

DeKalb County Economic Development Summit

November 17, 2015

DeKalb Farm Bureau, DeKalb, Illinois

On November 17, 2015, the process of creating a vision for DeKalb County's economic development future was launched as two interactive 90-minute "summits" were held at the DeKalb County Farm Bureau. Offered in the morning and evening on that day, each summit included an opening by County Board Chair Mark Pietrowski, Jr., followed by presentations by NIU Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) Assistant Director Brian Richard on "The State of DeKalb County's Economy," and by DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Paul Borek on efforts and assets from the DCEDC's perspective. Next, small tabletop discussions were facilitated by CGS staff to obtain participants' ideas for the county's economic development future. An estimated 100 people participated in these two summits.

The summits were offered at no cost and open to anyone who lives, works, attends school, or owns property in any community in DeKalb County. This visioning process is being co-sponsored by DeKalb County Government, the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation, the DeKalb County Community Foundation, Northern Illinois University, and the DeKalb County Farm Bureau. Discussion questions focused on understanding the assets in the county and how they could be leveraged by individual communities as well as at the county level.

Overall Themes Identified from the Economic Development Summits

- ❖ DeKalb County is a great place to live, work, and play **because of its people, competitive location, and business climate**. However, it **lacks a consistent identity** and cohesive marketing effort. To attract and retain businesses, residents, students, and tourists in the county, a dynamic, consistent message is needed that all can believe in and promote.
- ❖ More good-paying **job opportunities** are needed throughout DeKalb County to encourage younger residents and families to stay in the area.



- ❖ DeKalb County can **build on current assets** and encourage a “Grow Your Own” environment anchored by three pillars: student retention, strategically important industries such as manufacturing and agriculture, and a collaborative business environment.
- ❖ **NIU is an asset** to the County and many community outreach efforts are under way. However, a greater effort should be made to reach smaller, more rural communities that have fewer resources but offer many opportunities to students and businesses.
- ❖ Thriving, resilient communities are **built on innovation and entrepreneurship** in all sectors. The County and its partners need to enhance or create a built environment that fosters entrepreneurship at all ages and across all industries.

Assets and Leveraging Opportunities

Two questions were discussed by the small groups: What are the top three important economic development assets in DeKalb County, and how can local communities leverage these assets?

Below is the list of the top *economic development* assets in the County.

Economic Development Asset

- People
- ALL communities in DeKalb County have assets and economic opportunity potential
- Broadband and I-Fiber
- NIU, Kishwaukee College, K-12 education
- Entrepreneurship potential
- Competitive location
- Availability of land
- Agricultural heritage – 80% of our economy
- DeKalb County has a strong base of existing small, medium, and large businesses.
- Collaborative business climate and “Get it Done Attitude” including public, private, and non-profit sectors.
- Regional Health Care Hub
- DeKalb County is a great place to live

