

Area economic development looking to expand focus

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The Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium (JCEDC) is embarking on the area's first capital campaign to engage the region's private sector in collaborative economic development work.

The JCEDC and the Watertown Economic Development Organization are planning to merge later this year.

In conjunction, local leadership is also developing a five-year economic development strategic plan.

Together, this effort aims to increase economic development responsiveness; improve visibility of the area statewide, regionally, and globally; and align area communities, businesses, and economic development partners with the impactful work of the five-year work program.

The new organization, which has not been named, would broaden the scope and increase the impact of economic development efforts in the area.

When launched, the intention is to have a newly-developed partner nonprofit organization that is led jointly by area public and private-sector leadership and JCEDC staff. The leadership of the partner organization will oversee the implementation of the plan's programming. With the economy recovery gaining momentum, each community in the area has a different economic focus; this new model aims to provide more extensive specialized support to area public and private leaders with expanded staff, programming, and resources. This expansion of capabilities to the area's communities will include a range of new initiatives under the five-year work program including an area-wide manufacturing council, an entrepreneurship council, an extensive branding/marketing campaign, increased workforce assistance and programming, a renewed focus on logistics development, and targeted industrial and retail sector growth.

Leadership from both organizations have been in discussions since late 2015 about how to better work together on economic development initiatives in Watertown and the greater Jefferson County area.

"The development of this new model and the merger holds much promise for the City of Watertown as well as the greater area. Having WEDO merge with the JCEDC is a smart move that helps both organizations towards long-term sustainability and while providing better value for our businesses," noted Watertown Mayor John David and board chair of the JCEDC. "When

companies look at expansion or relocation they look at an entire customer base, laborshed, and supply chain of an area – the steps area economic development leadership is set to take in 2016 positions Watertown and our area to be more relevant in the economic development arena.”

“Economic development is an increasingly competitive field. Our area alone is experiencing a significant number of layoffs – but is set to grow our workforce by nearly 1,000 jobs. Our economy is evolving and our organizational model needs to evolve with it. Alignment is critical for local economic partners to be as effective as possible,” said Jefferson County Administrator Benjamin Wehmeier.

The newly merged organization, which has yet to be named, will eliminate duplication of efforts and align resources to effectively manage and implement the work program of the 5-year strategic plan. Since both organizations are currently operating with minimal staff and budgets, it is difficult for each to work on the breadth of economic development projects. The merger will allow for a broader scope of work and cover more sectors of economic development in the area. For Watertown, it will also increase efficiencies, as most of the businesses currently served by the organization operate area wide.

Genevieve Coady, JCEDC executive director, said, “Businesses don’t stop functioning at the municipal or county boundaries; this new model for economic development is a model for business - not for government. Our job is to best support businesses with their challenges and opportunities, and I believe this newly merged organization and the strategic plan will empower us to do just that.”

“Watertown businesses aren’t confined to jurisdictional boundaries,” said Matthew Mauthe, WEDO Board president and CEO of Marquardt Village in Watertown. “As businesses expand beyond Watertown, whether it’s through their supply chain, workforce, customer bases, or additional facilities such as Marquardt Village, the new organization will be able to assist them more effectively and efficiently. More resources and staff will be directly available and on-call to our companies under this new model; the work program of the 5-year plan will cover more of the spectrum of economic development work we need to focus on in Watertown.”

The organization will be funded by both the public and private sectors through the capital campaign. Currently, JCEDC member communities in Jefferson County pay a per-resident fee. Member communities include Cambridge, Fort Atkinson, Jefferson, Johnson Creek, Lake Mills, Waterloo, Watertown, and Whitewater.

James Schroeder, chairman of the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors, said, “Jefferson County has one of the only publically-funded area-wide economic development organizations in the Midwest. The creation of a true public-private economic partnership and supporting strategic plan

for our area will not only emulate best practices but, more importantly, give the private sector a leadership role in the health of our area's economy."

Kim Erdmann, WEDO executive director, said "Ultimately our area operates as one economy sandwiched in between major metros; there is a unique opportunity at hand to reinvent how we support our area's economy. This merger will enable us to take economic development to the next level – not only for Watertown and its businesses but for all of the businesses in the area. Our plan is to provide more strategic assistance to a greater number of companies in the area."

Boards for both organizations will vote on the merger in March. A feasibility study for the capital campaign is also expected to begin next month. The campaign, to be executed in the second half of the year, will focus on raising funds for economic development programming. Programming will include job fairs, workshops and seminars, and a host of other economic development activities designed to promote business retention and attraction.

The Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium (JCEDC) serves as the lead economic development organization in Jefferson County. The consortium was formed in June 2003 to implement Jefferson's Overall Economic Development Program and to achieve the economic development goals of the County. Its overall goals are to foster and encourage responsible, sustainable economic development activities that result in job creation, job retention, increase the tax base and improve the quality of life for the citizens of Jefferson County. For more information, visit, jcedc.net.

The Watertown Economic Development Organization was founded in 2012 with a mission to promote and enhance the economic vitality of the community through the retention and expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new business to the Watertown area. WEDO services include site location, marketing assistance and acting as a resource for a host of business-related topics. For more information, visit wedobusinesswi.com.