

Kenosha First

An Economic Development Strategy For Kenosha County: The Next Phase

2009

Purpose and Scope

The Kenosha Area Business Alliance (KABA) engaged TIP Strategies, Inc., an Austin-based economic development consulting firm, to assist in developing an economic development plan for Kenosha County. The following recommendations are the result of a seven-month process incorporating input and ideas from key stakeholders throughout the county. The purpose of the plan is to provide KABA and Kenosha County with an economic vision that is mindful of current economic conditions while positioning the county for the next wave of growth. The plan identifies projects and initiatives and presents guidelines for implementation.

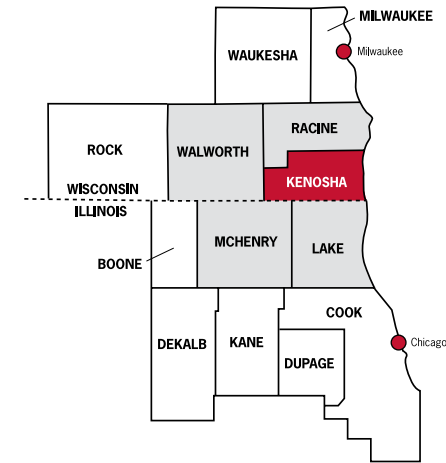


Primary Assets

- Strategic location on Lake Michigan and I-94 within the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor
- Strong population growth
- Access to high-quality postsecondary education institutions
- Strong inventory of large, shovel-ready industrial sites
- Good water and utility infrastructure
- Competitive cost of living and doing business
- Experienced professional economic development organization
- Effectively managed revolving loan funds

A Vision for Kenosha County

Kenosha County is the premier destination for new investment and talent in the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor.



Key Challenges

- Kenosha County's existing business base cannot avoid being affected by the current global recession. KABA must assist its existing businesses in weathering the downturn. With fewer expansions and new investment opportunities, KABA will have to be more creative and strategic in its approach.
- Kenosha County must elevate the education and skill sets of its talent base to match future jobs. The era when a manufacturing job allowed those with limited education to live comfortably is over. It is essential that residents - young and old - use the area's first-rate higher education assets.
- Kenosha will face growing competition in the region for talented workers and knowledge-based jobs. Already, a growing number of Kenosha County's highest earning and most skilled workers commute out of the county, especially to jobs in Lake and Cook County, Illinois. Attracting and retaining talent, especially younger professionals, will be key to Kenosha's long-term economic vitality. Offering them high-level jobs is a challenge that must be met.
- Development in the county in recent years has been uneven. As the commercial and residential center of gravity of the county moves westward, there is a danger that downtown Kenosha will no longer be competitive. The expanding gulf in desirable development opportunities is exacerbated by congested traffic and physical bottlenecks along east-west thoroughfares. Promoting faster access between I-94 and the lakefront will be crucial for Kenosha's long-term development.
- While recent economic successes have helped transform Kenosha's image of an aging industrial community, many newcomers to the county report little knowledge of these changes. Misconceptions of the county abound. For many regional commuters, their only image of Kenosha is the commercial and retail development along I-94. They have little or no familiarity with the city and its lakefront amenities.



Priority Recommendations

This plan lays out a number of specific strategies for consideration. Six major steps can move the county forward:

- Build awareness of Kenosha County among employers in and around Chicago and Milwaukee. The county should be top of mind to companies considering facility consolidation or expansion within the region. Existing Kenosha businesses with locations elsewhere should also be aware of the county's competitive advantages. Consolidation of business units in Kenosha is an opportunity not to be missed.
- Align the funding priorities of the KABA-managed revolving loan funds with the goals of the strategic plan. Design loan evaluation criteria that emphasize the development or attraction of innovative businesses in targeted industries. Assign a higher value to infill or redevelopment projects. Consider the quality of the jobs as well as the total number of jobs. Support developments and companies that promote sustainability and green building.
- Bring the business, workforce training, and education communities closer together. Facilitate greater partnerships and communication on issues of employer needs and corresponding training programs.
- Place greater emphasis on entrepreneurship and small business development. Bring a creative approach to start-up funding and link to young professionals organization.
- Address a gap in the county's industrial/commercial real estate inventory of one to five-acre sites. Kenosha offers many sites for companies requiring larger industrial, office, and retail developments, especially near I-94. Purchase options for small or growing businesses are more limited. KABA and its partners should explore options for establishing a new infill business park ideally suited for small developments.
- Elevate the image of Kenosha County internally and regionally. To raise its image, KABA and its partners cannot rely only on regional organizations to market Kenosha. The county must take a more active role in defining itself internally and to the region. This involves a greater utilization of non-traditional outreach and marketing tools, such as Web-based social networks.

The Plan

Goal One

Support and expand the existing base through business retention and consolidation strategies.

Strategies

- Support the retention and expansion of existing businesses.
- Develop a local “rapid response” strategy and team for dealing with potential lay-offs or plant closures.
- Prepare creative solutions for retaining dislocated workers and professionals within the county.
- Pursue new investment by targeting companies in the region that are consolidating facilities and operations.

Goal Two

Position Kenosha County for long-term economic growth and vitality.

Strategies

- Align the funding priorities of the KABA-managed community revolving loan funds with the strategic plan.
- Increase the availability of commercial and industrial land suited for small companies.
- Pursue a targeted industry recruitment strategy.
- Support innovation among existing businesses.
- Promote entrepreneurship and small business development.

Recommended Industry Targets

- Professional services
- Clean tech
- Transportation & Logistics
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Biomedical and Life Sciences
- Food Processing

Goal Three

Attract, retain, and engage talent.

Strategies

- Bring the business, workforce training, and education communities closer together.
- Engage educators more directly in economic development.
- Promote greater utilization of existing workforce training assets.
- Engage young professionals and new residents.
- Reach out to former residents and recent graduates.

Goal Five

Build a distinct image and brand for Kenosha County.

Strategies

- Commit additional resources to local marketing efforts.
- Initiate a local positive image campaign.
- Enhance the image of Kenosha County within the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor.
- Engage in cooperative marketing with area post-secondary institutions.

Goal Four

Ensure all parts of the county are economically, digitally, and physically connected.

Strategies

- Actively promote downtown development and redevelopment.
- Support road improvements to east-west thoroughfares between I-94 and the lakefront.
- Work with county and municipal officials to pass and implement the Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan for Kenosha County.
- Improve public transportation to business, industrial, and education sites.
- Actively support KRM expansion.
- Support airport expansion for commercial aviation.
- Support and publicize ongoing efforts to provide broadband Internet access to county schools and campuses.



KABA and its partners have put a great deal of effort into this plan. However, it is just the beginning. The next step is to align the necessary resources in support of these strategies and to begin implementation. This will require a team effort to place “Kenosha First.”

The Kenosha Area Business Alliance (KABA) is Kenosha County's economic development organization and employers association. KABA is a public-private partnership that drives economic development throughout Kenosha County and supports and provides services to its members and the community to ensure quality growth, a robust economy, and a positive business climate for the Kenosha area.

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