

Article 4: The Importance of Planning in EDOs

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Engaging in economic development without a plan is like sailing off into the horizon without a map. How do you know if you are on course and when you reach your destination? In keeping with that metaphor, economic development strategic planning is the map used by EDOs to know they are on course (doing the right things) and when they arrive at a specific location (attracted the right company or accomplished a specific goal).

The WCEDP was formed in 2002. By 2004 we had a strategic plan in place and “set sail” on the economic development journey. The planning process involved

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board members and business leaders from the community. We contracted with a professional planning organization to ensure the best possible results.

Since our process included participation from every community in the county, we received a wide variety of feedback to chart the right course.

To ensure that we stay on course the WCEDP has an annual planning meeting where we set specific goals for the year. The goals are aligned with the plan and represent small “ports” along the way. Again, the planning meeting involves our partners and board members ensuring a variety of input.

At the core of an economic development plan are the target industries. These represent broad industry designations that match well with the community and can be supported by the local workforce. As things change, the target industries may also change.

For example, the four primary target industries in our original plan were food processing, warehouse distribution / logistics, oil field services, and electronics. As we all know, the electronics industry has shifted overseas. To adjust our course, we replaced electronics with aviation. We made this adjustment when the Houston Executive Airport was completed. We now have an asset in place that supports a different industry.

Likewise, if there is a shift in the workforce or a community invests in infrastructure that could support a data center, then the target industries would change as the community changes. A good plan points the way, but can also be adjusted. Just like a sea voyage, you need to adjust the course periodically to reach your destination. For the WCEDP, the destination is a strong sustainable economic base to support our future.

Stay tuned for the next part in this series on economic development. If you have any questions or feedback, please feel free to email me at vyokom@wallercounty.org.

About the Waller County Economic Development Partnership (WCEDP): The WCEDP is a Texas non-profit corporation with an IRS 501 (C) 6 tax designation. We are non-political and have a 24-member board, which includes representation from every community in Waller County that has an economic development program. To learn more, visit www.wallercounty.org.

Mission: The WCEDP is organized to operate a charitable service center to foster increased, environmentally balanced business commerce, positive growth, and overall cooperation and coordination for all communities throughout Waller County, Texas.