

January 4, 2018

Dear Chairman Rasmussen and Dunn County Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Dunn County Economic Development Corporation, we would like to sincerely thank you for the financial investment you made in the DCEDC in 2017, without which we could not have continued to perform our important mission in Dunn County, WI. Also appreciated the time, energy, collaboration and expertise you have shared that allow us to say the past year has been very successful. In 2017, well over eighty financial supporters including Dunn County Board of Supervisors, City of Menomonie, Villages of Boyceville, Colfax, Elk Mound & Knapp along with well over seventy individuals, businesses, institutions and organizations. Couple those with our numerous “in kind” investments and we can that say the DCEDC has been able to help the economic climate of Dunn County continue to improve.

The mission of the Dunn County Economic Development Corporation is to work cooperatively with regional stakeholders and partners to facilitate economic stability, growth and diversity in Dunn County. The means to this goal is continued work on the four strategic priorities which are part of our three year strategic plan. These include continuing to measure and build upon business retention actively participate & expansion efforts, continue to promote the construction of the virtual spec building, and in order to grow the talent pipeline develop and implement a talent & outreach plan.

We continue to drive an active business retention and expansion program. We do not just want our businesses to survive, rather we want them to thrive and prosper and we are here to assist. It is easier to help with a problem when it is small, than to remediate a crisis. Being there for County businesses, industries and citizens has always been a priority for the DCEDC. This, of course, will continue throughout 2018.

In order to promote the virtual spec building, we continue to have it listed on CoStar and on the Expansion Solutions' 2018 International Production & Processing Expo and the International Manufacturing Technology Show websites. It has been a feature on the Greater St. Croix Valley Alliances Quarterly property listings. We include the building on requests for information on existing buildings. There are definitely advantages for the VSB. The building is literally ready to break ground. All building plans, permits, site surveys are in place. Possible financing is available. Many of the time consuming tasks are already completed. Small-scale “customization” can take place during the accelerated build schedule, as opposed to the time consuming and expensive remodel to an existing building. The prospective client is able to take a virtual tour of the completed building, make changes specific to their needs and be up & running in less time than it would take to move into an existing building; approximately six months.

The last goal, a talent & outreach plan, has taken several extremely interesting turns in 2017. Having already begun work with the Northwestern Wisconsin Collaborative for STEM &

Momentum West's Understanding the STEM Gap and Momentum West's Talent Retention & Attraction Strategic Action Plan, we have determined where the gaps are showing up in area STEM education, as well what steps we can take to retain the talent that is produced in this area and how we attract more talent to this area's talent pool.

A means of accomplishing this is by getting our students, both secondary and post-secondary, involved in local business and industry; the sooner the better. One promising way to do this on the grade 7 to 12 levels is the Inspire program by Career Cruising. This will allow students using the Career Cruising platform (which DPI currently provides to all public Wisconsin school districts) to safely interface with Dunn county businesses and industry on a variety of levels, including company tours, interviews with current employees, temporary employment, internships, online Q&A, forum participation and job shadowing opportunities. A student can learn what is taking place. Dunn County's site is slated to go live later this month. Any businesses interested in taking advantage of this opportunity, please contact our office for more details.

Also on the secondary level, DCEDC is working with both CESA 10 and CESA 11 on the YA or Wisconsin's Youth Apprenticeship program; overseen by the state of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. This program has many benefits for the employer, the student and our local economy. Students are familiarized with what goes on in local business, learn how their in-school education ties into their career plan and develop hard & soft job skills that relate to their specific professional goals.

A few benefits to employers include the ability to recruit and screen potential employees, improve community relations by assisting local youth with education and employment, and help develop skill standards geared to business & industry needs while improving their competitive position in a global marketplace.

The new step in connecting our students with business and industry is at the college and university level. If we look along the I-94 corridor, we will see that there is a large amount of talent produced by UW-Stout and the three other UW schools and the Chippewa Valley & Wisconsin Indianhead Technical Colleges. We need to promote means integrating these students into our work force. We are working on getting more internships & coops for our students that keep them local and encourage them to start their careers locally. Discussion is ongoing with UW Stout's College of STEM+M & CVTC's leadership in an attempt to have direct involvement of these institutions of higher learning with the Career Cruising, the Inspire and the YA programs. Imagine, starting in middle school the student begins charting their possible career path with Career Cruising. They learn what companies operate in the region, what is their product or services that they produce or provide. After deeper research using Inspire, they narrow down a list of several businesses that appear to be a good match. Job shadows, mock interviews or company tours occur. At this point, the sixteen to seventeen year old student has found a company or companies they might be interested in a Youth Apprenticeship. It is also an opportunity to make use of Inspire to connect with CVTC or UW-Stout to discover what type post-YA/post-secondary training would be required to start at a higher level career within the company in which they are interested. Imagine the student takes part in a Youth

Apprenticeship, earning money while developing skills that could lead to a career in the host company or a similar company. The company has the opportunity to do what is essentially a two year interview with the apprentice. If the company likes them as an employee they could offer them employment at that time. If they like the employee, but the employee is in need of further training, it is likely the employee's schedule could be adjusted to fit the class schedule. It is reasonable the apprentice student will start their career with the company were they were apprenticed. And we have them living and working in the greater Dunn County area. A last benefit is the colleges and the universities have a direct pipeline of students wishing to pursue a career here.

Employment at a company with which one is comfortable is nice, but it is not everything. Quality of life issues are incredibly important, too. We are all familiar with the quality of life we all enjoy in Dunn County. It is imperative this information is shared beyond our County's borders. We are in the enviable position to be located between two growing metropolitan areas. DCEDC has been involved with the creation of Ag-tourism and Ag-entertainment ordinances in the County. Smart rules make for smart growth. Early 2017 saw the EDC embark on identifying and archiving areas of Tourism/QOL interest to push the "Fun in Dunn" marketing of rural Dunn County. The surprise that reared its head was the lack of quality broadband service through parts of rural Dunn County. No or sub quality broadband service was a detriment to development. In discussions with the Community Resources and Tourism committee it was determined that this issue needed to be dealt with if we want potential talent to stay or relocate to Dunn County.

Funding from the EDC budget for the Tourism/QOL project was reallocated to a full blown Countywide Broadband survey. It was decided that a Broadband Team would be formed drawing from members the DCEDC, the Dunn County Environmental Services - Planning & Zoning Department and the Dunn County UW Extension Department. The Team kicked off the ambitious survey with three community broadband discussion meetings, presentation to the County Township committee and visits to the City council, regular village and town boards meeting to explain the process the survey would employ. An every address in the County mailing took place in early June with a postcard detailing the process of how Dunn County residents could take the survey either on line or on a smartphone and if you had no internet, hard copies were available at all government/municipal buildings as well as public libraries & schools throughout the County.

The survey was live for one month beginning June 20, 2017. Word was also spread through email blasts, newspapers articles and a variety of social media platforms. Survey results were compiled by the UW-River Falls Survey Research Center (SRC). Some information has been provided to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to aid in the first round of Broadband Forward Grants for 2018. (24/7 Telcom has been successful in receiving grants in the past two years that covered four separate projects.) The final roll out to the full County Board will be on January 17, 2018. Copies will be available on the DCEDC & Dunn County websites after acceptance.

Dunn County continues to experience positive growth. Sales tax receipts are up, two new hotels in Menomonie are in operation, and there has been growth in the tax base on property in the County. New projects in the Tech Park, North Park and Airport Parks have come online in 2017 as well as Countryside Co-op in the Town of Red Cedar. New residential growth has taken place in Colfax and Elk Mound. Boyceville is embarking on a new placemaking initiative begun last year. The DCEDC Board, Executive Director and staff are committed to strengthening the relationships and partnerships that will position Dunn County and West Central Wisconsin businesses & their employees to continue to grow and prosper. Thank you again for your support and investment in the Dunn County economy and community. We wish you a happy and prosperous 2018.

Sincerely,

Eric Turner

Executive Director  
Dunn County Economic Development Corporation