

Menasha Community Economic Development Preparedness Index Summary Report and Action Ideas

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*Prepared for
City of Menasha, Menasha Redevelopment Authority and
Menasha Action Council*

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This document provides a summary of CEDPI input and potential action ideas for those involved with community economic development efforts in Menasha. It is based on discussions and recommendations from the October 23, 2006 MAC forum, recent actions of the Menasha Action Council, City of Menasha, and Redevelopment Authority, and CEDPI results.

It begins with a list of potential immediate priority actions. The document subsequently continues with sections that highlight actions to date and input from the October 23 forum. It concludes with a comprehensive list of economic development priorities for Menasha based on the CEDPI results.

Potential Immediate Priorities for Menasha

- **Retain existing businesses**

ACTION: Develop and/or build on current efforts to conduct individual business visits for Menasha businesses to determine their needs and priorities.

ACTION: Develop a follow-through plan to nurture newly formed businesses.

ACTION: Consider conducting a business retention and expansion study. (WI Department of Commerce is one resource for such an undertaking.)

- **Define and recruit/attract desired businesses**

ACTION: Conduct a retail market analysis and/or cluster analysis to help define appropriate target businesses. (UW Extension's Center for Community Economic Development is one resource for such an undertaking.)

ACTION: Define and market the full range of services currently available to new businesses from the City and existing organizations. Survey newly started businesses to find out which services were lacking when those businesses started (gap analysis) and develop a plan to meet those needs, or be able to connect new businesses to resources.

ACTION: Review past plans to develop a business incubator in Menasha to find out why it didn't occur. Should this issue be tackled again? If so, analyze appropriate business attraction and retention roles for the incubator. Can the City partner to achieve this function?

- **Communicate and market business assistance programs**

ACTION: Improve communication for businesses to help them understand community resources and amenities such as financial assistance, quality of life (schools, homes, activities, organizations, etc.), labor market information, infrastructure, etc. using a newsletter, website, printed brochures or other means.

ACTION: Market support the community provides to businesses. Have business support packets, website, materials, contacts etc.

ACTION: Review economic development programs in Menasha and increase communication with appropriate entities regarding these resources.

ACTION: Assign an ad hoc group the responsibility of finding out answers to the 'don't know' responses in the CEDPI and develop communication strategies for them.

- **Build the City's Economic Development element of its Comprehensive Plan**

ACTION: Begin by defining a shared vision for economic development in Menasha

Summary of Actions to Date

Since January, 2005, Community Development Educators with UW Extension in Winnebago and Calumet Counties have provided educational programs and research assistance working in partnership with members of the Menasha Community to address and refine community economic development programs and activities. Some of the specific activities and results include:

- Helping the Menasha City Council become aware of community change and community economic development opportunities in Menasha through multiple presentations, which culminated in a decision to implement the Community Economic Development Preparedness Index (CEDPI) in Menasha; (January to May 2005)
- Making the Menasha Action Council (MAC) aware of the CEDPI through multiple presentations and hands-on participation, which resulted in MAC's decision to take a lead role in disseminating the CEDPI; (June 2005 to January 2006)
- Preparation and distribution of the CEDPI Survey Results Report and Recommendations, and subsequent presentations to the Menasha City Council, Redevelopment Authority, and Menasha Action Council. These recommendations fostered several local accomplishments, including MAC's reorganization and focus on downtown business retention efforts; stronger partnering between MAC and the City; and a better understanding by City officials of local economic development needs and expectations (March to June 2006)
- Co-sponsorship by MAC, the City, and UWEX, of a public forum to share the CEDPI results, seek input, and determine next steps for Menasha's community economic development efforts (October 2006)

Community ideas and reactions to the study (from the October 2006 forum)

Ideas

- Neighborhood groups could be organized to improve the community, perhaps coordinated by
 - City Council
 - Police Dept.
- Improved communication for businesses to help them understand business resources
 - Communication
 - Newsletter
- Is the tax rate in Menasha higher than other communities?
 - Example of real estate agent who toured doctor in North Appleton, Harrison, Menasha, Neenah. Menasha needs to facelift homes/businesses. Why would doctors want to live in Menasha
- Many efforts have been undertaken to improve city, at great cost, and they need to be acknowledged.
- Continue with efforts to develop positive community-building -- pride, help people get together.
- Define a shared vision for economic development in Menasha
- Develop a communications plan to get the word out.
- Comprehensive plan, Schreiber-Anderson, ECWRPC/City/Stadtmueller study are helping Menasha develop a redevelopment plan, RDA is the newest group adding to the priority planning process.
- Maybe solicit ideas from people beyond the business community
- Specific request to publicize the Trestle Trail
 - Image changer- "Tourism" draw.

Response from Mayor Joe: Acknowledge and understand more fully the distinction between Calumet and Winnebago Co parts of Menasha, possibly by conducting a survey.

Response from MAC/Brian – education and communication are important, and MAC will prioritize them.

Reactions

- How should we deal with don't know's?
- Downtown positives need to be reiterated/built on.
- Acknowledgement that high quality of life ranking is good
- Disconnect from Menasha by some youth because our children attend schools in 2 different districts, so many youth do not attend Menasha schools
- 3-5 years ago there was significant planning for an incubator; it never occurred because the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce did not support. This issue should be addressed.
- Concerns with decline in traditional downtown neighborhoods, especially with the growth in the Calumet County portion of Menasha, and the relationship/expectations those residents have with the Town of Harrison.
- High percent of don't knows among business retention/formation needs to be addressed.

Comprehensive List of Priorities for Menasha Based on CEDPI Results

Significant time and resources went into the preparation, implementation, and initial utilization of the Menasha CEDPI. The following section includes a list of detailed observations and recommended actions from the CEDPI results that should be considered for action over the longer-term. The list includes each of the CEDPI categories, and highlights question areas where the CEDPI results indicated significant agreement or disagreement with the statement, or a high number of don't know responses.

Organizational Capacity

Questions 2 and 3. Key leaders are sufficiently involved in the governmental process and economic development efforts. Lots of people disagreed with this statement.

ACTION: More involvement by business leaders or groups in City efforts, and publicizing of this involvement.

Question 4. Effectiveness of local EDC or similar group. Respondents were split on agree and disagree.

ACTION: more communication about outcomes/ progress or impact of efforts by MAC, RDA etc. to help the community assess the effectiveness of local efforts.

Questions 6-9. Fairly high 'don't knows' regarding the community's access to and relationships with economic development professionals and leadership development, but general agreement that these things are happening.

ACTION: Use these questions as opportunity to highlight these positive strengths in various communications (newsletters? Websites? Newspapers?)

Strategies for ED

Questions 12-14 indicate people don't know about or disagree that the City has an ED plan.

ACTION: Continue to develop the economic development element of the comp plan and promote the process.

Question 15. Lack of a process to target appropriate businesses is a 'weakness'.

ACTION: Consider a retail market analysis, cluster analysis, and/or business retention and expansion study to help define appropriate target businesses.

Question 16. Many people disagreed that Menasha actively supports existing businesses.

ACTION: Market the support the community provides (role of MAC?) Have business support packets, website, materials, contacts etc.

Question 17. Most people didn't know if there is a marketing plan to target and attract businesses.

ACTION: Seems like this links directly with #15. Once the community knows what they want to attract, they can recruit them.

Existing Business Retention

Question 18. Most people don't know if a business retention and expansion program exists. Many disagree.

ACTION: Consider conducting one or clarify if one already has been done.

Question 19. Regarding the practice of business visits, this is viewed as a weakness, with a fairly high level of don't know responses.

ACTION: This strategy could be linked with #16 to round out the package of services that MAC and the City provide businesses.

Question 20. Adequate business recognition events are not a strong weakness, but more recognition events could be held, marketed and promoted.

Question 21. Respondents were split on the existence of an active downtown program.

ACTION: Communicate current work on downtown programs and future plans. Is there a common vision about the downtown? Ask downtown businesses what they would like to see in downtown to support them (through the BR&E study perhaps?).

Question 22. Maintain the strength of City responsiveness by communicating how the City is responsive and supportive to local businesses on important issues.

New Business Formation

Question 23. Business start-up assistance is a weakness with a high degree of don't knows.

ACTION: Couple with #16 and #19 to develop and market the full range of services currently available to new businesses. Survey newly started businesses to find out which services were lacking (gap analysis) and develop a plan to meet those needs, or be able to connect them to resources.

Question 24. Similar to #23, assessing the health of new businesses is a weakness with a high degree of don't know.

ACTION: Develop a follow-through plan to nurture newly formed businesses.

Question 25. Couple information about financing availability with #23 to identify and promote these resources.

Attracting New Businesses

Questions 26-29. This entire section regarding attracting targeted businesses has a high degree of don't know responses and generally more disagreement than agreement.

ACTION: First, answer the question – does Menasha have a plan to target certain business types or not. If not, couple with #15 to include in an ED plan and identify what types of industries and businesses to bring to Menasha. Once identified, recruitment and attraction can occur. NOTE – it might be that attraction is not the most important facet in the City's ED plan. Retaining and supporting new or existing businesses might be a better first step before bringing new ones into a 'faulty' support system.

Tourism

Questions 30-31. Tourism assets and analysis. Many unknowns and disagreements with these statements.

ACTION: Strengthen relationship with FCCVB and figure out the assets, marketing analysis, and promotion strategies for Menasha. Broaden understanding of tourism (eg its not just 'heads in beds'). Communicate findings to businesses. Especially consider the Trestle Trail as an asset worthy of promotion.

Question 32. Build on the existence of the FCCVB as a regional tourism agency and strengthen relationships with them.

Question 33. While it isn't a strong weakness, it does appear that a calendar of activities would be helpful to promote Menasha events and programs.

Downtown Merchants

Questions 34-35. While there is an active organization (MAC) working with downtown merchants, a downtown retail market analysis may be needed to determine additional support needed for downtown merchants, based on the high number of don't know responses.

ACTION: If needed, conduct a downtown retail market analysis. Potentially combine with efforts to survey needs of downtown merchants as part of business assistance and retention. (#21). Market analysis would also feed into the ED plan and strategy for recruiting. Use UWEX Market analysis tools.

Information about Economic Development

Questions 39-42. Most people did not know the answer to these questions about sources of basic information for economic development.

ACTION: review these topics and determine if appropriate information exists for Menasha. Increase communication with appropriate entities regarding these resources about ED.

Labor Force

Questions 43-47. There seems to be general agreement that this information regarding the labor force exists although many people didn't know.

ACTION: Answer these questions – does labor force data exist or not? Then, promote the data, share with businesses and use as part of the business retention and expansion programs.

Questions 48-52. Generally the areas of labor/management relations, training, and hiring are strengths.

ACTION: Develop/maintain relationship with the Workforce Development Board to answer these questions, obtain data and maintain a pulse on regional labor force issues that may affect Menasha.

Infrastructure Capacity

Questions 53-59, 61-71. There is general agreement that many of the city's infrastructure resources are strengths with some minimal degree of don't knows.

ACTION: Use information about Menasha's strong infrastructure in promotional materials, business recruitment material, on LOIS etc. Communicate with City council, public works etc that these pieces are important to ED in Menasha. Find out answers to the questions people don't know.

Question 60. Lack of a business incubator perceived as a weakness.

ACTION: Apparently there is some history of trying to accomplish this in Menasha that failed. Review past plans to find out why they didn't occur. Should this issue be tackled again? Can Menasha partner with another community or regional entity to achieve this function? (There are a variety of opinions about the effectiveness of incubators. Perhaps some research could be done first regarding purpose and measures of success of an incubator).

Financial Resources

Question 72. Financing for new business start ups is the same question as #25, but with different responses.

ACTION: Determine the level of financial resources available and market them

Questions 73-79. Assistance with financing generally is perceived as a strength, but with some degree of don't know. #75-76 indicate that the city is doing a good job utilizing the financial tools it has to augment ED work. The remaining questions indicate that more people could use information about financing opportunities in Menasha.

ACTION: Research answers to these questions. If there are gaps, develop strategies to enhance financial resources. If adequate financing programs exist, communicate them to appropriate groups. Continue to make Menasha businesses aware of the Calumet and Winnebago RLFs.

Quality of Life

Questions 80-81. There is a strong degree of agreement that quality of life and maintaining property are a strength in Menasha.

ACTION: Use these strengths in communication material for businesses. Consider working with the schools to make sure graduates are 'ready' for college or to enter the workforce. Work with City and schools to develop strategies to augment graduation rates, send more kids to college or tech school, and potentially recruit them back to Menasha to work. There are some 'don't know' answers that could be researched.

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