



Redwood County Economic Development Authority (EDA)

Executive Summary Strategic Plan 2023-2025

OPENING COMMENTS

The Redwood County Economic Development Authority (EDA) Board, County Commissioners, County Administrator, and Economic Development Coordinator embarked on a strategic planning journey in late summer of 2022. Through a process of gathering and analyzing insights from a broad array of stakeholders, the Redwood County EDA was able to establish strategic priorities for the next 24 months and determine the key objectives to pursue in moving these priorities forward. The priorities and strategies included in this plan were identified as the best ways for the EDA to catalyze business retention, job creation, and economic growth. It is important to note that the EDA will continue to serve existing initiatives such as business finance, technical support, and LINC Redwood County. Through this work, the EDA will strive to position Redwood County as a great place to live and work.

PLANNING METHODS AND PROCESS

In 2022, the EDA sought to engage a consultant in the development of a strategic plan to serve as the primary vision-setting and policy-directing strategy to lead the EDA for the next 24 months. The plan will function as a “living document” to guide the EDA’s operating budget and activities to best serve the businesses and residents of Redwood County. In June of 2022, Cheryl Glaeser, owner of Achieve Consulting, was awarded a contract as a result of a competitive selection process. Glaeser facilitated a strategic planning process that included several phases: 1) Discovery to understand historical strategies and current economic conditions; 2) Implementation of interviews, a stakeholder survey, and two focus groups to gather insights from a broad group of Redwood County stakeholders; 3) Planning sessions with the EDA Board, Economic Development Coordinator, County Commissioners, County Administrator to review and discuss discovery insights; and 4) Development of strategic priorities and objectives, strategic plan, and supporting documentation.

MISSION AND VISION

The mission of an organization is the starting point for planning, the vision is the destination, and the strategic plan is the roadmap that helps guide an organization along the way. Through discussion, the following mission and vision statements were developed.

Mission: *To be a trusted community partner to support and accelerate business and economic growth throughout the county.*

Vision: *A future in which Redwood County is a premier place for businesses, communities and residents to thrive.*

EDA 2023-2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS

WORKFORCE

Redwood County is comprised of a diverse business sector, with employment opportunities in many industries. Over half of the workforce in the County is supported by private companies, followed by Government, not-for-profit and self-employed organizations. Workforce scarcity is seen as a key impediment to business growth in the County. Unless workforce challenges are addressed, the County will continue to see employers “stealing” employees from each other and/or delaying growth plans. Additionally, recruitment of new businesses into the County will be limited. To address this need, the EDA will provide support to new and existing businesses through workforce attraction and retention tools.

HOUSING

Housing is instrumental in economic and community development; businesses may struggle to retain and recruit employees without a housing supply that meets the needs and preferences of the population. Further, if employees are unable to find housing near their place of employment, they may choose to live and work elsewhere. This was identified as a concern among Redwood County stakeholders. Concerns were not only related to availability/affordability, but also to the quality of current stock. Stakeholders suggested that the EDA may be able to better assist communities by understanding the current housing situation across the county and working with stakeholders to address housing needs.

BROADBAND

In 2021 the EDA prioritized the need to facilitate the buildout of broadband infrastructure for the county. Significant progress emerged through these efforts including successfully attaining grants and partnering with internet service providers. Continuing to move these efforts forward to ensure all residents and businesses have access to affordable, reliable internet is important to stakeholders.

CHILD CARE

Child care availability and affordability continues to be a concern for Redwood County, with many stakeholders noting that child care is a main factor in workforce attraction and retention. Although many activities have been undertaken, beginning in 2017, to help address child care capacity, many challenges remain. It is important for the EDA to stay engaged in supporting child care access and affordability.

BUSINESS SUPPORT & LEADERSHIP/CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The work of the EDA expands beyond the specific priorities identified within this strategic plan. Assisting entrepreneurs and businesses with access to financial and technical support, strengthening leaders within the county through LINC, and working to market and promote Redwood County as a place for new businesses and entrepreneurs to flourish will continue.

CLOSING

Intentional focus on the 2023-2025 strategic goals and objectives above will position Redwood County for the future by addressing key barriers to success in catalyzing business retention, job creation, and economic growth. Through partnerships, the EDA can help ensure that Redwood County is recognized as a premier place for businesses, communities and residents to thrive.

Redwood County Economic Development Authority (EDA)
 Strategic Goals and Objectives 2023-2025

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: WORKFORCE

GOAL #1: Provide Redwood County businesses with tools to support attracting and retaining the needed workforce for business success and growth.

Desired Outcome: Decreased workforce shortages lead to stronger business retention as well as increased business growth and expansion in Redwood County.

Strategic Objectives

Strategy 1.1 – Coordinate technical assistance opportunities to support Redwood County businesses in building/implementing innovative approaches for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.
OBJECTIVES
1. Research available workforce resources for businesses and communicate with businesses to identify gaps and needs
2. Develop a calendar of workshops to offer over the next 24 months that are based on business needs. Implement one within 90 to 120 days following the completion of research.
Strategy 1.2 – Establish a Redwood County Coalition for Workforce Innovation to identify and develop strategies to support workforce attraction and business growth in Redwood County.
OBJECTIVES
1. Identify champions and stakeholders within the community who have a strong desire to work together to make Redwood County a place where people choose to live and work.
2. Convene stakeholders to explore and define the purpose and intended outcomes of a county-wide coalition
3. Develop coalition participation/process guidelines
4. Determine key actions that will be undertaken within the first 6 to 12 months
Strategy 1.3 – Develop a county-wide marketing strategy and online recruitment toolkit to promote and communicate Redwood County as a place to live and work.
OBJECTIVES
1. Develop a county-wide marketing strategy
2. Create an online recruitment toolkit for businesses to house relocation guide, job openings, county profile, pictures, district information, housing, childcare, lifestyle information
3. Explore county-wide marketing efforts of other counties to identify success factors in a county-wide approach
4. Promote the online recruitment toolkit to businesses and in Redwood County outreach to promote Redwood County as a place to live/work
5. Support existing agencies seeking to help businesses attract/retain workers

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: HOUSING

GOAL #2: Actively support Redwood County’s ability to meet housing needs and reduce housing cost burdens through funding programs.

Desired Outcome: Employers no longer identify housing as a primary barrier in attracting and retaining talent.

Strategic Objectives

Strategy 2.1 – Establish a Housing Committee to explore housing needs/opportunities, encourage collaboration, and enhance awareness.
OBJECTIVES
1. Identify key stakeholders who broadly represent the County and are committed to working together to address housing needs.
2. Establish committee purpose and cadence of collaboration
3. Facilitate intentional and regular meetings to identify/inform housing needs/opportunities
4. Work with committee members to identify housing strategies based on housing study insights
5. Develop and execute plans for identified strategies with the greatest potential for impact
Strategy 2.2 – Research existing housing rehabilitation programs and explore new opportunities designed to address financial gaps to rehabilitate existing housing stock within the county.
OBJECTIVES
1. Research funding sources/programs to support rehabilitation programs/services
2. Engage in discussions with cities/townships to determine optimal funding vehicles/program components and share available resources through promotion across the county.
3. Explore the development of a county housing rehabilitation program and pursue funding to implement.
Strategy 2.3 – Research methods and costs to conduct a comprehensive county-wide housing study, collaborate and promote the use of the study with stakeholders.
OBJECTIVES
1. Identify and pursue funding to conduct a county-wide housing study
2. If determined to be feasible, proceed with required steps to engage a contracted firm to complete housing study
3. Host public meetings to determine best strategies for addressing housing needs/demands
4. Research opportunities/methods to utilize tax incentives to encourage new development and rehabilitation of existing housing

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: BROADBAND

GOAL #3: Promote and engage in broadband projects to achieve county-wide access of high-speed internet through coordinated support, public awareness and advocacy.

Desired Outcome: Every resident and business in Redwood County has access to an affordable, reliable, high-speed internet connection.

Strategy 3.1– Coordinate the delivery of a fiber network to unserved areas in the county to support the broadband vision that every resident and business has access to high-speed internet.

OBJECTIVES

1. Research federal and state funding to fulfill unserved areas
2. Maintain fiber network map across the county to identify areas of need
3. Coordinate and foster relationships with willing internet provider(s) to develop project(s)
4. Engage or lead the pursuit of funding needed to implement project(s) to include: coordinate outreach efforts/letters of support, grant application technical support, coordinate funding where appropriate, etc.

Strategy 3.2– Continue to provide comprehensive public awareness of broadband

OBJECTIVES

1. Maintain the Redwood County EDA broadband landing page
2. Issue press releases, social media content and communications to the public, businesses and municipalities with key messaging
3. Share Redwood County’s story amongst media platforms, when invited

Strategy 3.3– Engage and advocate at a state level

OBJECTIVES

1. Participate in the 5-year *Internet for All* planning sessions hosted by the Office of Broadband and any future workshops
2. Remain a member of the MN Rural Broadband Coalition

STRATEGIC PRIORITY: CHILD CARE

GOAL #4: Support the growth and retention of family and center-based child care businesses.

Desired Outcome: Child care shortages are no longer identified as a primary barrier in attracting and retaining employees or impeding business growth in Redwood County.

Strategy 4.1 – Increase awareness of/appreciation for the role of child care providers in supporting the county’s economy and local employment
OBJECTIVES
1. Host an annual childcare provider appreciation event
2. Host educational sessions in partnership with organizations such as Child Care Aware or First Children’s Finance
3. Maintain the Redwood County EDA child care webpage to provide easy access to available resources
4. Issue press releases, social media content and communications to the public, businesses, and municipalities
Strategy 4.2 – Serve as a resource to help family and center-based child care business retention and growth
OBJECTIVES
1. Connect child care providers to resources for business planning, staff professional development, and funding support
2. Work with United Community Action Partnerships to connect providers to child care assistance programs in the area to ease affordability concerns
3. Provide resources to explore the development of a child care center including technical assistance with the SBDC/First Children’s Finance, architectural services, business modeling or financing needs
4. Engage or lead the pursuit of funding mechanisms such as county tax abatement or grants to implement child care projects
Strategy 4.3 – Continue to explore, understand, and support ongoing child care needs in the county
OBJECTIVES
1. Work with support agencies to gain greater insight regarding current and future needs and how the EDA might best support addressing those needs.
2. Collect an annual gap analysis from First Children’s Finance to reveal ongoing needs
3. Advocate for child care access and affordability at a state and regional level

Business Support & Leadership/Civic Engagement

The work of the EDA expands beyond the focused priorities identified through this strategic planning process. Assisting entrepreneurs and businesses with access to financial and technical support, strengthening leaders within the county through LINC, and working to market and promote Redwood County as a place for new businesses and entrepreneurs to flourish will continue.

Adopted March 21, 2023