

February 20, 2014

To: Sisters City Council

From: Andrew Spreadborough, COIC Executive Director

Re: Summary of 2013 EDSAP Sector Action Plan Update



Overview:

The City of Sisters (in partnership with the Sisters Chamber of Commerce) contracted with COIC in December 2012 to conduct an update to the Sisters Economic Development Strategic Action Plan (EDSAP). The EDSAP was created in 2009 with the purpose of identifying goals and actions to improve the Sisters Country economy. The EDSAP was focused on several key economic sectors: retail, agriculture/natural resources, light industrial/manufacturing, self-employed professionals/home-based businesses, tourism/arts/culture/recreation, and real estate/development.

The scope of this update was limited; the update process focused only on action planning around these established sectors. The existing EDSAP targeted sectors and high level goals were not updated. COIC Executive Director Andrew Spreadborough facilitated public meetings focused on updating the action plans within each of the sectors. The work took place from December 11, 2012 through January 4, 2013.

Process:

The goal of the update was to streamline the priority action items within each sector. Actions are defined as specific tasks or activities that result in an outcome within a limited/defined time frame. The 2009 EDSAP had lengthy lists of actions, which led to the belief among City and Chamber leadership that the large number of priority actions resulted in a lack of focus and too much to accomplish with limited resources and capacity. So the intent of the update was to identify the top **2-4 priority actions** under each sector and goal, and thereby ensuring a focused emphasis on the highest priorities for improving the economy.

Additionally, there was an emphasis on separating ongoing roles from specific short-term **targeted actions**. For instance, the 2009 EDSAP contained several actions such as "Ensure participation of light industrial/manufacturing sector representatives on Sisters Economic Development Committee." This is an ongoing function of the Chamber and EDCO, so is not appropriately listed as a strategic action.

Finally, efforts were made to ensure that actions are **very specific and actionable**, as opposed to open-ended and non-defined. For example, the 2009 EDSAP included an action item of developing "agri-tourism opportunities." While an important and worthwhile goal, further narrowing of actions related to this goal are necessary to stimulate action.

Six facilitated public meetings were hosted at City Hall in December 2012 and January 2013. The COIC facilitator led participants through a brainstorming session which was framed by several questions:

- Are the existing actions still appropriate as a means to advance/build this sector?
- What are the highest priorities?
- What new actions should be included?
- Who should lead each action?

Comments were captured on flip charts. After the brainstorm and discussion process was completed, all participants "voted" for their highest priority actions through the use of dots. After the vote process was complete, the COIC facilitator reviewed the outcomes and led the group through a discussion to achieve concurrence that the highest vote totals reflected the highest priorities.

Outcomes:

High priority actions by sectors:

Retail Sector:

- Goal 1: Support the development of a marketing strategy for the community.
- Goal 2: Increase retail customer base by responding to needs of community and continue to cultivate the aesthetic character and economic base of the Commercial Districts.
- Goal 3: Improve circulation and parking facilities in the commercial districts to maintain viability.

Priority Actions:

- Conduct a business/visitor survey to better understand overnight visitor trends
- Develop a marketing strategy highlighting the Sisters retail niche and aesthetic character

Agribusiness and Natural Resources Sector:

- Goal 1: Strengthen Economic Viability of Local Agricultural Community
- Goal 2: Ensure the health of Whychus Creek and the Metolius River and nearby National Forest Land and resources.
- Goal 3: Capitalize on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Opportunities

Priority Actions:

- Strengthen agricultural education at the high school – develop a native plant greenhouse and farm-to-school program
- Develop a community greenhouse
- Expand OSU Extension courses for the community
- Increase fuels treatments on public lands
- Support and promote sustainable harvest levels
- Energy education, including energy efficiencies and renewable energy opportunities

Light Industrial/Manufacturing Sector:

- Goal 1: Continue the development of the Sisters Industrial Parks and other light industrial zoned properties in order to attract new companies and accommodate the growth of existing employers in the community.
- Goal 2: Expand and market current and potential incentives for relocating companies and existing employers.
- Goal 3: Identify and respond to needs of existing employers.
- Goal 4: Evaluate local workforce, identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- Goal 5: Address ongoing infrastructure needs of business community.

Priority Actions:

- Develop flex building and incubator co-work space
- Support airport improvements; develop better connections to downtown
- Develop/enhance relationship with OSU to improve workforce training
- Strengthen HS career and technical education programs

Self-Employed Professionals and Home-Based Business Sector:

- Goal 1: Support current Sisters Country home-based and internet- based business opportunities.
- Goal 2: Encourage new Sisters Country home-based and internet- based business opportunities.
- Goal 3: Locate funding and additional expertise/resources to promote innovative self-employment and home-based businesses in the community.

Priority Actions:

- Develop vocational training programs
- Support Sisters Airport as a transportation asset; develop better connections to downtown
- Market Sisters, targeting start-ups and small businesses; focus on lifestyle businesses
- Identify opportunities to reduce ore waive permit and SDC fees to incent business development

Tourism, Culture/Arts and Outdoor Recreation Sector:

- Goal 1: Develop community infrastructure and facilities to attract, retain and enhance a visitor's experience.
- Goal 2: Support and facilitate the development of activities that target off-season use.
- Goal 3: Develop tourism promotional activities that support the Sisters Country as a tourism destination
- Goal 4: Develop and implement tourism related business assistance activities
- Goal 5: Support the creation and further development of a dynamic arts economy

Priority Actions:

- Collect data on retail customer and visitor demographics, interests and spending patterns
- Market the Sisters Country to niche visitor categories; align with regional marketing efforts
- Improve and expand transportation system to improve access, including airport improvements, transit, and bike/pedestrian facilities.
- Improve community gateways

Real Estate/Development Sector:

- Goal 1: Encourage development of year-round business to mitigate seasonality of Sisters economy.
- Goal 2: Encourage City to support new development.
- Goal 3: Facilitate open communication and dialogue between the City area jurisdictions, the development community and local businesses.

Priority Actions:

- Market the Sisters Country as a means to increase tourism
- Support development outside of city limits
- Develop consistent city planning; e.g. master facilities development plan w/established/predictable fee structure

Other Notes:

Common themes across sector strategy areas include prioritizing the further development of the Sisters Eagle Airport as a transportation asset, improving connections from the airport to the downtown core, data collection regarding visitor trends, and marketing the Sisters Country as a retail/tourism destination and as a good location for small businesses.

See the attached detailed sector meeting outcomes report, which includes attendance lists and a deeper summary of participant comments and the prioritization process outcomes.

Possible Next Steps:

The 2012 EDSAP priority action plan update was not structured as a full EDSAP re-write, nor was COIC asked to produce a revised document. Further work is needed, including additional public meetings, to take these raw priorities and craft them into a cohesive, actionable economic development strategy. COIC would be interested in continuing this work to produce a full update to the EDSAP document.