

Mahaska Community Vision and Priorities

Establishing Direction for the Community in 2015

Introduction

This document was created by the Mahaska Development Partners (herein “MDP”), which consists of several organizations from around the Mahaska/ Oskaloosa area that strive to advance economic growth, community development, and quality of life in the area. Partner organizations include the Oskaloosa Area Chamber and Development Group, Mahaska Community Development Group, Mahaska County Agricultural and Rural Development, and Main Street Oskaloosa. The MDP also includes two key government partners: the City of Oskaloosa and Mahaska County.

This document is intended to provide broad guidance for the partner and government organizations in their respective strategic planning processes, and is the result of many discussions and brainstorming sessions over the past several months. Participants in these discussions used the *State of the Local Economy: A Baseline Analysis of Mahaska County Economy in 2014* report and several other data sources as the basis for common understanding on which to build the Vision Statement and Priorities discussed below.

Vision Statement and Goals

A vision statement is intended to cast a broad, conceptual view of the future community. Its purpose is to give a general target toward which the community can work. A strong vision statement can help rally multiple organizations toward a common cause; with a common vision statement identified, each organization can then begin to develop strategies that work toward the vision. The Mahaska Development Partners vision statement for the Mahaska Community is:

In five years, transform the Mahaska area into a community where residents, businesses, and investors see continual opportunity for growth and development.

To support this vision statement, the Mahaska Development Partners developed the following four goals:

1. Increase the quantity of high quality jobs.
2. Increase capital and personal investment.
3. Increase the quality of life for all residents.
4. Increase the competitiveness of local businesses in their markets, whether local, national, or global.

Priorities

Thousands of different possible directions could be taken in pursuit of these goals; however, rather than a multitude of loosely coordinated efforts, a few well-constructed, strategic actions can put the community on the path toward these goals. With this in mind MDP decided to identify several priorities toward which the partners will place their collective efforts. The list of priorities is divided into "Top Priorities" and "Additional Priorities." Top Priorities were identified as those having the greatest positive long-term impact on the community in pursuit of the goals above. Additional Priorities are those that also important to be pursued, but may not be the center of focus for these organizations in the immediate future. Top Priorities include (lead partner in parentheses):

1. **Workforce Development and Recruitment** (MCARD) – training existing workforce to meet employer needs and recruiting new employees to fill workforce gaps.
2. **Northwest Oskaloosa Development** (MCDG) – planning, preparing, and directing new development in the area that consists of roughly Oskaloosa's northwest quadrant extending out to the planned regional airport.
3. **Economic Diversification** (OACDG/MSO) – attracting new businesses to diversify the local economy. Immediate needs are in retail and service sectors.
4. **Existing Business Expansion** (MCDG) – assisting businesses in the area to grow their current operations. A commonly cited statistic is that approximately 80 percent of job growth comes from existing businesses.
5. **Housing** (MCDG) – developing a task force to address housing needs, local regulation, accessibility to financing, availability of local skill, and other issues that may affect the ability to provide an adequate quantity of high quality housing.
6. **Physical Improvements to Downtown Buildings** (MSO) – improving and stabilizing the urban fabric of downtown Oskaloosa to preserve the heart of the community.
7. **Tourism Development** (OACDG) – expanding and marketing local tourism opportunities, which may include developing hotels and/or other amenities.
8. **Policy and Regulation** (MCDG) – working with the governmental entities to foster a business-friendly culture that facilitates new investments and new businesses.

Secondary Priorities include:

1. **Entrepreneurship** – encouraging and enabling people to start new businesses.
2. **Infrastructure Investment** – ensuring the long-term viability of area infrastructure.
3. **Succession Planning** – working with locally-owned businesses on succession plans.
4. **Preparation for Incoming Industry** – advertising sites and buildings, along with information about local attractions and labor force.
5. **Build on Recreation Opportunities** – maximizing the use and attraction of the many area recreation amenities.
6. **Communication & Marketing** – integrating a consistent message with all economic and community development activities and initiatives.