

Economic Development Strategy

Implementation Plan

Phase Two Implementation

FY 2014

With the results of the business retention and expansion survey in hand, four of the six priority one actions complete and one well into its development and review phase, a more comprehensive review of the Strategy document as a whole is needed to maintain focus and productivity towards the overall strategy goals and objectives.

The original strategy broke the strategy down into three primary areas: The Task, The Questions, & The Plan.

The Task

The task remains essentially unchanged, but for a few proposed additions to slightly enlarge the scope of the composition and impact of the next group of recommended implementing actions.

Develop and implement a comprehensive economic development strategy for the purpose of:

- Diversifying and expanding the economic base of the community
- Supporting creation and growth of businesses and non-profit/public sector organizations that use and provide local and regional products and services
- Increasing the number of family-wage jobs in the community
- Leveraging the strengths of Ashland's tourism and repeat visitors

Inclusion of non-profit and public sector organizations alongside the more common focus of "business" is intended to recognize the ability of many non-profit and public sector groups to contribute as a traded sector participant in the local economy, bringing "outside money in" by exporting their services to others outside the region, importing wealth in the form of grant funds that benefit the local economy in a number of ways and often paying wages at or above the regional median levels.

The innovative partnership between the City of Ashland, the US Forest Service, Lomakatsi Restoration Project and the Nature Conservancy is a prime example of the impact of non-profit and public sector organizations in the local economy.

The Questions

The strategy development committee went through significant effort to answer the following key questions that helped shape the final plan:

- What is economic development?
- How is our economy different? (Advantages)
- What is working for us now? (Strengths)
- What is not working? (Weaknesses)

- What do we want? (Vision)
- How do we get there from here? (Strategy)

As various staff, local partners and Mayor and Council reviewed the results of the Business Retention and Expansion (B,R & E) survey, much of the survey responses were consistent with the committee answers to these questions.

The B,R & E survey was a critical first implementation step that resulted in detailed statistical analysis of the current local economic climate and most importantly provided feedback and prioritization of specific actions, activities, services or resources our local business community needs and values to survive, thrive and grow.

While the first five questions are important, the key question of “How do we get there from here?” forms the basis for the task of updating “The Plan” Before jumping into specific strategy objectives, four focused target business types were identified along with a business profile. They include:

- Existing businesses in the community with a commitment to operating their business and living in Ashland
- Businesses that rely on and earn a competitive advantage from innovation, creativity, design and technology in their operations for new product development, creation or expansion of niche markets, process improvements, etc
- Businesses that produce specialty and value added goods or services with a market beyond our local economy
- Businesses that purchase from the local and regional economy for supply or provide goods or services that reduce the need of the community to purchase goods or services from outside of region.

To incorporate the traded sector value of local non-profit organizations, the term businesses should be defined to reference the inclusion of non-profits or be added to each of the four targets as well. The business profile seems to remain a good match to the types of businesses that the plan is intended to focus its efforts and has no differentiation between business and non-profit.

The Plan

The final strategy document contained the following seven objectives:

- Assist local existing and emerging business stabilize and grow
- Improve long term coordination and collaboration with local and regional economic development partners
- Increase availability of investment capital for local businesses
- Provide local educational & technical skills development to match local business workforce needs
- Increase tourism in the fall, winter and spring and diversify the types of events and activities promoted
- Provide appropriate land supplies for needed business growth/expansion with quality infrastructure to all commercial and employment lands

- Manage the physical development process to ensure understandable requirements with timely and predictable results while safeguarding and improving the quality of the environment and the community

Implementing actions were built to accomplish each of the seven objectives. In reviewing the original prioritized action list along with the results of the B,R&E and various meetings and discussions with local business and economic development partners, the following updated priority list addresses the concerns, requests and desires of most.

Each of the original actions contained a description providing additional details of tactics, tasks and projects to successfully accomplish the action. With the benefit of the additional review and input, the descriptions of the recommended new priority one items have been revised to assist with final funding, timeline, City staff and partner involvement needs as well as to most closely match the needs of the local economy.

Priority 1 Actions (10 items)

	Action
7.1	Improve the Land Use Development Process – Incorporates actions 7.2 and 7.3
2.1	Formalize relationships and roles for Ashland specific strategy implementation among major partners
2.2	Create formal and routine communication with all regional economic development partners
3.3	Create a coordinated economic development information and marketing plan to maximize public communication tools
6.4	Pursue the expansion of a State E-Commerce Zone for Ashland
6.5	Evaluate land availability for business expansion on lands on or adjacent to existing businesses
1.5	Assist local businesses in energy, water, waste, supply chain reductions and efficiencies
4.2	Develop, promote, and expand job training programs to meet skill needs identified by local business
1.4	Create/Expand a local business resource & mentoring program
4.1	Develop/expand programs to connect local education partners with business community for experience and exposure to entrepreneurship, business development & operations

* Proposed to be directed to Council Goal concept of Jobs Commission/Jobs Advisory Board to review existing resources and develop actions to maximize existing resources or develop new resources specifically for Ashland employers and current/future potential employees.

Individual Action Detail

7.1 Improve the Land Use Development Process	1	City
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This action is one of the original priority one actions and remains in progress towards meeting the objective of improving the land use development process. As the Community Development Staff have progressed through their participation in the B,R&E survey as well as surveys to their own customers, many of the issues are being addressed through the Unified Land Use Code project. The Unified Code project objectives are to make the code clear, consistent, concise, adaptable and user-friendly, while also improving internal City department communication and coordination particularly on larger and more complex development projects.

Phase II of the project is intended to address issues raised in action items 7.2 and 7.3, which state:

- **7.2** - Create incentives for development applications that meet certain pre-defined economic development eligibility criteria
- **7.3** - Consider changes to Land Use Development Code that may be inhibiting redevelopment or new construction

Benchmark/Performance Measure – Completion of Unified Land Use Code project

2.1 Formalize relationship and roles for Ashland specific strategy implementation among major partners (City of Ashland, Chamber, Jackson County, SOREDI, Business Oregon, Job Council, etc)	1	BizOR, Chamber, City, JackCo, SOREDI, SOU, RCC, SBDC, THRIVE
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With the responsibilities for the coordination and on-going implementation of the Economic Development Strategy and related activities resolved with its placement in the City Administrator's Office, this action will be given more attention and will function in parallel and in conjunction with the proposed updated priority one actions.

Benchmark/Performance Measure – Schedule to host and conduct four quarterly meetings with representatives of economic development partner organizations in FY14

2.2 Create formal and routine communication with all regional economic development partners	1	BizOR, Chamber, City, JackCo, SOREDI, SOU, RCC, SBDC, THRIVE
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This action is closely associated with action 2.1 and could benefit from the creation of a local Jobs Commission/Advisory Board, but will also rely and build on existing communication structures utilized by local and regional economic development partners.

Benchmark/Performance Measure – Schedule to host and conduct four quarterly meetings with representatives of economic development partner organizations in FY14

3.3 Create a coordinated economic development information and marketing plan to maximize public communication tools

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BizOR, Chamber, City, SOREDI, SOU/RCC

The community has a variety of public communication resources such as City, Chamber and other economic development partner websites, social media outlets, direct mailing lists, e-newsletters, community TV (RVTV), postings in community meeting spaces, City Commission & Committee packets, etc. A coordinated information and marketing plan would provide consistent and complete local and regional economic development information and services for the region. The system would integrate partner agency content to automate distribution across partner communication platforms for maximum efficiency and reach to the business community and the public.

The B,R&E contained many references to the need/desire for increased marketing and communication efforts for business education and training, including Ashland specific data sets across a variety of often inter-related business segments such as real estate market analysis, detailed demographic analysis, etc. Additionally, resources such as current development related information, fees, licenses, services available, etc was also suggested to be pulled together into one resource location and kept current.

3.3.1 - A suggested concept to achieve this goal is a local business resource web portal which could house all of the information described above as a one-stop shop for market/demographic data, contacts, educational and business services resources across the various business segments.

The portal would be organized to provide information, resources and guidance specific to the needs of the user:

Starting a business – Business assistance/training, business/strategic planning resources, legal structures, licensing/permitting, site selection, sector specific customer demographics, local vendor supply chain opportunities

Growing a business – Staffing/workforce training resources, expansion markets/exporting assistance, site evaluation, real estate occupancy/vacancy/BLI information

Relocating a business – Site evaluation/land use codes, infrastructure assessment/constraints, incentive programs (enterprise/e-commerce zones), occupancy/vacancy/BLI information

Financing a business - Local, State and Federal financing programs, grant opportunities, seed/angel fund programs, infrastructure deferral/loan programs, incentive programs

3.3.2 – Develop, maintain and publish through the business portal an economic indicators dashboard tool to assist Council, businesses and the community in gauging the local economic climate. Indicators could include totals, percentage annual change and comparisons to other communities in the following:

- Business license registration by major category
- Total employees by major category
- Residential and commercial construction permits and valuation
- Home occupation permits
- Transient Occupancy Tax collections

- Occupancy rate
- Visitor/tourist population
- Ashland School District enrollment by grade
- Commercial electric and water utility consumption
- New commercial electric and water utility meter connections
- Annual average home monthly rent
- Median home sales
- Population by age group
- Attainment of Economic Development Strategy action targets

Other regional indicators could be included and tracked to connect Ashland specific trends with regional indicators such as median household income, wage growth, etc that are not available at the Ashland community level.

3.3.3 – To further expand and provide exposure to the variety of core business segments, information could also be provided in the form of short videos for key local segments such as: Digital Technology , vitaculture/sustainable ag/organic farming, Performing Arts, Visual art and design, film and video production, culinary, government innovation/partnerships and connected to the business resource portal and other marketing partners and outlets.

Benchmark/Performance Measure – Completion and quarterly reporting to Council and the community using an economic indicators dashboard with FY13 benchmarks and performance targets and measures where appropriate.

<p>6.4 Develop and implement a communication/outreach plan for the recently awarded E-Commerce Zone</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>BizOR, Chamber, City, JackCo, SOREDI</p>
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With considerable support and assistance from Jackson County and SOREDI, an e-commerce designation was secured for the entire Jackson County enterprise zone which much of the employment lands in Ashland are now a part of. To maximize the benefits of this new resource, City staff will work with Jackson County and SOREDI to ensure that property owners, businesses and interested parties are aware of the program, its benefits and opportunities.

Benchmark/Performance Measure – Contact all property owners and businesses within the three e-commerce nodes in Ashland, schedule and conduct informational meetings at each node location, follow up on interest from individual property owners or business owners by January 2014. One approved e-commerce business in FY14.

6.5 Evaluate land availability for business expansion on lands on or adjacent to existing businesses	1	BizOR, Chamber, City, SOREDI
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As most job growth comes from the expansion of existing businesses, it is critical to evaluate lands where business expansion is likely or desired to understand and anticipate obstacles and barriers of the adjacent lands for expansion while also looking forward using expected market growth need estimates over the next 10-20 years. Using the Urban Renewal District feasibility study, the EOA, the updated BLI, the B, R & E results and other related data, an initial analysis would be prepared.

City staff or a designated task force could review and evaluate existing business expansion opportunities (adjacent lands), new business land needs consistent with identified target areas (profile/attributes action 1.1) and land needs and opportunities within the existing Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). The evaluation will include elements such as, infrastructure needs for the identified lands, existing and proposed zoning regulations and identification of potential conflicts with expansion forecasts/needs, etc.

The results may indicate the desire and benefit for proactive adjustments to the zoning regulations, the inclusion of specific public projects in the City Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and/or other policy modifications. The results will also provide those businesses contemplating expansion with upfront analysis of the practical and policy implications of a proposed expansion, removing much of the unpredictability of that process.

Participating proactively with the business community on business expansion needs and obstacles was identified in the B,R&E survey as a significant business need and resource. City and Chamber staff had follow up conversations with many of the survey respondents and found a variety of issues where further site evaluation and identification of expansion needs would benefit both short and long term decision making for business expansion and could be the biggest assistance in retaining existing businesses in Ashland.

Benchmark/Performance Measure

Conduct a minimum of 10 site expansion evaluations in FY14

1.5 Assist local businesses in energy, water, waste, supply chain reductions and efficiencies	1	City, Recology, Parks & Rec, DEQ, Avista
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The City of Ashland created an Ashland Green Business Program four years ago, managed and staffed through the City’s Conservation Division, as a coordinated multi-agency team (City-Water, City-Electric, Recology-waste, Avista-Nat gas, DEQ) to help businesses wanting to increase the efficiency and sustainability efforts of their business operations. The program conducted audits in all major consumption categories and works with businesses to develop plans and strategies to reduce initial consumption, reduce waste and eliminate toxic materials. In addition to reducing operating costs for local businesses and preserving community resources, successful implementation of audit findings result in job creation for the local construction/trades sector.

With turnover in staffing and a significant increase in program workload each year (new businesses are added with existing businesses going through annual evaluations), the Green Business Program has been placed on hold pending a review of program objectives and potential tools available to more efficiently deliver the level of service expected and desired of the program.

Staff proposes providing businesses with a set of online tools developed by ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) called the Green Business Challenge. The product allows local businesses to complete a baseline survey of their resource usage, select a goal level to achieve in each category, use the software to track data over the period of the goal, connect with City and other partner resources to help meet the selected goal and compare their progress with other local businesses and businesses of their type across the nation. This program format allows staff to serve interested businesses regardless of the volume of interest and participation.

Benchmark/Performance Measure – Participation by 30 local businesses by end of FY14

4.2 Develop, promote, and expand job training programs to meet skill needs identified by local business	1	Chamber, City, Job Council, SOREDI
1.4 Create/Expand a local business resource & mentoring program	1	Chamber, City, SOU/RCC-SBDC
4.1 Develop/expand programs to connect local education partners with business community for experience and exposure to entrepreneurship, business development & operations	1	ASD, SOU/RCC, Chamber, Job Council, SOREDI, City

Each of these actions were mentioned consistently throughout the B,R&E as programs and services that would benefit local businesses. All three actions identified and supported in the B,R&E are occurring at some level within the region. The reoccurring theme throughout the survey response and from other discussions with business leaders and partner organizations is that there is a need for Ashland specific resources and programs in these areas.

As part of Council’s goalsetting for 2013-14, an objective was identified under the community quality of life goal to establish a permanent jobs commission. A group like a Jobs Commission or Jobs Advisory Board could be developed and charged with developing a prioritized plan to leverage existing services and augment those services when necessary to ensure that work being done in the region is available, accessible and tailored to Ashland employer and employee needs.

Staff level discussions with the listed partners indicate that a variety of programs currently in place in the region would benefit from additional participation from Ashland businesses, institutions, schools and non-profit and government partners.

Priority 2 Items (7 items)

Action	Priority	Partners	Lead	City Funding
1.6 Determine feasibility/demand for local business assistance and support office	2	BizOR, Chamber, City, SOREDI, SBDC, RCC, SOU	Chamber/SOU	TBD
3.2 Create opportunities for increased local access to funds	2	City, Chamber, SOREDI	Chamber	Econ Dev budget (staff time)
5.1 Maximize City funded marketing efforts targeted for “year-round” tourism	2	Chamber, City	Chamber	Econ Dev Grant or contract
5.2 Determine market feasibility for a convention/community center	2	Chamber, City, OSF, SOU	City	Econ Dev budget (Staff time + contract)
5.3 Develop a capital improvement plan and maintenance strategy for the Plaza and downtown	2	City	City	City budget (Staff time + contract)
6.3 Complete transportation and utility service connections to all commercial and industrial lands in the City limits and UGB	2	City	City	CIP budget (Staff time + Contract)
6.7 Complete and maintain real-time commercial occupancy data (availability, price, contacts, etc.)	2*	Chamber, City, SOREDI, Private	City/Chamber	Econ Dev Grant or contract

* Possible data set to be incorporated into proposed action 3.3.1 – Business Resource Portal

Priority 3 Items (8 items)

Action	Priority	Partners	Lead	City Funding
1.3 Increase opportunities for local import substitution and local to local purchasing	3	Chamber, City, SOU, THRIVE	THRIVE	Econ Dev Grant or contract
6.2 Complete and maintain publicly accessible real-time online buildable lands inventory	3*	City	City	PW budget (Staff time)
6.6 Determine feasibility and cost/benefit for public purchase of key industrial lands to make “shovel ready” for re-sale for business development	3	City	City	Econ Dev/Admin budget (Staff time)
7.4 Update the Economy Element of the Comprehensive Plan	3	City	City	Comm Dev/Econ Dev budget (Staff time)

7.5 Provide public access to development related data sets (GIS Mapping)	3*	City	City	PW budget (Staff time)
7.6 Integrate existing sustainable development concepts & practices into development standards	3	City	City	Comm Dev budget (staff time)
7.7 Create and define quantifiable community "Quality of Life" indicators to measure economic development strategy success, both monetary and non-monetary	3	City	City	Grant or contract
7.8 Develop and Implement a Façade Improvement Program	3	Chamber, City	City	Econ Dev/Admin budget (Staff time)

* Possible data set to be incorporated into proposed action 3.3.1 – Business Resource Portal