with company representatives, the initiative group works on the problem and comes up with the solution that will be presented to the company. If the results are satisfactory, the company may reward the work of students with small monetary prizes.

2. The Kehoe Center can also work with NC State College students and training program graduates. Kehoe Center has a solid base of different programs and grants that are currently implemented. It uses the scientific base and the tools from grants in order to come up with training programs for local unemployed people and use it during the academic process for its own students.

a. Students can have course presentations with local companies. In this project, college curricula should be reviewed to find the upper level courses that can use the final presentation instead of an exam. The class of students is broken into teams, each of which will work with a different company. The course details will specify the direction for each project and the types of companies that can be involved.

b. TAACCCT grant has been awarded to Kehoe, and one of the reasons for the training programs' slowness is that many companies were unaware of the opportunities, and it took some time to promote them. Students can create a promotional group to inform employers about these activities as well as offer them customized training options, when the curricula is adjusted specifically to the needs of the company.

c. We believe that a major problem for Richland County is high poverty levels among the population. It is especially important for single mothers with lower educational degree

(high school or less), because the statistical analysis showed the highest correlation of poverty level in the region with this type of factor. Kehoe Center should review the population data and work together with Chamber of Commerce and Department of Labor in order to come up with a specialized training programs directed for these specific groups of marginalized population. Students and training program graduates will be a main part of the research in identifying the necessary skills to teach in these trainings.

3. Additionally, the Kehoe Center can support minority and new businesses. In general, the small business support is very remarkable in the region, which goes both ways – helping the business to strive and the local community using use the products (e.g. Small Business Saturdays). However, we believe there are some areas that should be covered on this matter:

   a. Federal programs and the funds should be approached to be used through SBTT (Small Business Technology Transfer) program, which requires education institution (or other non-profit) to cooperate with the local small businesses to come up with solutions to their problems.

   b. Attracting foreign investments into the region to start new business activities can be accomplished by different ways. First, it can be accomplished by government programs and promoting the attractiveness of the regions to the foreign companies related to the businesses in Richland. Another way is to encourage the immigrant population in foreign investments program to settle down in the county. The statistics prove that, on average, the foreign investors are more open to make contribution to the region for its development and the number of business run by immigrants is usually higher and more successful compared to local businessmen[6].

   c. Bringing the diversity to Richland will be essential to the progress for a number of reasons. It will not only create the new markets and opportunities for inflow of diverse customers, but also have full government and other community support by the organizations that are interested in development. Considering that over 90% of population in Richland are Caucasian, efforts should be taken to increase the diversity and make it more attractive for people to get new experiences. For this purpose, the Kehoe Center should be a hub to identify the minority businesses in the region and start cooperating with organizations

---

[6] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/08/immigrants-new-businesses_n_1499719.html

(such as National Minority Supplier Development Council[7]) to increase the share of minority-led businesses in county economy by involving them in activities and encouraging to get certified for better opportunities in networking (MBE Certification[8]).

It is important to note that all these projects will not be as effective unless the main development steps (such as downtown improvement or housing) are carried out in order to create the total flourishing environment for businesses and retention of talent.

Campus District

While both OSU Mansfield and North Central State College are both known for its high quality of education, there is a lack of other amenities like health services and recreation, which could be a reason for students not choosing to attain their higher education in these schools. The Campus District Project has a vision to attract more students to Richland County. This project benefits both Mansfield and Ontario.

OSU Mansfield draws students from 42 out of the 88 counties in Ohio. But all regional campuses have been replications of themselves. One of the main reasons students are attracted to this campus is its proximity to both Cleveland and Columbus. The vision for this campus district project is to make the Mansfield campus an 'environmental campus'. The issue with this campus is that it is largely hidden, with the possibility of people driving by not even noticing it. Development of the multiple acres of unused land could give more visibility to the campus.

In order to make the campus more attractive, multiple initiatives are being undertaken to improve roadways within the campus, and also several precedents are being considered to design a gateway that would serve as an attraction to the campus. The new campus entrance is closer to the commercial district of Ontario, next to the new student housing. The idea is to keep the gateway simple, elegant and well designed.

Ecolab/Health & Wellness Vision - The Ecolab project focuses on strategies to use and preserve the natural environment and to create a more connected and interactive campus. It would be on the walking loop in

---

[7] http://www.nmsdc.org/our-network/

[8] http://www.nmsdc.org/mbes/mbe-certification/

the campus and could potentially be used as a creative outdoor classroom. The campus has interesting features, and building the Ecolab could take advantage of that. A health and wellness center could be developed on the east side of campus, with proposed soccer and baseball fields. Students who might not be interested in taking these classes could still enjoy the walk through the campus.

Town Center – There has been unrestricted mall and strip development in the county till now, and the idea is to develop a town center on the lines of Easton and other well-developed town centers. This will be situated in the south of campus, and there will be connecting roads between the gateway and the town center.

The overall idea is to make the campus district both economical and recreational. Prioritization of this project can occur through a joint economic development plan between the cities of Mansfield and Ontario. Joint Economic Development (JED) groups and Joint Recreational Development (JRD) groups have been successful in various other comparable counties and cities across the country, and strategies used by these groups could be used as examples to develop similar commissions for Richland County.

Employer Connections

L ocal businesses in Richland County are on the lookout for a skilled workforce. To ensure that more students are finding jobs upon graduation, there should be enough transparency between the students and businesses looking for this skilled workforce. Several steps can be taken towards this.

a. County-specific database for jobs:

The first step in this direction should be to have a centralized database that could be used by both employers and job seekers. There are a number of resources available that could be streamlined to be used specifically by Richland County. Two of these resources are:

- Ohio Means Jobs

    It is a Monster-based website, which can be used by employers to post jobs available at their companies and also by candidates to filter jobs by job title, location, etc. As more and more employers from Richland County post on this website, it will be easier for candidates to learn more about the positions and apply to them directly on the company website.

- Job and Family Services

Richland County Job and Family Services (RCJFS) is a government-owned service that provides family support and workforce development system for skilled job seekers, successful businesses and strong communities.

b. Apprenticeship/Internship program

Ohio State Mansfield and NSCS provide an internship program to their students, with resources dedicated to making them aware of current internships available in the county area. Opportunities range from non-profits to small businesses, in various functional areas such as marketing, advertising, event management, journalism, tourism, etc.

Some of the other possible steps that could be taken are:

- Resume blitzes: universities can help students prepare resumes, review them and tailor them for specific companies
- Career fairs and company info sessions
- Corporate visits and on-campus interviews

High School and Beyond

Richland County boasts of a number of quality educational institutions, both for technical as well as non-technical education. Businesses are always looking to hire more technically skilled workers. To ensure that high school students are aware of the available opportunities and understand the need for quality education, there is a need to promote the appropriate degrees. This educated workforce could also be used to attract newer businesses to the county. Education could also be targeted towards industries currently in demand.

The main driver towards this would be higher visibility of for local universities and technical schools with county high schools. Universities can have recruiters and speakers talk to students about the importance of a high quality education, and high school alums can go back and talk about how good education can make them successful. Riverside High School in Painesville, OH (Lake County) has been successful in this approach.

Some of the local high schools in Richland County that could be partnered with higher education institutes are:

- Clear Fork High School

- Crestview High School
- Lexington High School
- Lucas High School
- Madison Comprehensive High School
- Malabar High School
- Mansfield Christian School
- Mansfield Senior High School
- Ontario High School
- Pioneer Career and Technology Center
- Plymouth High School
- St. Peter's High School
- Shelby High School
- Temple Christian School

Since Richland County seeks employees educated in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), OSU Mansfield's engineering program could be promoted. The fact that the degree costs just a third of what it would at the Columbus campus could help attract students not only from within the county, but also students from outside the county in the long term.

Appendices

Appendix 1:Graph Prioritization

In the presentation, the group presented a graph on the prioritization of the nine different proposals based on the value-add (low to high) to Richland County and the ease of implementation (low to high). Please refer to this graph in the presentation portion of the deliverables.

Appendix 2:Resources

Downtown Mansfield Parking and Wayfinding Project Outline
Wayfinding Resources
Kehoe Center Proposal Resources
Industrial Sites and Website Resources

Downtown Mansfield Parking and Wayfinding Project Outline

Improve Parking (*approx. 6 months*)
1. Identify a project leader and assemble project team for this initiative
2. (*2 months*) Take inventory of existing parking options in Downtown. Data collection should capture:
   a) Most visited destinations
   b) Cost to park
   c) Ownership of parking lot/space
   d) Quality and condition
   e) Payment options (i.e., cash only, credit card, monthly, private)
   f) Signage
   g) Accessibility
   h) Community feedback

3. (*Concurrently with Step 1*) Gather best practices in parking management
   a) Compile the ideas and practices that make the most sense for Mansfield's profile

4. (*2 - 3 weeks*) Develop an objective assessment of downtown Mansfield's current parking composition compared to:
   a) Best practices
   b) Community needs and desires
5. (*2 - 4 weeks*) Develop an idealistic future state for parking in downtown Mansfield assuming 100% stakeholder buy-in and no funding limitations
6. (*1 month*) Engage downtown stakeholders to collect feedback on the idealistic parking

plan. Stakeholders should include business owners, parking space owners, developers, government officials, community-interest groups, and chief employers. Data collection points should include:

   a) Attractiveness of parking plan
   b) Feasibility
      i)Funding
      ii) Logistics
      iii) Actual Need
   c) Anticipated impact
   d) Potential impediments

7. (*1 month*) Develop a more realistic future state of parking in downtown Mansfield by incorporating stakeholder feedback. This plan should consider:
   a) Funding needs and potential sources
   b) Anticipated impact of the plan
   c) Potential roadblocks

8. (*2 weeks*) Re-engage stakeholders with the revised future state plan with the goal of gathering additional feedback to finetune the plan while strategically focusing on buy-in.

Improve Wayfinding (*approx. 6 to 8 months*)
   1. Identify a project leader and assemble project team for this initiative

   2. (*2 - 4 weeks*) Survey downtown visitors, residents, workers, and business owners on the current state of wayfinding in downtown. Data collection points and observations should include:
   a) Most commonly visited destinations
   b) Entry-points to downtown
   c) Inventory of signage/landmarks and placement
   d) Parking locations
   e) Under-promoted destinations and businesses
   f) Level of foot traffic
   g) General pedestrian-friendliness

   3. (*1 - 2 weeks*) Gather best practices in urban wayfinding. Resources should include:
   a) Academic research
   b) Wayfinding strategies available on the web
      i. See attached plan for the City of Austin

   4. (*2 - 3 weeks*) Develop an objective assessment of downtown Mansfield's current wayfinding state compared to:
   .   a) Best practices
   b) Community needs and desires
   5. (*2 - 4 weeks*) Develop an idealistic future state for wayfinding in downtown Mansfield assuming 100% stakeholder buy-in and no funding limitations
   a) Be cognizant of how the parking plan fits into the wayfinding plan

6. (*1 month*) Engage downtown stakeholders to collect feedback on the idealistic wayfinding plan. Stakeholders should include business owners, parking space owners, developers, government officials, community-interest groups, and chief employers. Data collection points should include:
   a) Attractiveness of wayfinding improvements
   b) Feasibility
      i) Funding
      ii) Actual Need
   c) Anticipated impact
   d) Potential impediments

7. (*1 month*) Develop a more realistic future state of wayfinding in downtown Mansfield by incorporating stakeholder feedback. This plan should consider:
   a) Funding needs and potential sources
   b) Anticipated impact of the plan
   c) Potential roadblocks

8. (*2 weeks*) Re-engage stakeholders with the revised future state plan with the goal of gathering additional feedback to finetune the plan while strategically focusing on buy-in.

9. (*2 - 4 weeks*) Identify low-cost test strategies to improve wayfinding in downtown and create and implementation plan

10. (*2 - 4 weeks*) Upon implementation, survey downtown visitors, residents, and workers to collect feedback and effectiveness of the test strategies

11. (*1 - 2 weeks*) Incorporate feedback from test strategies into wayfinding future state plan

---

Wayfinding Resources

City of Austin, TX Wayfinding Project: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/downtown-austin-wayfinding-project

---

Kehoe Center Proposal Resources

Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative: http://www.huduser.org/portal/sc2/about_sc2.html

Statistics about average college/school dual program education:
http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=51

STTR Grant program: https://www.sba.gov/offices/headquarters/oca/resources/6828

Ohio Job and Education references: http://ohiolmi.com/proj/OhioJobOutlook.htm and http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/45/45079.html

OSU and NC State College graduates earnings and programs: https://public.tableausoftware.com/profile/joshh8541#!/vizhome/OBRDashboard_updated_091114/WhatDegreesPay

Unemployment rates in Richland, Ohio and US: http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LAUMT393190000000003?data_tool=XGtable

Economic Development plans for Flint: http://www.imagineflint.com/Documents.aspx

---

Industrial Sites and Website Resources

Basics of Search Engine Optimization: http://searchenginewatch.com/sew/how-to/2259693/seo-basics-8-essentials-when-optimizing-your-site

Residential Real Estate Listings Are Moving Online: http://www.businessinsider.com/real-estate-technology-companies-chart-2013-3

Social Media Campaign for Commissioner Marilyn John: https://www.facebook.com/MarilynJohnOhio -

How to Build a Social Media Campaign: http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/facebook-ads-event-marketing/

How to Use Advertising on Facebook: http://sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-advertising-guide/

Why Businesses Need Websites: http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2012/oct/19/businesses-need-websites