

INVESTCR



INVESTCR

InvestCR focuses on how to foster a robust economic environment in Cedar Rapids. Many indicators point to an economy that is already strong. In 2013, Cedar Rapids had a \$550 million net retail surplus, a 40% excess of local supply over demand, meaning the city attracts spending from outside its borders. In that same year, unemployment was 5.2%, significantly lower than the national average of 7.9% and consistent with the state rate. Median home values are higher than the state median and have risen over the past decade despite a large-scale disaster.

Yet, concerns surface over the economic trajectory of Cedar Rapids. According to a 2013 economic study, Cedar Rapids residents expressed three top issues:

- Lack of retention and ability to attract young professional workers in the 25 – 44 year age bracket. The Cedar Rapids population is aging. From 2000 to 2010, the proportion of residents in this age bracket dropped by about 3%, even while overall population rose by 4.6%.
- Development and attraction of a skilled workforce. Cedar Rapids has a lower proportion of residents with higher education degrees than the State of Iowa.
- Need to focus a wide array of economic development efforts and involvement with regional organizations through a well-devised city strategic plan.

The goals of InvestCR address these concerns and more. This element is driven primarily by the results of the recently completed Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy prepared in 2014 by Angelou Economics. Goals 1, 2 and 4 in particular draw most of their content directly from the “Cedar Rapids Strategic Action Plan.” The reader is encouraged to refer to this outside report for more detail on the goals in InvestCR.



INVESTCR GOALS

1. Expand economic development efforts to support business and workforce growth, market Cedar Rapids, and engage regional partners.
2. Cultivate a skilled workforce by providing cutting-edge training and recruiting talented workers.
3. Reinvest in the city’s business corridors and districts.
4. Grow a sustainable, diverse economy by supporting existing businesses, fostering entrepreneurship, and targeting industry specific growth.



A CITY FOR ALL AGES

To attract and retain residents of any age, the city needs to enhance quality of life, and create a culture that drives people to form an attachment to this community. The “Soul of the Community Study” by the Knight Foundation in 2010 found that the key drivers of community attachment are: social offerings, openness, and aesthetics. Public spaces and neighborhoods should reflect these principles. The NewBo Market area is a good example of a public space that embodies these three principles.

Downtown Cedar Rapids is an important component of a young professional-friendly environment, and the implementation of the 2012 Downtown Plan will help make this a stronger asset for Cedar Rapids.

In addition, other sections of EnvisionCR provide strategies to implement this initiative, by promoting place-making, alternative transportation and diverse neighborhoods. These strategies include:

1. Place-Making.
 - Have the best parks, recreation and trails system in the region (GreenCR)
 - Be stewards for the environment, promoting economic and social growth while restoring the relationship between the city and the natural environment (GreenCR)
2. Alternative Transportation
 - Provide choices for all transportation users: inter- and intra-city (ConnectCR)
3. Diverse Housing and Interesting Neighborhoods
 - Encourage mixed-use and infill development (GrowCR)
 - Support existing and new neighborhood associations through the development of Neighborhood Action Plans (StrengthenCR)
 - Improve the quality and identity of neighborhoods and key corridors (StrengthenCR)
 - Adopt policies that create choices in housing types and prices throughout the city (StrengthenCR)



GOAL 1: Expand economic development efforts to support business and workforce growth, market Cedar Rapids, and engage regional partners.

The public sector has a role to play in the private market, by making sure policies are business friendly, fostering connections, and aligning public investments with market trends that support collective economic goals. In an increasingly global marketplace, the city is strongest when working as part of a region to promote economic development. The city already has several regional economic organizations, including the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and the Entrepreneurial Development Center, Inc.. The city will work with these organizations, neighboring municipalities and others to continue to identify and rally around common regional economic goals.



INITIATIVES

1. Develop a retail and services recruitment strategy.

This can help strengthen areas with opportunities for growth in Cedar Rapids.

2. Promote the city's unused fiber optic capacity to attract technology companies.

This unused fiber optic capacity can be used to attract businesses that value access to broadband.

3. Create a business expansion and retention program.

This involves strategies that build relationships with existing business owners or managers and communicating regularly with them to identify challenges and opportunities related to expansion and retention.

4. Create an economic development brand (marketing and communications).

This can be used to attract the attention of site selectors and industry leaders by showcasing the benefits and opportunities that exist in Cedar Rapids. Attracting new businesses and promoting existing businesses can lead to a more diversified economy.



GOAL 2: Cultivate a skilled workforce by providing cutting-edge training and recruiting talented workers.

Cedar Rapids needs a workforce with skills employers need. The Cedar Rapids Target Industry Report notes that Cedar Rapids is “experiencing a switch in business growth from construction, manufacturing and information industries to service establishments that include financial, professional and health categories.” Educational institutions and other training providers must keep pace with this change.

At the same time, the city needs to ensure this community attracts skilled workers, including young professionals. A talented and diverse pool of workers is often one of the top priorities in location decisions for companies. Cedar Rapids can retain and attract more firms if the city has a robust workforce.



INITIATIVES

5. Promote workforce development through city economic development programs and a variety of initiatives focused on enhancing quality of life to attract and retain a skilled workforce.

The Strategic Action Plan recommends a number of strategies to help recruit talented workers, especially young professionals:

- Support organizations targeted towards young professionals such as ImpactCR.
- Encourage development of live/work environments in downtown and Czech Village-New Bohemia District
- Provide recruitment assistance for companies to recruit executive level talent and recruit at career fairs in cities with workforces in the target industries.

6. Develop and implement a citywide Wi-Fi network to support entrepreneurship, job skills, educational opportunities, and innovation.

A citywide Wi-Fi network supports educational efforts at all levels and makes the city more attractive.



GOAL 3: Reinvest in the city's business corridors and districts.



MEDQUARTER MASTER DEVELOPMENT PLAN (THE LAKOTA GROUP)

Businesses receive direct benefits by close proximity and interaction with other businesses, a phenomenon often referred to as “economies of agglomeration.” A concentration of businesses can use common suppliers and draw from a common customer base. Even competing businesses can benefit from each other’s proximity, since a concentration of one type of business can serve to establish a niche market that attracts customers and/or workers. Business districts and corridors should make the most of these potential benefits by supporting connectivity between businesses and an active environment that attracts workers, customers, and other businesses.

Business corridors and districts also provide some of the city’s most important public spaces. These types of vibrant

urban spaces play a critical role in helping residents form an attachment to their community.

Strategies to achieve this goal are provided elsewhere in this document and in other plans. This goal will be achieved by implementing the recommendations of:

- Improve the quality and identity of neighborhoods and key corridors.
- Improve the function and appearance of our key corridors.
- Other planning initiatives such as: 2012 Downtown Plan, Czech Village-New Bohemia Revitalization Strategy, and the MedQuarter Master Plan.

INITIATIVES

7. Promote southwest industrial/airport development.

City infrastructure investments in the southwest (south of Highway 30 and between I-380 and Edgewood Road SW) make this an attractive area for industrial businesses. Implementation of the Eastern Iowa Airport’s Commercial Real Estate Strategy is recommended.

8. Promote core districts through façade program and other improvements.

This can lead to improved appearances and enhanced quality of life in these areas.



GOAL 4: Grow a sustainable, diverse economy by supporting existing businesses, fostering entrepreneurship, and targeting industry-specific growth.



The city, through an expanded economic development department, can take an active role in business creation, retention and expansion. The city can have the greatest effect by gathering information on business needs, coordinating access to funding or assets (such as large spaces for expansions and new development), and crafting city policies and incentives that match the needs of the local business community. In general, the public sector should be focused on activities which will act as a catalyst or support for private sector activity. Ultimately, the city should prioritize support for grassroots efforts by the local business community - efforts that will build social capital, particularly among entrepreneurs.

INITIATIVES

9. Form a regional alliance for marketing efforts.

This will help the city promote itself to a larger geographic area.

10. Create a business advisory board.

This board will be used to review the progress of city economic development efforts.