



FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 2024

SUMMARY REPORT:

**IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR THE DIRECTION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
—AN ECONOMIC FUTURES WORKSHOP**

CLIENT

Becker County Economic Development Authority
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EVENT DETAILS

The Becker County Economic Futures Workshop was held May 29th, from 9:00 am to 11:00 am., at the Becker County Courthouse. There were 25 participants and four Extension facilitators.

WORKSHOP GOALS

The economy of Becker County is growing, and the goal of this workshop was to help the Becker County Economic Development Authority (EDA) identify community priorities and opportunities for business, civic, and workforce development. The EDA reached out to Extension's Department of Community Development for suggestions on programming to fulfill that goal. From the range of offerings in community economics, an *Economic Futures Workshop* was chosen as the first engagement with the community. The EDA invited a group of community leaders to the workshop.

EVENT STRUCTURE

The workshop consisted of three distinct activities: 1) the *general session*; 2) a facilitated exercise for idea generation in small-groups called the *preserve, change, create* exercise; and 3) *projects selected for advancement* from clusters of the ideas generated by the small-groups. These three activities are discussed in greater detail below.

THE GENERAL SESSION

The general session began with participant introductions and a request for comments on both the things they appreciate and the concerns they have about living in Becker County. Among the things they appreciate are street fairs, the level of volunteerism, the benefits of being a welcoming community, and access to the outdoors. Their main concerns include housing, childcare, and transportation.



The main feature of the general session was a presentation of the economic profile of Becker County by Senior Economic Impact Analyst, Brigid Tuck highlights of her presentation included the following:

- Stable employment and job growth that outpaces its neighbors.
- The largest employers come from manufacturing, trade, health care, leisure and hospitality, and professional business services.
- From 2010 to 2023, the growth of employment has been strong in manufacturing and leisure and hospitality, while employment in agriculture and trade has declined.
- The population ages 65 to 69 has grown significantly, while the cohorts from 45 to 59 years have declined.
- Overall, the workforce is becoming more diverse.
- The number of people in the workforce has remained relatively stable.
- Commuting patterns are relatively balanced, with 3,772 workers commuting into the county, 5,195 commuting out of the county, and 6,380 remaining within the county.
- Wages have been rising. The current average weekly wage in Becker County is around \$850, compared to an average wage of \$1,300 for Minnesota.
- The surge in consumer spending between 2019 and 2021 was a challenging time for producers of durable- and non-durable-goods manufacturers, as well as services.
- The economic forecast calls for continued growth in consumer spending, while unemployment will remain relatively low.
- There are more jobs than people looking for work.
- There is an acute shortage of childcare, with current demand outpacing supply by 648 slots, and many households choose to decline or withdraw from employment to care for their children.
- Housing starts and listings have been declining. Housing for middle-income families is a major concern.

THE PRESERVE, CHANGE, CREATE EXERCISE IN SMALL GROUPS

After the general session, participants were asked to form small groups to consider what's working well and what might need to be changed in a facilitated exercise called the *preserve, change, create* exercise. Under the "preserve" category, groups were asked to identify the things that have lasting value and are working well. The "change" category identified things that require some sort of change or adaptation -the things that need to be changed, adapted or improved and cannot and should not be avoided. The "create" category includes activities, relationships, and processes that need to be in place to create the preferred vision into reality. What needs to be started (created) for a healthy future for the Becker County community? The ideas generated during the small-group interaction were posted on a sticky wall. The table below records their contributions under each category.

Ideas generated during the small-group phase of the *preserve, create, change* exercise:

PRESERVE:	CHANGE:	CREATE:
<p>Tourism Board and promoting the area and bringing people to DL</p> <p>Outdoor rec</p> <p>Preserve the quality of our natural environment.</p> <p>Public land, lakes, and parks</p> <p>Recreation/natural environment</p> <p>The natural environment invests in protecting the lakes</p> <p>Retaining community value</p> <p>Recreation access</p> <p>Small town feel</p> <p>Engaging youth to develop the community they want to live in</p> <p>Vibrant business community, restaurants, campers, RVs</p> <p>Progressive attitude</p> <p>Inclusive events are offered at no charge</p> <p>Invest in keeping infrastructure in good condition</p> <p>Jobs</p> <p>Jobs throughout Becker County and keep employees</p> <p>Becker County population</p> <p>Keep people living and working in Becker County</p> <p>Tourism/hospitality year-round</p> <p>Natural resources - protect and enhance</p>	<p>Recognize and support older workforce</p> <p>Perception and look on the north side of the tracks</p> <p>Common sense regulation for childcare (de-regulate), problematic regulation</p> <p>Workforce development - cooperation with schools, state, and local government</p> <p>Make it easier for childcare providers to get through the rules and regulations</p> <p>Apply childcare administration to high school learning - "on the job training," create income for younger generations</p> <p>Revisit housing policy</p> <p>Affordable housing availability</p> <p>Create more housing options, create community acceptance</p> <p>More cohesive countrywide housing, planning, meetings, public input</p> <p>How do we keep communities local? Housing affordability for all</p> <p>Decrease regulation that inhibit industry growth</p>	<p>Partnerships to address and define affordable housing</p> <p>Relocation specialist position</p> <p>Marking campaign encouraging families to move to D.L.</p> <p>Childcare: affordable, county/grand funded, business funded</p> <p>Create childcare facility/openings</p> <p>Regional communication cooperative</p> <p>Move operations between education and industry</p> <p>Invest in an apprenticeship academy to retain local youth in employment</p> <p>Create transportation partnerships</p> <p>Transportation-add Park & ride stops, promote carpooling</p> <p>Focus on youth involvement and engagement</p> <p>Affordable housing for those in the \$17-25/hr.</p> <p>Marketing plan for ECDF *(Early care and Development Foundation)</p> <p>Create partnerships to discuss and address daycare shortage</p> <p>Housing - transitional/step-up to get people to the area, rates are poverty to millions, no in between</p> <p>Volunteer group "coordinator" for all local events</p> <p>Countywide organizations/chamber - United Way, Fargo/Moorhead</p> <p>Opportunities for mentorship</p> <p>Invest best practice for affordable housing (tiny homes/land trust)</p> <p>Stronger branding and regional attraction, housing inventory and programs</p> <p>Create more childcare, more businesses and gov't assistance</p> <p>Hire ED leaders in rural communities to implement solutions</p> <p>Create more trails and connections</p> <p>Create collaboration as region to meet local need</p> <p>More buildings or space for business growth.</p>

PROJECTS SELECTED FOR ADVANCEMENT

The ideas listed in the table above were clustered into four major categories, and larger groups were formed to discuss specific courses of action for making progress. The table below shows the ideas discussed and the newspaper headline generated from those ideas.

Projects selected for advancement during the large group dialogues

<p>1. Regional branding</p> <p>Headline: We have the jobs, we have the quality of life; all we need is you!</p> <p>Next steps: Gather community support for a lodging tax to provide funds for promotion of entire communities; hire county marketing position; gather input from communities; secure school involvement.</p> <p>Participants: Mike Stearns, Hank Ludtke, Josh Omang, Matt Boeke, Karen Pifher, Deane Stewart, Abby Anderson</p>
<p>2. Becker County Community Connect</p> <p>Headline: Improving volunteer opportunities and welcoming new residents.</p> <p>Next steps: Hire new person to lead; make a website; match people in a volunteer website; forum on what is going on; welcome packet for new people</p> <p>Participants: Mark Bjerke, Sarah Hofmann, Thomas Hill, Stephanie Poegel, Brittany Nordick</p>
<p>3. Daycare</p> <p>Headline: Public, private partnership builds daycare facility</p> <p>Next steps: Build a new daycare facility; verify land availability; identify a daycare provider, grants; participation by city, county and community; potential funders would include: county \$250K; city \$250K, grant \$500K (Public facility DEED Childcare program), community \$500K.</p> <p>Participants: Cody Piper, Ian Carlstrom, Bridget Penton</p>
<p>4. Housing</p> <p>Headline: Becker County grows housing availability</p> <p>Next steps: Change community and elected officials' attitudes toward certain types of housing; create funding partnerships; public and private partnerships and collaboration; state grants, local dollars, willingness to invest, support and funding from local businesses</p>

NEXT STEPS

- Continued monitoring of the projects selected for advancement
- Identification of further programming opportunities with Extension
- Ripple mapping effects and event assessment in the medium- and long run

COSTS

University of Minnesota Extension is a designated *University Center of the United States Economic Development Administration* (EDA). University Centers receive federal funding to collaborate with partners, such as Economic Development Districts (EDDs), by providing expertise, applied research, and technical assistance to develop, implement, and support regional strategies that result in job creation, high-skilled regional talent pools, and business expansion in a region's innovation clusters. The costs of facilitating this project were covered through this funding mechanism.

EXTENSION PERSONNEL

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ATTACHMENTS: PRESENTATION SLIDES, PARTICIPANT LIST