

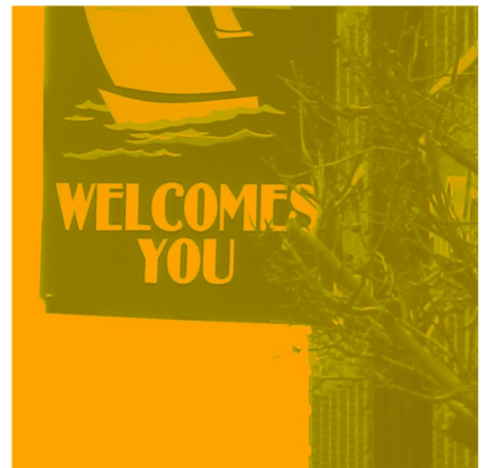


Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan

CITY OF PORT HURON AND SURROUNDING ST. CLAIR COUNTY, MICHIGAN



June 18, 2010



WilburSmith
ASSOCIATES

THE VISION:

Develop the Blue Water Region into a prosperous, sustainable economic environment through the united effort and commitment of the private, public, and non-profit sectors.

More than 100 people who live and work in the Blue Water Region have invested many hours working diligently to develop this strategic plan. These community volunteers have been very clear about the core values of the Blue Water Region: the **people** of the region; this **place** and the value those who live here place on the water, the beauty of the region, and the location; and the importance of shared **prosperity** for the people and businesses in the Blue Water Region.

The focus of this plan is on jobs and on the region's economy. However, the region's core values, the **people**, **place**, and **prosperity** of the Blue Water Region, must continue to be addressed in order to build the kind of vibrant economy that is desired. The Blue Water Region has many strengths, including the demonstrated capability of local entrepreneurs and success in practical innovations, outstanding transportation assets, moderate business costs in several key areas, a skilled workforce and high quality education and training resources, advanced manufacturing capabilities, and community leaders who demonstrated their dedication to the economic development of this region by faithfully attending planning workshops and participating in building this plan.

The economic future of the Blue Water Region will be built on existing strengths and on new opportunities that the region will aggressively pursue in a targeted and focused manner. To implement this plan, people, businesses, and organizations from all across St. Clair County must work together for the economic success of the entire region. "Business as usual" will not work. Success will require dedication and a commitment to partnership from all of the towns, cities, and the county, from school districts, economic development and tourism organizations, and elected officials, and from civic groups, churches, and community organizations.

As we move ahead, maintaining the amazing energy and partnership created through the steering committee who developed this plan will be critical to our ability to achieve each of the actions outlined here. This is just the beginning. It will be the work accomplished in the coming months and years that will create the economic prosperity that we are committing ourselves to work toward. We are reminded of these words:

"Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision merely passes time. Vision with action can change our world."

Joel Barker

This strategic plan was overseen by a steering committee of business and community leaders from across St. Clair County. The members are listed below. We thank them for their service.

**Port Huron/St. Clair County Economic Development Strategic Plan
Steering Committee**

Name			
Alex Morten	Freda Brown	Kyle McCalmon	Paul Bailey
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Bill Kauffman	Greg Smith	Lee Jones	Randy Maiers
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Dave Devendorf	Joanne Wine	Mel Wallbank	Syd Santavy
Dave DuVerny	Joe Vandervest	Michael Bacheller	Thomas Shorkey
David Haynes	Joe Vito	Michael McCartan	Tim Donnellon
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Denise Brooks	John Gabor	Mike DuVerny	Timothy Lozen
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Doug Alexander	Kevin Bilyeu	Nick Grazi	Tyrone Burrell
Doug Dolph	Kevin Pollock	Pam Sawyer	Vincent Cataldo
Edward Brooks	Kimberly Burnham	Pamela Wall	Wally Evans
Father Tomak	Kristopher Jackson	Pat Nowak	Will Oldford

The Blue Water Region Competes in a Global Economy

While the global economy has expanded the nature of business and competition, the unique assets within regions are becoming even more important in determining where businesses will choose to grow in the future. Many may think that in this electronically connected world business activities can be done from almost anywhere; however, in many ways “community” is actually becoming an even more important factor for economic development. The unique assets and expertise of the Blue Water Region will play a vital role in the region’s future economic prosperity.

The Blue Water Region represents one county, 23 townships, seven cities including Port Huron, and two villages located at the nexus of the nation’s third largest international border crossing where more than



Steering Committee Meeting

\$40 billion in trade flows between the U.S. and Canada every year. This strategic plan is a roadmap defining specific actions to enable the Blue Water Region to compete and prosper in the future. While the global marketplace continues to evolve and technology continues to change how we do business, one thing is certain: economic development has never been more competitive than it is today, and the Blue Water Region is ready to do what it takes to be the master of their economic destiny and have a vibrant economy in the years to come.

The Blue Water Region Strategic Plan

This strategic plan builds on the assets and strengths in St. Clair county, areas for improvement and a realization that there are new opportunities the region can capitalize on. In today’s global marketplace a region will not achieve success by being the cheapest location, but by being a place where businesses can realize real value, the nexus between competitive cost and quality. The Blue Water Region has a talent for entrepreneurship and practical innovation that can play an important role in the region’s economic future. Consider existing businesses in the community such as Britt Manufacturing, PTM Corporation, Acheson Colloids (now Henkel International), Preferred Industries, and BTM Corporation. These companies excel by using practical innovations to meet the needs of their customers. The most beneficial innovation today is achieved by creating value through improved processes and products focusing on customer needs and issues. This region has many strengths and opportunities that are discussed at length in the plan’s SWOT analysis, completed in January 2010.

This strategic plan is built on three interlocking core values: **people**, **place**, and **prosperity**. Prosperity enhances the economic health of our businesses as well as the economic well-being of the people who

live in all our communities. To keep our existing companies and attract new businesses in the future, the people who live here now and those who will be attracted to the region in the future must meet an ever-increasing standard of workforce excellence which requires outstanding education, training, and personal commitment to life-long learning. Finally, the quality of this place is essential to retaining our workforce, keeping and recruiting businesses, growing tourism, and increasing practical innovation and entrepreneurship on which a successful economy depends.

Goals of the Plan

Prosperity

- Retain, strengthen, and support existing businesses, including small business
- Diversify the economy
- Foster practical innovation and entrepreneurship

Place

- Grow tourism
- Maintain and enhance the quality of life and place to support our economic development
- Maximize our geographic location

People

- Develop an outstanding workforce aligned with the business development goals of the Blue Water Region and enhance the education system to closely integrate with desired economic objectives

Action Plan

To achieve the vision and the desired economic success, the Blue Water Region must distinguish itself as an exceptional location for existing businesses and for entrepreneurs, as well as a location that will attract companies in the future. The region must continue to distinguish itself as a tourism destination with charming and attractive downtowns, connections to the water, and art and cultural amenities. This action plan clearly establishes specific actions that can improve the economy of the Blue Water Region. If the region can move the action plan forward and continue to preserve and enhance the quality of life and place that is so highly valued by the people who live here, the Blue Water economy can thrive.

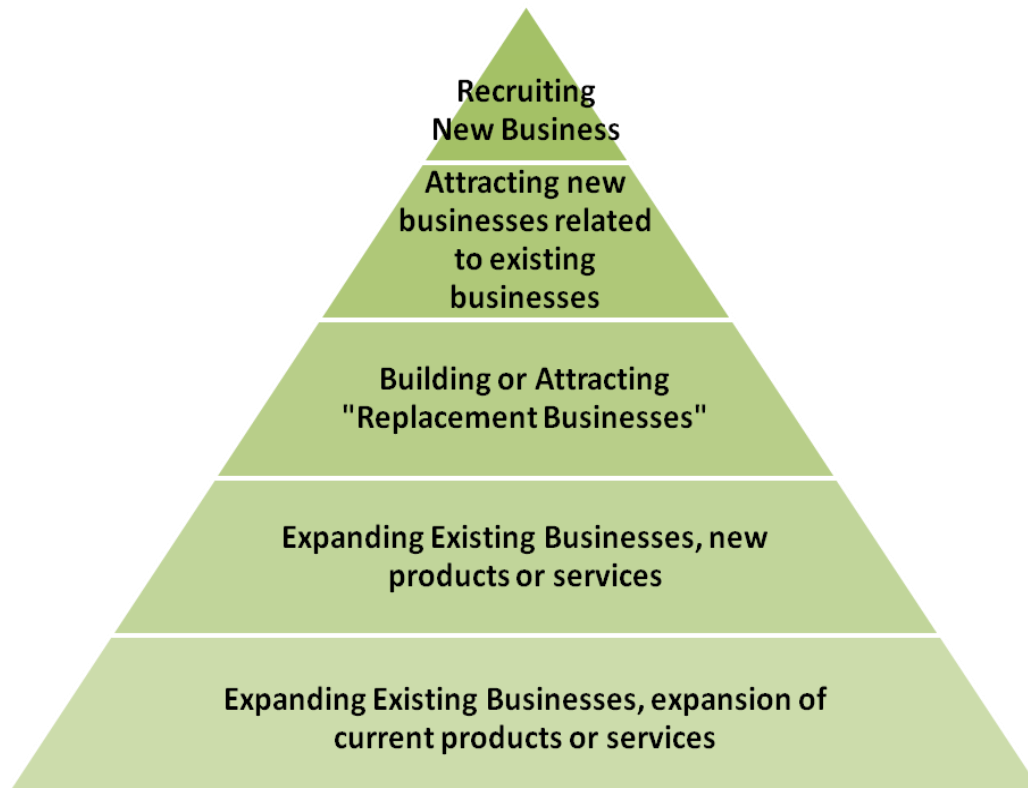
The goals and priority actions detailed below are the roadmap to the future. The actions are prioritized based upon Steering Committee discussions, strengths within the region, and opportunities that can generate near term benefits.

PROSPERITY

GOAL: Retain, strengthen, and support existing businesses, including small business

It is our existing businesses, growing from within, that generate the highest percentage of our new jobs. Historically, nearly 70% of the new jobs created in any community are created by their existing

businesses. All too often communities focus most of their economic development efforts on recruiting new businesses to a region, and while that is an important part of a comprehensive economic development program, efforts to sustain and grow our existing businesses will most likely produce the greatest benefits in terms of new jobs. The Hierarchy of Business Opportunities shown below depicts the potential attraction strategies for creating new jobs and associated risks (cost vs. benefits).



Prepared by Dan McCarty

Priority Action 1: Build a robust and comprehensive business retention and expansion program for the Blue Water Region.

- A.** Develop a county business database that will provide relevant information about county businesses including contact information, primary business activity, and so forth for all the businesses in the community. The database will be updated at least every two years.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization determined by the Executive Committee.

Desired results: Web accessible database listing all county businesses. This database will provide the foundation for the local business cross match program.

By when: December 2010.

Additional resources needed: Will require some staff time; final resource allocation to be determined.

- B.** Build a business to business cross-match database for St. Clair County that will provide information on area businesses including the material inputs, products produced, materials and services utilized, and other data to help area businesses identify local sourcing opportunities and potential customers within the region.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization determined by the Executive Committee.

Desired results: Comprehensive database that will allow area businesses to determine the availability of local resources for products and services and to identify opportunities to sell goods and services to other local businesses, and create stronger linkages and collaborative efforts among the local business community.

By when: June 2011.

Additional resources needed: Evaluate opportunities to work with SC4 to develop cross match surveys, conduct surveys using volunteers or work-study students, and evaluate opportunities to utilize student workers for the database input. The database must be maintained and updated periodically to retain value; this will require staffing resources.

- C.** Create the St. Clair County Business Alliance bringing together area business leaders at least quarterly to discuss the ongoing issues, opportunities, and needs of the Blue Water Region's existing businesses. The Business Alliance will help identify strategies to respond to the needs and issues facing the region's existing businesses and new opportunities to help existing businesses prosper.

Who will do it: A sub-committee of the Steering Committee will provide the foundation of the St. Clair County Business Alliance; involve other area business leaders, educators, and leaders.

Desired results: Build a stronger understanding and knowledge of the needs and issues facing existing businesses in the county, and increase opportunities for regularly and effective communication between existing business and industry, educators, elected officials, and others. Create an open dialogue where business needs and new opportunities can be discussed and pursued and opportunities for collaboration can be capitalized upon.

By when: September 2010.

Additional resources needed: None initially.

- D.** Expand and improve the current existing industry program based on the needs and interests of the existing business community. An enhanced existing industry program should include annual visits with existing businesses, regular existing industry appreciation activities, and other meaningful activities identified by the existing business community. Expand the use of volunteers participating in this program, including elected and appointed officials, throughout the community to meet regularly with area businesses in a one-on-one setting. Develop an existing industry survey to track historic trends and opportunities.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organizations, working with other economic development groups in the county. Regular reporting of existing industry activities should be made to the Executive Committee.

Desired result: Regular communication with existing businesses to provide information about available services and programs, to encourage businesses to contact local economic development organizations about issues and opportunities, and to demonstrate strong support for the existing businesses in the Blue Water Region.

By when: Revamp existing industry visitation program and additional services and initiate a new survey and visitation program by December 2010.

Additional resources needed: Dedicated staffing and resources required should be determined based on actual programs and services to meet the needs of existing businesses.

- E.** Develop and implement an Economic Development Volunteer 101 training program for volunteers participating in existing industry and any business recruiting activities.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Ensure volunteers understand confidentiality and other important issues related to economic development activities and are knowledgeable about available programs and services for existing and new businesses. Increase local knowledge of existing buildings and property, infrastructure, and other community amenities. Volunteers who participate in this program could also assist in economic development recruiting activities.

By when: September 2011.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated initially.

- F.** Conduct an evaluation of currently available business incentives that could be used

to help existing businesses expand. Develop recommendations for changes and improvements that would be beneficial to expanding existing businesses such as changes to tax abatement requirements on used equipment as well as purchase of new equipment.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization and/or St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission.

Desired results: Increase knowledge of incentives available to support existing businesses, identify opportunities to change incentives to meet the needs of expanding existing businesses, and identify gaps in existing incentive programs to assist in the development of new programs and incentives to support existing business growth in the Blue Water Region. Improve availability of information about incentives, financing programs, and other services to assist existing businesses.

By when: December 2010.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

Priority Action 2: Develop a network of resources to help existing businesses expand their product lines to produce new goods, utilizing existing employees, equipment, and capital.

- A. Create the Blue Water Region Economic Development Council, bringing together all of the organizations engaged in economic development in St. Clair County. The Council will meet at least quarterly to foster better communication, collaboration, and cooperation among the chambers of commerce, tourism organizations, downtown organizations, and the economic development agency. The director of each of these organizations should attend these meetings. This council should work together to continuously improve economic development in St. Clair County. For example, the council should develop a community-wide economic development training calendar to share the training and educational programming of all economic development organizations, making it easier for area residents and businesses to find information about the business training offerings available in the community.

Who will do it: The Executive Committee will request that the president or chairman of each of the economic development organizations in the county participate in this council along with the staff leadership of each organization. The council should present regular reports of their activities to the Executive Committee.

Desired results: Increased communication, collaboration, and cooperation among all of the economic development groups in St. Clair County.

By when: December 2010.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- B. Develop a business incubator facility in St. Clair County that will provide a facility and support services to enhance the growth of successful small businesses. Link the incubator facility to SC4 to leverage mentoring support from faculty.

Who will do it: Initial conceptual planning effort will be undertaken by the Economic Development Council and SC4, reporting regularly to the appropriate sub-committee of the Steering Committee.

Desired results: Develop an affordable and supportive business incubator facility designed to increase the sustainability and prosperity of the small businesses that it serves.

By when: December 2011.

Additional resources needed: Further evaluation is required to develop the detailed business plan for this facility, identify funding sources, and create an operating budget for an incubator facility.

Priority Action 3: Evaluate the region's regulations, permitting processes, utility policies, electrical services, and other public practices that affect the economic competitiveness of the region for existing businesses and new companies that might consider the Blue Water Region.

- A. Prepare a matrix of permitting requirements, utility rates, and policies (coordinate with those working on Priority Action 3 under Diversify the Economy goal) and other related regulations to clarify requirements affecting businesses across the county.

Who will do it: St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission will collect information and develop the matrix, working cooperatively with area local governments.

Desired results: Shared knowledge about fees, regulations, and requirements for existing businesses and better understanding of the competitive environment that exists for businesses in St. Clair County.

By when: June 2011.

Additional resourced needed: Not anticipated at this time; however, additional discussion with Metro Planning Commission is required to determine resource requirements.

- B. Designate local officials in each town, city, and the county to assist business with permitting and regulations, expanding on the business concierge concept to create a seamless, one-stop process to support expanding businesses.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organizations working in cooperation with local governments.

Desired results: A seamless process to expedite and streamline permitting and regulatory processes for businesses.

By when: March 2011.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated initially.

GOAL: Diversify the economy

In this region, as in regional economies everywhere, certain industries have played a decisive role in shaping the economy. Michigan became the automotive capital of the world and communities around the country envied the jobs, wages, employers, and other amenities that the automotive industry provided. St. Clair County attracted its fair share of automotive-related businesses and jobs. When this sector began to contract, the community saw many long-time employers leave the area or go out of business all together, with a resulting rise in unemployment.

A diverse economy enables a region to withstand the normal economic cycles because the area's employment is not concentrated in one or two industrial sectors. Diversifying the St. Clair County economy will require an aggressive and dedicated business recruiting program coupled with ongoing existing industry efforts to help sustain and grow companies that are already here. Successful recruiting programs are conducted as a part of a comprehensive economic development program, not as a stand-alone effort.

A detailed target industry analysis was prepared as part of this strategic plan in March 2010. The Steering Committee has selected an initial list of five target industries that the Blue Water Region will focus on for the next 24-36 months. At the end of that period, the target industries should be evaluated given existing market conditions and other factors to determine if the industry targets should remain the same or if other targets from the target industry analysis should be selected for future pursuits.

Priority Action 1: *Develop an externally focused business recruiting program to pursue the five defined target industries:*

- *Manufacture of adhesives*
- *Manufacture of industrial and general purpose machinery including custom prototyping*
- *Manufacture of surgical appliances and supplies*
- *Wholesale distribution of medical, dental, and hospital supplies*
- *Data processing, hosting, and related services*

- A. Develop and implement a professional, externally directed marketing and communications plan focused on the target industries.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization determined by the Executive Committee.

Desired results: Designated organizations will quantify specific objectives and indicators of success based upon available resources. These performance measures will be established before the plan is executed.

By when: Three to six months from plan approval.

Additional resources needed: Execution of the marketing and communications plan will require additional resources for this ongoing program. Budget and funding sources to be identified by designated economic development organization.

- B. Reach out to businesses and educational institutions in the community to participate in trade shows and recruiting activities focused on pursuing the defined targeted industries.

Who will do it: The designated economic development organization will work with businesses and educational institutions to build a collaborative partnership, ensuring that strategic businesses and appropriate educational representatives participate in these activities.

Desired results: Private sector and education personnel should join the economic development organization at all trade shows and recruiting meetings.

By when: An ongoing effort to begin within 60 days after designation of economic development organization.

Additional resources needed: Anticipate additional budget for travel expenses assuming five or six trade shows per year and three to four recruiting meetings in the initial 12 months; costs estimated to be \$76,500.

- C. Meet with regional and state Michigan Economic Development Corporation staff to discuss the selected targeted industries, marketing materials, and marketing strategy, and request MEDC's assistance in pursuing these targeted companies.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Ongoing support and assistance from MEDC to support and enhance target industry recruiting efforts in St. Clair County.

By when: Within 90 days after designation of economic development organization.

Additional resources needed: Additional resources are not required. Regular contact and communication with regional MEDC staff is expected.

- D. Develop a target industry inventory and analysis and implement the key recommendations for attracting each of the five target industries. Use the information from the Strategic Plan External Scan (January 2010) to emphasize St. Clair County's competitive advantages in the target industries and develop additional resources to define education and training resources, incentives, workforce, and other strategic factors to document the competitiveness of the region for the target industries.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Conduct a targeted, proactive recruiting campaign for the five target industry sectors.

By when: Begin recruiting activities in September 2010; this is an ongoing effort.

Additional resources needed: Additional staff and financial resources will be required. These resources should be determined based on a detailed implementation plan for each of the five target industries to be reviewed with the Executive Committee, and subsequent performance measures and budget to be developed.

- E. Develop a contact database of local business and national professional organizations with potential connections to each of the five target industries. Utilize this data to develop a target industry business network for each of the target industries and use this network to identify potential business recruiting or expansion opportunities within the five target industries.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Robust database of local and national business contacts with connections to and information about the five target industries.

By when: December 2010.

Additional resources needed: To be determined.

Priority Action 2: *Create special Incentives for target industries.*

- A. Develop a matrix of local incentives available for new or expanding businesses that are offered by each of the adjoining counties and by St. Clair County. Compare these local incentives to assess the competitiveness of the incentives available in St. Clair County.

Who will do it: Request assistance of regional MEDC staff, St. Clair County Commissioners, and designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Matrix of regional incentives offered by other counties in the region to help quantify competitiveness of St. Clair County compared to other counties in southeast Michigan.

By when: Within 12 months after approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- B. Prepare a resource database of all available local, state, and federal incentives and support services that are currently available to attract new business to any location in St. Clair County.

Who will do it: Work with regional MEDC staff, designated economic development organization, and St. Clair County Commissioners.

Desired results: Detailed database of available incentives readily available to all economic development organizations in the county and to businesses considering the county for their business.

By when: Within 12 months after approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- C. Create an education resource team including SC4, Baker College, Michigan Works, and other area education resources to work in partnership with the designated economic development organization to promote workforce and education resources available to businesses. Develop an interactive database for target industries to demonstrate specific existing and potential training services and resources that are readily available.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization determined by Executive Committee working with SC4, Baker College, Michigan Works, and other appropriate organizations.

Desired results: User-friendly database of workforce training services and resources.

By when: Six to twelve months after approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: Request funding from Workforce Board and Michigan WIRED, and identify other grant funding opportunities.

Priority Action 3: Ensure a sufficient supply of suitable land with necessary infrastructure and design standards to meet the needs of target industries and other businesses that can be attracted to St. Clair County. To the extent possible, incorporate the existing building inventory and potential in-fill properties in this inventory.

- A. Evaluate existing industrial land and building inventory, including both public and privately held properties, currently available in the county to determine the adequacy of the present business and industrial land and building inventory. Assess the quality of industrial lands to determine their suitability for meeting the demands and needs of the region's target industry and expanding existing businesses. Determine the land, building, transportation logistics, and infrastructure requirements of the target industries and emerging industries. Estimate the business and industrial land needs in the county for the next 7-10 years. Develop a plan for meeting future industrial land needs.

Who will do it: St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission.

Desired results: One-stop database to search for available land and existing buildings and a plan and implementation strategy to ensure a suitable inventory of sites and buildings to support existing industry expansions and new business attraction activities.

By when: Six months after plan approval.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated. Funds will be needed to acquire and development a new business park.

- B. Identify existing utility infrastructure throughout the county available to support the expansion or attraction of industries in the Blue Water Region. Develop mapping and a utility information matrix providing information about treatment capacity, line capacity, tap fees, industrial utility costs, and any pretreatment or permitting requirements.

Who will do it: St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission with assistance from municipalities and utility districts.

Desired results: Available database and mapping with basic utility infrastructure information.

By when: Six months after approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- C. Reduce the vacant industrial building inventory in St. Clair County. Develop a property profile with current information about existing industrial buildings that will be maintained to provide information to potential users. Some of the vacant

industrial space in St. Clair County can be utilized or renovated to provide suitable space for future businesses. Some of the vacant industrial buildings in the county no longer meet the requirements of today's business and industry and as such, these buildings may become blighting influences in the community and continue to decline.

Using vacant industrial building inventory prepared by EDA, the region should develop a vacant industrial building information matrix with information about building ownership, location, building condition and suitability, and other property data. Using this vacant building matrix, the economic development organization should identify up to three industrial buildings in substandard condition that are currently owned by non-local businesses or corporations, and conduct initial due diligence on these buildings and associated properties to determine potential demolition costs and environmental issues, assuming the buildings do not have industrial utility. Develop a redevelopment plan for each property. Prepare a strategy to request that owners donate the building and property to an appropriate local entity (review legal issues in advance and consider environmental insurance to protect local entity) so that the property can be redeveloped.

Who will do it: St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission assisted by the designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Reduce the number of vacant industrial buildings that are in substandard condition and cannot effectively be reused for industrial facilities.

By when: December 2011.

Additional resources needed: Additional funds will be needed to cover legal fees, environmental insurance, demolition costs, environmental assessments, and related due diligence. Ultimately costs should be recovered from sale of redeveloped property.

GOAL: Foster practical innovation and entrepreneurship

St. Clair County businesses excel in practical innovation. With the third highest rate of patent formations in the state of Michigan and a proud heritage of fostering practical innovations that helped to change the world, St. Clair County can be a leader in practical innovation in the future. Practical innovation was defined recently in *The Economist* as "important innovations consisting of incremental improvements to products and processes."

Priority Action 1: Build a recognized Cluster of practical innovation in St. Clair County.

- A. Develop a database of the companies in St. Clair County that regularly engage in practical innovation activities.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization determined by Executive Committee.

Desired results: Identification of practical innovation businesses in the county.

By when: Within six months after plan is approved.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- B.** Establish the St. Clair Practical Innovation Council, bringing together the existing regional businesses engaged in practical innovation. Schedule quarterly meetings to identify challenges and opportunities to help existing companies engaged in practical innovation to grow and prosper.

Who will do it: Group formed by the Steering Committee.

Desired results: Quarterly meetings of the Practical Innovation Council.

By when: Three months after plan is approved.

Additional resources needed: Volunteer effort initially.

- C.** Work with companies that announce upcoming closings or reduction in employment to determine if opportunities exist to retain key employees that could be mentored by local business experts to create a new business that will remain in St. Clair County.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization determined by Executive Committee.

Desired results: Retain talented employees, generate new business opportunities, and retain practical innovation talent in the region.

By when: Begin within 30 days of plan approval; ongoing activity.

Additional resources needed: Further evaluation required.

- D.** Develop alliances with area universities, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and other innovation firms with an interest in the advance machining, machine tool technology, and metallurgy capacities in St. Clair County to promote the Practical Innovation Cluster. Meet with university technology transfer experts to discuss strategies to expand and enhance the growth of practical innovation businesses in the region.

Who will do it: Designated economic development organization.

Desired results: To expand and foster the Practical Innovation Cluster in St. Clair County.

By when: June 2012.

Additional resources needed: Additional evaluation required to established performance measures and budget requirements.

Priority Action 2: Align the SC4 and education resources to further the competitiveness of the community's Practical Innovation and Entrepreneurial Cluster.

- A. Identify the key associate degree programs needed to grow the Practical Innovation Cluster in St. Clair County and offer scholarships to students from St. Clair County that pursue a course of study in these programs and maintain a level of scholastic performance.

Who will do it: St. Clair County Community College working with the Education Task Force and the Steering Committee.

Desired results: Build a recognized workforce cluster in practical innovation and entrepreneurship.

By when: June 2015.

Additional resources needed: Additional resources will be required.

- B. Growing practical innovation businesses depends on a critical mass of skilled workers supported by flexible and responsible training systems, higher education, and a primary and secondary education system that prepares the next generation. Create a Council for Knowledge and Economic Development in St. Clair County committed to collaboration and leadership linking education, business, and practical innovators to define the education and training needs for the Blue Water Region.

Who will do it: A Steering Committee focus group and representatives from SC4, RESA, area school superintendents, input from the St. Clair Practical Innovation Council, and other education and business representatives.

Desired results: Build an ongoing, effective collaboration between education, practical innovation, and the business community to ensure that the workforce skills and education needs of businesses are met to create the skilled knowledge workforce required to have a vibrant economy.

By when: Within nine months after approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: The Council for Knowledge and Economic Development in St. Clair County will develop a detailed business plan to establish any need for additional resources.

- C. Evaluate the opportunities resulting from creating an entrepreneurial development program in St. Clair County middle schools. This program would be designed to create an entrepreneurship and business curriculum to capture the interest of area students in math, science, and engineering. Incorporate a mentoring program and internships as students advance in the local schools.

Who will do it: Area schools with support and involvement of the Steering Committee.

Desired results: Encourage local youth to recognize outstanding employment opportunities that are available in St. Clair County. Support Practical Innovation Cluster. Demonstrate to existing and future businesses the competitiveness of their future workforce.

By when: Begin project planning work by 2011; ongoing program.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

Priority Action 3: Increase capital availability for growing the Practical Innovation Cluster.

- A. Identify sources of risk capital that could be made available to support practical innovations and associated business expansions. Evaluate interest in and need for a business incubator to support the Practical Innovation Cluster.

Who will do it: Utilize local expertise from the banking, investor, and business community.

Desired results: Build a database identifying local, state, federal, non-profit, and private funding and financing resources to help grow practical innovation businesses in the county.

By when: Within 12 months of the approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- B. Build a risk capital funding pool to provide financial support for companies engaged in practical innovation with significant growth potential. Structure the funding pool using sound investment guidelines and knowledgeable review and analysis, and establish clear requirements for businesses receiving funds.

Who will do it: Utilize local expertise from the banking, investor, and business community. These groups will assist in the initial planning for the funding pool,

identify potential sources of capital, and define a permanent governing board for the funding pool.

Desired results: A pool of funds that can be loaned to local companies who are developing products based upon the company's practical innovations.

By when: Within 24 months of plan approval.

Additional resources needed: The Practical Innovation Finance Committee will not require additional resources; however, the committee will identify staff and funding resources that will be required to manage the funding pool in the future.

Priority Action 4: Establish the Michigan Center for Practical Innovation in Advance Manufacturing, Machining, and Machine Tooling in St. Clair County.

- A.** Facilitate a meeting between the St. Clair County Practical Innovation Council and representatives from SC4, the University of Michigan, MEDC, the Michigan Economic Growth Authority, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and other appropriate organizations to discuss the advantages of creating a Michigan Center for Practical Innovation in Advanced Manufacturing, Machining, and Machine Tooling.

Who will do it: The designated economic development organization determined by Executive Committee with guidance from the St. Clair County Practical Innovation Council.

Desired results: An initial conceptual plan for moving forward to create the Michigan Center for Practical Innovation in St. Clair County.

By when: Within 24 months after approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: To be determined.

PLACE

GOAL: Grow tourism

Tourism is important to the Blue Water Region's economy. Special events and activities attract day visitors to the region, ongoing sporting events bring family and friends of the participants to the community for overnight visits, and additional business travelers could be attracted to the area to attend meetings and regional conventions if the necessary facilities were available. Tourism imports money into the region, helps to support small businesses, attracts visitors to downtown businesses, and can enhance the region's revenue base.

Priority Action 1: Develop a convention center facility and convention and meeting facility marketing program.

- A.** Conduct a feasibility study to assess the demand for convention and additional

meeting facilities in the Blue Water Region and the feasibility of redeveloping space in McMorran Center for this purpose.

Who will do it: Jointly sponsored by St. Clair County, the City of Port Huron, and the Blue Water Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Desired results: Attract additional business travelers and tourism revenues to the region; attract additional hotel and lodging revenues to the region; support local restaurants, arts and cultural activities, and entertainment venues.

By when: Complete the feasibility study by December 2010.

Additional resources needed: \$100,000-\$125,000 to cover cost of the feasibility study. Redevelopment feasibility study will provide detailed costs required for redevelopment of McMorran Center.

- B. Hire a highly qualified convention marketing manager who will prepare and implement an effective convention and meeting facility marketing plan for the Blue Water Region.

Who will do it: The county and city should jointly provide the initial funds to support this position, working with the Blue Water Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Desired results: Book regional meetings, conventions, seminars, and other related activities in the McMorran Convention Center.

By when: Fill this position prior to awarding the construction contract for redevelopment of the McMorran Center.

Additional resources needed: Funds will be required to support a full time salary and salary for administrative assistance, and to cover operating expenses including travel and marketing materials to promote the new Convention Center facilities to meeting planners, State of Michigan Tourism officials, boards of organizations holding annual conventions, and others.

- C. Redevelop the Jr. Arena in the McMorran Center into a high-quality convention and meeting facility for the Blue Water Region.

Who will do it: St. Clair County, the City of Port Huron, and the Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Desired results: Help local businesses expand, attract additional visitors and revenues to the region, and attract a new higher-end hotel to the region.

By when: December 2013.

Additional resources needed: The cost to redevelop McMorran Center is not known at this time. Anticipate multiple funding and financing resources will be used to complete this project.

Priority Action 2: Create a Tourism Steering Committee to facilitate and support tourism in the Blue Water Region.

Who will do it: The Executive Committee.

Desired results: Assist in expanding and supporting positive tourism activities in the Blue Water Region.

By when: July, 2010.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

Priority Action 3: Expand special events, attractions, and marketing activities to attract additional visitors and revenues to the Blue Water Region.

- A.** Improve and expand the Discover the Blue campaign to provide additional marketing and advertising activities to grow tourism.

Who will do it: Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau working with the Tourism Committee.

Desired results: Increase the number of visitors to the region and build a strong repeat visitor base.

By when: Begin by June 2011.

Additional resources needed: The cost for additional marketing and advertising funds should be based on a detailed marketing plan linked to performance measures.

- B.** Continue to improve and update the comprehensive county-wide events calendar listing events, arts and cultural activities, special activities, downtown events, and other activities that visitors can enjoy. Build a county-wide network to foster enhanced communication with area groups and chambers to increase the exchange of information and enhance the events calendar.

Who will do it: Blue Water Area Convention and Visitors Bureau with assistance from chambers of commerce.

Desired results: Enhance the comprehensive listing of events and activities for visitors.

By when: Ongoing effort.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- C. Continue to promote and develop special events and activities that attract visitors to the region.

Who will do it: The Blue Water Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Tourism Committee. The Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Tourism Committee will work with events groups throughout the region to help support and expand special events and activities that help to grow tourism.

Desired results: Support existing special events and new special event weekends attracting more visitors who will spend more time in the region.

By when: November 2010.

Additional resources needed: Volunteers and increased sponsorships will be utilized.

- D. The Tourism Committee will work with area tourism organizations to support event planning, event promotions, marketing travel and tour operators, securing local business sponsorships, expanding the volunteer base, and promoting additional volunteer training to ensure the friendliest and most knowledgeable volunteers in the Blue Water Region.

Who will do it: Blue Water Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Tourism Committee.

Desired Results: Expand the promotion of special events, increase marketing for upcoming events and activities, provide support and assistance to tourism organizations with limited resources and personnel, identify additional resources to support tourism activities, and so forth.

By when: January 2011.

Additional resources needed: Additional resources to support tourism activities, marketing, and events will be needed. Resources to be determined in detailed business plan.

- E. Utilize social media to increase the promotion of special events and activities throughout the Blue Water Region.

Who will do it: Michele Luzier of the Tourism Committee has volunteered to help led this effort.

Desired results: Expand marketing efforts using social media and get the word out to a broader pool of visitors.

By when: January 2011.

Additional resources needed: None initially.

Priority Action 4: Promote St. Clair County as a major regional sports venue, expanding on existing competitions and the community's sports and athletic facilities.

- A. Expand on youth sports activities in the Blue Water Region to attract team members and their families to St. Clair County. These youth sports activities may include two-man hockey, youth hockey leagues, and others.

Who will do it: Identify volunteers from Steering Committee who will assist in building this effort, and evaluate other municipal and county organizations and departments that could support this strategy.

Desired results: Have 40 teams regularly competing in Port Huron and St. Clair County by 2012, increasing visitors, hotel nights, restaurant revenues, and positive recognition for the region.

By when: 2012.

Additional resources needed: Not known at this time; additional planning required to develop staffing and resource requirements.

- B. Develop a detailed inventory and map of all existing sports and athletic facilities throughout St. Clair County including public, private, schools, educational institutions, church facilities, and others.

Who will do it: St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission working with towns and cities in the county.

Desired results: Create a comprehensive sports facilities database that can be used to assist in planning and developing sports events to attract additional sports activities to the region.

By when: December 2010.

Additional resources needed: Not known at this time; additional review by the Planning Commission is required to clarify resource requirements.

GOAL: Maintain and enhance quality of life and place to support our economic development

In talking with businesses throughout the Blue Water Region, it is apparent that quality of place was an important element of their decision to be a part of this community. This special landscape along the St. Clair and Black Rivers is an extraordinary asset. Sustaining and improving the quality of place is important to the region's economic development. The downtowns in each of the towns and cities in St. Clair County have unique histories and architecture; one-of-a-kind shops and restaurants attract people to the area; and the quality of downtowns plays a critical role in retaining and attracting people and workforce to the region.

Priority Action 1: Create a vibrant and healthy downtown.

- A.** Finalize and approve the Johnson, Johnson & Roy, Inc. City Master Plan for downtown Port Huron, sharing the plans with property owners and community stakeholders to maximize buy-in for this project. Although the Master Plan identifies several areas of downtown that will ultimately be linked together through projects that are part of the Master Plan, the initial projects must concentrate on the first priority area before moving on. The Master Plan must prioritize projects. Develop a schedule for completion of all Master Plan projects. Prepare detailed design plans for the Riverwalk project identified in the Master Plan. Identify funding and financing resources to fund the construction of the Riverwalk project and begin construction in April 2011.

Who will do it: City of Port Huron, St. Clair County, Community Foundation, and the Downtown Sub-Committee.

Desired results: Complete construction of the Riverwalk by April 2012.

By when: Complete detailed Master Plan for downtown Port Huron by October 2010. Promote and market plan to the community and approve the plan by December 2010. Complete detailed construction plans and begin construction of the Riverwalk by April 2011. Complete construction of the Riverwalk by April 2012.

Additional resources needed: Additional resources will be required and will be determined through the Master Plan. Additional funding and financing strategies will be identified to help provide the resources to implement this priority action.

- B.** Redevelop the Jr. Arena space in McMorrin Center to create a convention and meeting facility (see Priority Action Plan 1: Grow Tourism Goal).
- C.** Utilizing the downtown Master Plan, develop downtown design themes and design guidelines to enable private businesses in all areas of downtown to develop improvements on their own that would be consistent with the downtown theme.

Continue to use and expand upon Discover the Blue marketing program, incorporating those themes into the downtown Master Plan.

Who will do it: Downtown Steering Committee.

Desired results: Plan to enable private businesses in downtowns to invest in improvements that will be consistent with quality development for the area.

By when: Ongoing.

Additional resources needed: Privately funded improvements.

- D.** Create a stronger base of entertainment and activities in downtown by expanding farmer's markets, existing festivals, outdoor concerts, and other activities. Hire a professional entertainment promoter to bring quality entertainment events to the three existing downtown performance venues: McMorran Theater (1,100 seats), SC4 Theater (320 seats), and McMorran Arena (3,000+ seats).

Who will do it: Downtown Steering Committee, Port Huron Downtown Organization, other downtowns in the county.

Desired results: Attract residents and visitors to downtown and area businesses.

By when: December 2012.

Additional resources needed: Additional resources will be required; the level of staffing and funding are yet to be determined.

- E.** Develop a detailed inventory and map of publicly owned parcels in downtown Port Huron that could be used to attract private investment to downtown, helping to achieve the Master Plan.

Who will do it: City of Port Huron Planning Department.

Desired result: Inventory of vacant property that could be redeveloped to achieve Master Plan.

By when: December 2010.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

- F.** Review zoning ordinance governing downtown Port Huron to determine if requirements related to retail and related uses may be a deterrent to redevelopment in the downtown area.

Who will do it: City of Port Huron Planning Department.

Desired results: Ensure that zoning ordinance supports current development practices and market opportunities for downtown Port Huron.

By when: March 2011.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

Priority Action 2: Develop an attractive gateway into downtown with wayfinding that will create a positive impression for visitors and residents and enable visitors, business customers, and prospective industries to reach downtown.

- A. Develop a new signage program to guide people and visitors to downtown Port Huron.

Who will do it: City of Port Huron.

Desired results: Make it easier for visitors, business customers, and other guests to find downtown and downtown facilities.

By when: June 2011.

Additional resources needed: Funds will be required to complete detailed design gateway feature and way finding signs. The city has conducted an initial study but final costs for gateway and signage need to be determined.

Priority Action 3: Strengthen arts and cultural activities in downtowns throughout St. Clair County.

- A. Convene the Blue Water Arts Committee to develop a new arts and cultural event that will attract residents and visitors to downtowns in St. Clair County.

Who will do it: Request the Board of the Blue Water Arts Committee to assist with this action and add additional representatives to include other arts and cultural organizations.

Desired results: Continue to develop and support arts and cultural events, particularly in the downtowns in St. Clair County to attract visitors to the region.

By when: June 2012.

Additional resourced needed: To be determined as planning for the event progresses.

GOAL: Maximize our geographic location

St. Clair County is a major trade gateway between the U.S. and Canada. In addition to the annual freight and goods movement valued at over \$40 billion annually, more than 700,000 Canadian visitors come to

St. Clair County across the Blue Water Bridge and spend over \$57 million in the region each year. The Blue Water Region has multimodal transportation services including Class 1 and Class 3 rail service, access to Great Lakes shipping lanes, and a general aviation airport and industrial park facility. St. Clair County enjoys competitive trucking costs and timely deliveries to a number of key markets in the U.S. The Blue Water Bridge Plaza improvements will reduce delays at the bridge, expediting goods movements between the U.S. and Canada. The resulting reductions in delivery times present new opportunities for the region to capitalize on transportation assets and geographic location.

Priority Action 1: Develop programs to encourage additional trade and tourism between Canada and the Blue Water Region to take advantage of the county's strategic location.

- A.** Create a Canada-friendly visitor program focused on increasing the number of Canadians that come to St. Clair County to shop, enjoy events and activities, participate in conventions and meetings, etc.

Who will do it: Blue Water Chamber of Commerce, Blue Water Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Tourism Steering Committee with assistance from other chambers throughout the county.

Desired results: Continue to attract Canadian visitors to the area.

By when: December 2011.

Additional resources needed: To be determined.

Priority Action 2: Form the Blue Water Logistics Council to serve as an alliance in support of private companies in the logistics industry, transportation companies, warehouse operations, supply chain management professionals, freight forwarders, and shippers, including local business and industry and public sector organizations.

- A.** A logistics council can enhance freight and goods movements in the region, facilitate cooperation between companies to reduce transportation costs, consolidate loads, and improve deliveries to key markets. The goal of a regional logistics council is to enhance the movement of freight and goods to benefit business and industry in the area. A logistics council could also assist in identifying infrastructure needs, support continued workforce development, and provide transportation cost data for use by economic development organizations in the region.

Who will do it: The designated economic development organization should sponsor the creation of the Blue Water Logistics Council. The Council could meet quarterly or more frequently as needed to discuss opportunities, issues, and other topics that could benefit area business and industry, transportation companies, and other members.

Desired results: Continuing improvement in transportation and logistics services in the Blue Water Region that will benefit existing and future businesses.

By when: March 2011.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated at this time.

Priority Action 3: *Develop additional capacity at the St. Clair County Airport for businesses, Border Patrol, tourism, U.S. Customs Services, and others users.*

- A. Evaluate opportunities for expanding air services to support target industries, existing businesses, and growth of practical innovation

Who will do it: The designated economic development organization

Desired result: Optimize benefits from airport facility to enhance economic development

By when: December 2011

Additional resources needed: None anticipated at this time

PEOPLE

GOAL: Develop an outstanding workforce aligned with the business development goals of the Blue Water Region and enhance the education systems to closely integrate with desired economic objectives



An educated and skilled workforce is the single most important attribute for the economic future of the Blue Water Region. Meeting the workforce needs of existing and emerging businesses is absolutely critical and there are no incentives or tax abatement that can adequately compensate for a workforce that lacks the education and training needed to help an industry compete. Business and industry must be able to attract and retain employees with the skills required to utilize new technologies in the work place, problem solve, and collaborate with other employees to meet and even exceed customer needs.

The Blue Water Region is fortunate to have St. Clair County Community College and Baker College which offer a broad range of educational and training programs. While many of the businesses interviewed praised the skilled workforce they currently employ, a number of businesses expressed concern about where their future workers would come from and the kinds of skills they would have. The auto industry enabled many people in Michigan to secure well-paying jobs with only a high school education.

Unfortunately, some parents today do not realize that their children will compete on a completely different playing field for very different jobs that will require education and training beyond high school. It is imperative that parents and young people in the Blue Water Region understand the importance of education to their future.

Several new programs have been very successful in helping high school students recognize the value of education. The Know How to Go campaign and Talented Teens has been successful in increasing awareness about the importance of an education and attending college. These programs are a great start, but more is needed to build the region's workforce skill base, to foster a desire for life-long learning, and to attract people with college degrees to the region.

Priority Action 1: Foster a strong alliance between local businesses, educators, community leaders, and economic developers in ongoing efforts to improve and enhance workforce skills, increase the percentage of adults with an associate degree or higher, and attract the jobs that will bring educated young people back to the community.

- A. Create the St. Clair County Business and Education Council to bring together businesses, educators, community leaders, RESA, the Community Foundation, Michigan Works, the Education Task Force, and economic developers who will meet regularly to discuss issues of concern about existing and future workforce training needs and the changing workforce needs of area businesses, develop strategies to enhance and improve the training and educational services available to businesses in the region, and respond to opportunities to enhance and improve the Blue Water Region's workforce. This must be an ongoing collaboration between the business and education communities. This organization can be a valuable asset for future business recruiting efforts and should play a significant role in supporting existing businesses as well.

Who will do it: A subcommittee of the Steering Committee, the Education Task Force, leadership from SC4 and Baker College, major employers, and representatives from major business sectors. The designated economic development organization will provide ongoing support to the committee by facilitating communication between committee members, assisting in developing meeting agendas and related meeting logistics, and ensuring that the Council meets at least quarterly.

Desired results: Maintain a keen understanding of the ongoing training and workforce needs of existing businesses that are met through the outstanding and responsive educational services available in the community.

By when: The Business and Education Council should be formed and hold its first meeting within 60 days after the plan is approved.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated at this time.

- B. Convene a targeted industry skills panel at least annually to review and measure

existing workforce training and technical education programs to ensure they meet the core training needs of industry in the region.

Who will do it: Business and Education Council with support and assistance from the designated economic development organization.

Desired results: St. Clair County is recognized for excellent training and education services that meet the needs of business.

By when: June 2011.

Additional resources needed: To be determined.

- C. Create an Adopt-a-School program that allows area business and industry to build a partnership with a local school. Each Adopt-a-School team will be unique depending upon the industry and the school, but could include opportunities for students to see demonstrations of products and processes used by the company, creation of a co-op student program to give high school students an opportunity to work with a mentor for a week at the company, and other creative ideas. As Adopt-a-School programs have expanded they have offered summer internships, exchanges abroad with foreign owned companies, and other beneficial activities.

Who will do it: The Business and Education Council with support from the designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Create stronger connections between business and area schools and inspire students to realize expanded career opportunities and the importance of an education.

By when: December 2011.

Additional resources needed: This program may begin initially through volunteer efforts; however, some resources for part-time staffing may be needed to maintain an ongoing program.

Priority Action 2: Increase the Region's awareness of the importance of education to each individual's economic future.

- A. Expand the existing Talented Teens or similar programs and Know How to Go to reach out to more students in the region.

Who will do it: The Education Task Force, SONS, Richey Murphy, RESA, and additional professional staff to be determined.

Desired results: Support the expansion of effective existing programs that will lead to an increase in the number of students in St. Clair County who continue their

education. Definitive goals and performance measures will be established prior to expanding these programs.

By when: Develop a program and secure funding within 12 months of approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: Additional funds will be required to expand these programs. A detailed plan and performance measures will be developed to determine the level of resources required.

- B. Develop a program to help young people explore career options through interaction with active business professionals willing to work with young people and their parents.

Who will do it: The Business and Education Council, the Education Task Force, RESA, and school systems throughout the county.

Desired results: To reach out to parents and students in St. Clair County to enable students to fully understand their opportunities and the importance of their education.

By when: Within 24 months of approval of the plan.

Additional resources needed: Use volunteers where practical, and secure grants from Michigan WIRED, Michigan Works, and other funding programs.

- C. Continue to conduct and expand the public awareness efforts to enhance understanding about the importance of education to a child's future.

Who will do it: The Education Task Force, the Business and Education Council, KnowHow2Go, RESA, Talented Teens, designated economic development organization, SC4, Baker College, and area school districts.

Desired results: An increase in the number of St. Clair County students who continue their education after high school.

By when: September 2012.

Additional resources needed: Additional resources will be required; pursue grant funds from Michigan WIRED, Michigan Works, and other sources.

Priority Action 3: Increase the awareness of existing businesses about available workforce training programs, workforce services, and funding to support workforce training needs.

- A. Develop and publicize a county-wide training calendar that provides information on special business classes, entrepreneurship classes, industrial training classes, etc. at

all of the area chambers and the designated economic development organizations, with links to the websites for SC4 and Baker College and other education and training providers.

Who will do it: The designated economic development organization.

Desired results: Coordination and collaboration of training information for users and collaboration of services among providers.

By when: June 2011.

Additional resources needed: None anticipated.

Priority Action 4: Increase the percentage of the population in St. Clair County that has completed an associate degree or higher.

St. Clair County Community College will develop a detailed plan to establish the actions needed to achieve this priority action strategy.

