

Introduction

It takes more than good intentions or love of community to effectively lead and support economic development.

Congratulations! I want to be among those acknowledging your recent election or appointment to the important leadership position you now occupy in your community or region.

As a newly elected public official or recently appointed member to one of your community's prominent economic development organization boards, I know you are excited by the opportunity to improve your region's economy and to "make a difference." It may be something you always wanted to do and now, at this stage in your life, you are positioned to have a positive impact on your community, region, or state.

You have known for a long time that the future of your community depends on the successful efforts of those engaged in economic development. You do not have to be convinced of the importance of effective, pro-active economic development goals, plans, strategies, and actions. You read the daily paper religiously and know the local organizations and players who are working to develop the regional economy. You may regularly read *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, or similar publications and have a good grasp of recent trends and a sense of how the economy works. You understand the business cycle and know some basic facts about unemployment, balance of trade, and the federal deficit. You are also familiar with the local economic development organizations

and know the names and, perhaps, philosophies of major players in national, state, and local economic policy-making.

As you take up your new responsibilities, however, you suddenly find yourself confronted with a broad array of new challenges and problems that are much deeper and more complex than you anticipated. You are in new territory with responsibility for leading or providing guidance and support for your community's economic development programs and initiatives.

When you decided to run for office or accepted appointment to one of your region's economic development councils, you knew there were major challenges and even some serious problems; but you also believed there were solutions and possibly better ways to increase the competitiveness of your region's economy. You were optimistic that with stronger leadership and a higher level of commitment, your city, county, and region could break through the barriers that keep the economy from achieving its full potential for growth and development.

You may have been one of those candidates who ran for public office on a platform of economic revitalization. As a candidate or as a civic leader you talked often and passionately about making your city a model of the new economy. You knew something had to be done to stop the slow economic decline you could see all around. You and your friends were frustrated and, perhaps, embarrassed by the growing number of vacant buildings in what used to be a bustling, vibrant downtown business district. Year after year, you and your fellow citizens watched plant closings followed by nearby businesses closing their doors. You watched young college graduates leave your community for more exciting places where jobs were plentiful and lifestyles more exciting. The local newspaper ran articles and editorials on the "brain drain" that fed a slowly growing sense of pessimism in the community. You became painfully aware of the human side of this loss of young talent from your

city when your own daughter or son announced they were moving to San Jose or Seattle to take a job with an investment company, an information technology firm, or new startup.

Now, as a new public official or private citizen serving as a board member for one of the economic development organizations, the problem is on your doorstep and everyone is looking to you for ideas, proposals and, most of all, leadership to reverse the slow, seemingly relentless, downward spiral of your region's key economic indicators.

In one of those rare moments when you have time to reflect on your new involvement in civic and economic affairs, you wonder, "What have I gotten myself into? What do I really know about economics and economic development? How do I make good on my promises to reverse our economic fortunes? What do I need to know about economic development to help lead our communities' or region's efforts and initiatives?"

It may be little consolation, but you are not alone.

Every year, thousands of community-minded citizens and civic leaders step up to the challenge of improving the economy of their city, county, region, or state. Some of you may have accepted an appointment by the mayor or county administrator or even the governor to a committee or task force to attract jobs, new companies, or investment to your area. Others may have been appointed to the board of directors of the local Chamber of Commerce or an economic development organization charged with growing your economy. Or, you may be one of those who, with the best of intentions and motives, stepped up to the challenges and opportunities that are uniquely found in being an elected official. You may be a township administrator, member of city council, or a county commissioner. Perhaps you are a new mayor of a small- or middle-sized city that you love and you have pledged the next several years of your life to making better. Good for

you. You are now positioned to make a difference. And, more importantly, you can do it!

But as you now know, it takes more than good intentions or a love of your community to effectively lead, or even support, economic development. Campaigning on a platform of economic renewal is much different than putting in place well reasoned programs and initiatives that will actually renew the local or regional economy. Those websites and success stories that you shared with your friends — perhaps those same friends who encouraged you to run for public office or to get involved — now seem little more than teasers and anecdotes. Now *you* have to create a vision of a vibrant, competitive city or region which others find exciting and realistic. *You* have to bring together other public officials, CEOs of major companies, presidents of local universities, supporters of civic organizations, and community leaders to create a strategic plan with clear goals and agreed-on priorities. And, perhaps most importantly, *you* need to have an understanding of the basic concepts, principles, and elements of successful economic development.

Providing you with the tools you will need for leading and effectively guiding successful economic development in your community, region, or state is the major objective of this book.

You do not have a lot of time, so let us get started.

This easy-to-read book is designed to give you, a busy public servant or civic leader, the basics that will enable you to better understand the concepts and best practices of economic development; lead discussions about economic development policies and plans; contribute to the identification and selection of economic development professionals; and empower you to provide effective leadership confident that you are familiar with major issues, terminology, and processes related to local and regional economic development.

It was not intended for this to be the “last word” in economic development; rather it was hoped it will serve as an introduction to a field that is ripe with opportunities for those willing to take a disciplined, long-term, knowledge-based approach to growing their local economies. Lee Fisher suggested calling it a “toolkit” for public officials and civic leaders.

Economic development is not one of those endeavors where you can succeed by relying solely on your political instincts or gut feelings as many new leaders have learned. And, “shooting from the hip” is not a strategy but a surefire way to show how little you really know about growing your local and regional economy.

There is a knowledge base and a body of literature that provide a foundation for effective economic development planning, programs, and strategies. There are well conceived processes that will, if understood and adopted, increase the performance of your economic development departments and organizations. With this knowledge and understanding, you are better prepared to contribute to and help oversee economic development in your city, county, or region.

My goal is to give you the rudimentary yet meaningful tools you need to begin contributing to the economic growth and revitalization of your community. My hope is that you find this book to be focused on and reflective of the most important things you need to know to help guide economic development organizations in your locale or jurisdiction.

These are exciting times and the dynamics of our global economies are among the most interesting, challenging, and important issues of our day. It is my hope that this overview of economic development will whet your appetite for more information and knowledge about the forces of economic change and competitiveness. If this book helps you prepare for leading or supporting economic development in your city, region, or state it will have achieved its objective.