

CHAPTER 6 – Strategic Planning

The Cavalier County Job Development Authority can't emphasize enough the importance of strategic planning. In the first ten years of our program we participated in the North Dakota BUILD program, had sponsored informal "visioning" sessions in the community and were struggling to find a direction.

In 2001, representatives of the state office of USDA/Rural Development approached us and encouraged us to prepare an application for the USDA Empowerment Zone grant program. We qualified due to the extreme outmigration from Cavalier County from 1980-2000, an unhappy 39.6% . We hired a consultant to assist us with the application and when the work was done, we had a strategic plan that outlined seven major development priorities.

Our Cavalier County Strategic Plan is a living document and shows projects that are completed as well as those in development. We update it as new projects develop and at least once a year we meet with the leadership of each section to track and assist new efforts around the county. A strategic plan keeps the economic development organization and the community focused on what they need to accomplish.

We are indebted to the State Office of USDA/Rural Development for their assistance in building a strategic plan that really works. Until the Champion Community status was eliminated from Rural Development, we regularly reported on activities for the RD Benchmark System.

-Carol Goodman, Executive Director CCJDA

Strategic Planning Guides

USDA Rural Development:

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities

www.rurdev.usda.gov/SupportDocuments/Strategic.pdf

USDA Rural Development:

A Guide to Implementation and Benchmarking for Rural Communities

www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/ezec/Pubs/benchmark.pdf

Other valuable resources for strategic planning include:

- North Dakota State University Extension Service
- Staff members from rural utilities
- Various departments within the North Dakota University System
- Independent Consultants
- ND Department of Commerce

Strategic Planning Example

During the time CCJDA was categorized a Champion Community, we reported to USDA/Rural Development through an on-line program. We have now converted the report to an Excel format to track our progress as you will see in the CCJDA Benchmark Report below.

The CCJDA Benchmark actually serves as an annual report to the community as well. The CCJDA Board of Directors reviews the Report at a regular board meeting at least twice a year. We have also used it in board training sessions.

www.ccjda.org/documents/Benchmark_2011.pdf

Infrastructure Assessment Model

If your community is just beginning a formal planning process, or even if you already have a plan in place, an Infrastructure Assessment exercise is a good way to periodically keep up with progress and changes. Several North Dakota communities went through a similar program during the BUILD program in the 1990's.

www.communityecosystems.org/assessments/infrastructure.doc

It's important to keep in mind that a strategic plan will be a different document or approach for each community, depending on their size, resources and goals, and the plans can support a "big picture" or can be as detailed as you want them to be.

Examples:

-A community in southeast North Dakota just completed in 2011 a 20-year comprehensive plan which includes a housing study done a year earlier. They plan to do small updates every five years, major updates every 10. Committee members are expected to bring the plan books to meetings. The community economic developer states that "a plan is useful if it's on your desk, at the meetings, read and referred to, dog-eared and sticky-noted."

-Another example comes from southwest North Dakota where the economic development organization prefers a more flexible approach that allows them to address needs and issues as they come up, a philosophy that has served them well with the rapidly changing economic scene in the western part of our state.