

# IEDC Inspiring Innovation Summit

## Economic Development Summary Notes

On October 19-20, 2021, more than 150 regional citizens gathered to discuss the future of Itasca County. This is a summary of the economic development breakout discussions on each day. About 15 attendees participated in each session, with about half identifying as economic developers and the remainder a mix of public sector staff, private businesspeople, and elected officials.

### Economic Development Challenges

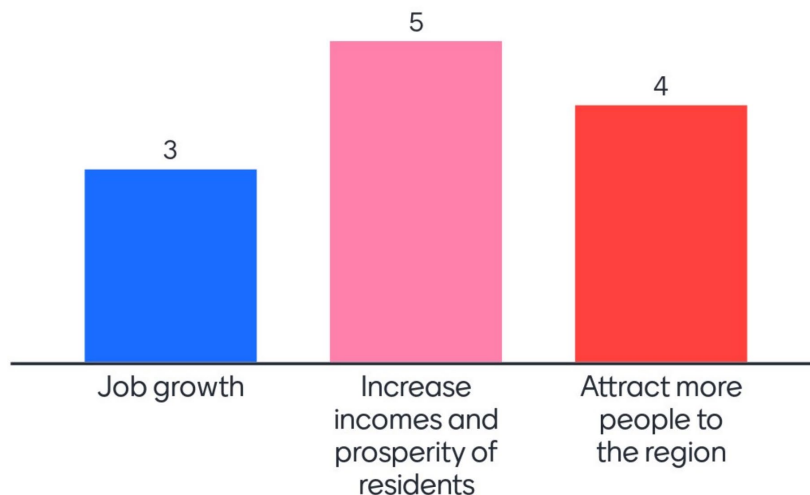
The group identified a series of economic development challenges in the region:

- Engaging people into the workforce, open jobs, skills training
- Permitting, regulation / environmental balance
- Loss of young people with others returning to the region
- Emergence of tele-work, lack of broadband data access
- Housing availability and child care access
- Small communities lack the personnel capacity to capture emerging opportunities

### Economic Development Goal

The group was split on the true goal of economic development work in the region. Attracting more people is becoming a more important priority, yet for many a primary focus on prosperity is most important, and others value job growth.

## What is our region's most important economic goal?

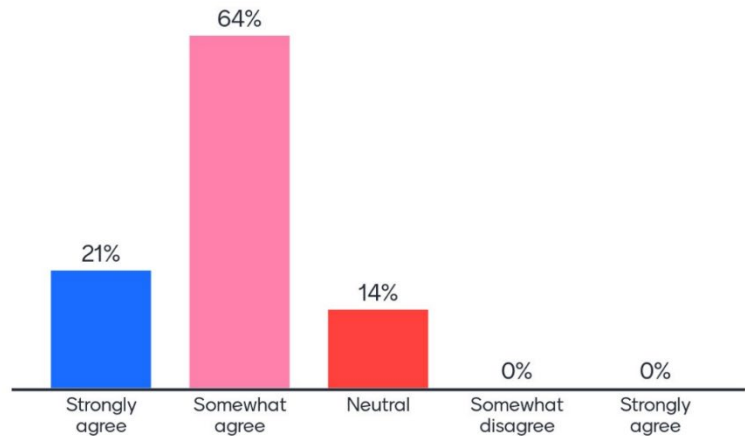


## Business Development Issues

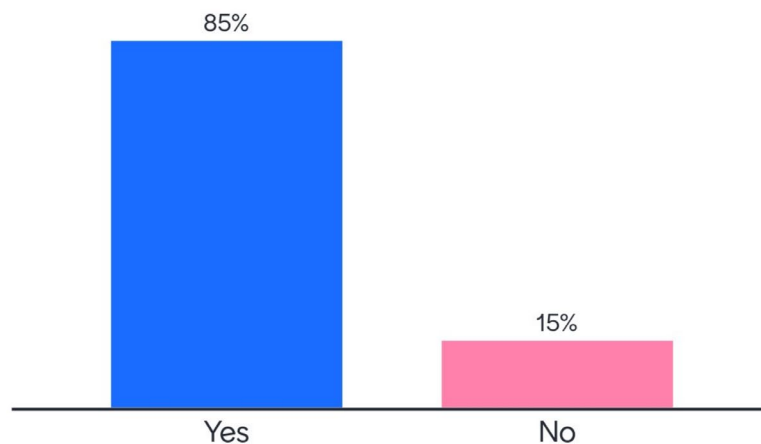
Participants on day one agreed that the region does a good job of economic development work, yet the ensuing discussion identified several issues and focus areas for improvement:

- Strong lead generation right now
- Lack of sites and buildings for quick development
- Need to clarify process in business development
- Dilution of capacity among some organizations and the need to clarify roles among business development partners
- Technology adoption and integration with existing target industries and the development of knowledge-based services firms in the region

**In Itasca County, we do a good job of economic development work.**



**Do you feel that trust among partners is high in Itasca County?**



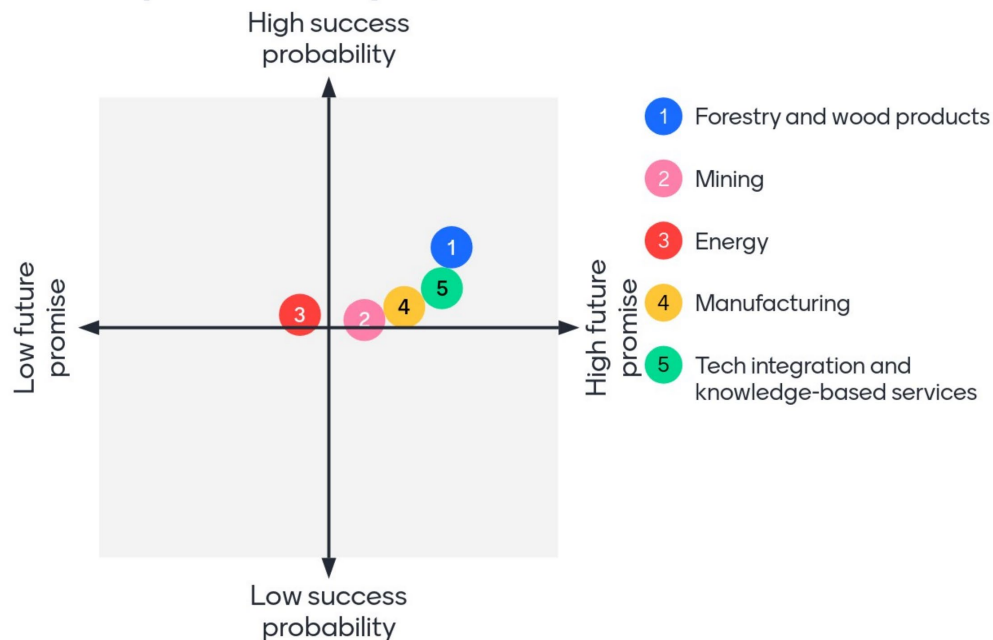
The need to clarify economic development roles and processes is important, but because several key players were not present – most particularly the City of Grand Rapids, MN DEED, and IRRR – the group decided to table discussions of these issues for a later time.

## Industry Opportunity Prioritization

Participants engaged in an opportunity prioritization exercise producing the following results:

1. Forestry and wood products
2. Tech integration and knowledge-based services
3. Manufacturing
4. Mining
5. Energy

**Rate these target sectors by its potential to impact our future and our probability of success.**



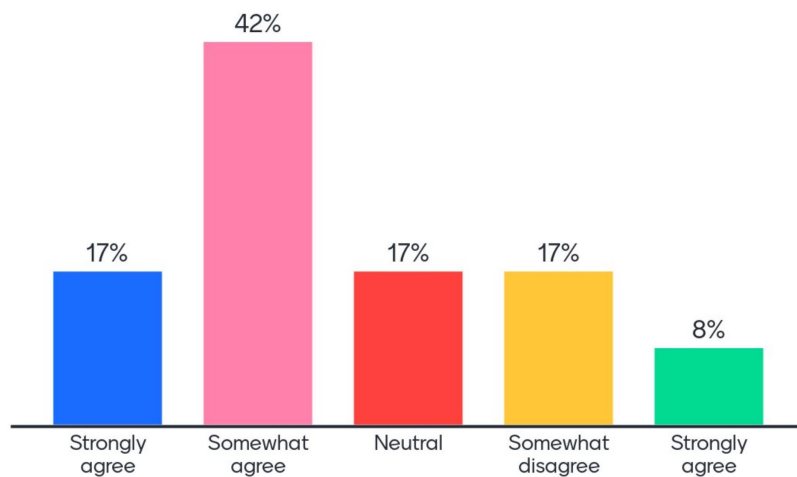
## Future Vision and Critical Broad Takeaways

Several key takeaways emerged from the group discussion on day 1:

- We know there are economic storm clouds ahead – change is coming, but this change also opens doors for opportunity.
- Huber Engineered Woods investment is great for the region, but it's not enough. Our work is not done.
- Industrial investment is up. There are opportunities to attract these projects. We need to act urgently.
- Part of our challenge is maximizing our existing industries, but also adapting them at the same time.

What is the region's economic vision? As starting point, economic vision statement for the region should revolve around the concept of reinvention, adaptation, and regeneration of the economic systems in our region.

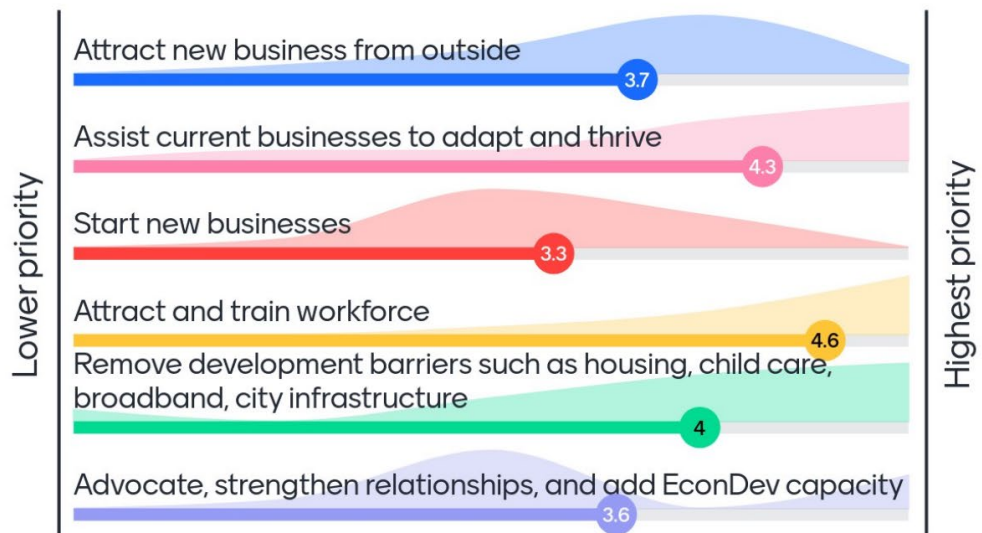
In Itasca County, we have the overall economic vision we need to be successful.



### Economic Development Tactics

Participants identified workforce, incumbent business assistance, and community development as key priorities for economic development focus.

Rate the priority level for each type of economic development work.



### Key Work Areas

Participants identified nine key issues and areas of work for the future, with a focus on prioritizing topics where cooperation amongst partners will drive progress. A prioritization exercise rating the potential for each issue to impact the region along with the potential effectiveness of execution tackling an issue tighter as partners.

# Impact vs Effectiveness



## Key Work Topics Rough Priority Order:

1. Develop new sites and buildings for commercial and industrial projects
2. Worker training
3. Integrate technology into existing industry strengths and target knowledge-based services
4. Clarify roles and processes for business development
5. Attract people to the region and improve quality of life
6. Improve broadband access
7. Capitalize on manufacturing industry reshoring and supply chain integration opportunities
8. Create cluster support initiatives and research to identify strengths and opportunities
9. Amplify the collective regional voice in St Paul and Washington
10. Manage the energy industry transition

## Work Area Action Items

Summit participants fleshed out the way forward for several work area topics, focusing on what work the group could do together. Discussions were framed by four questions:

- What should we do right now?
- Who should be at the table?
- Who leads?
- What is the IEDC role?

Results reported here are only a starting point for work based upon limited discussions in the short amount of time available at the summit.

## Manage the energy industry transition

### Work to do now

1. Begin regional collaborative meetings right now.
  - a. Solidify messaging, fight the “Huber is enough” narrative
  - b. Develop materials and content
  - c. Identify messaging to MN legislator and collective ask
2. Sort out potential federal funding for economic adjustment assistance
3. Identify and quantify long-term impacts of the loss of local power generation in the region
4. Create a backward timeline plan for action (IEDC). This could include spec building development and grant funding.

### Who should be at the table

- State task force

### Who should lead

- IRRR, with local leads in respective regions
  - IEDC / County
  - Taconite Harbor
  - Laskin

### IEDC Role

- Lead local efforts

## Develop Spec Sites and Buildings

### Work to do now

1. Assess and define the need across Itasca County
  - a. Facility size and type
  - b. Specialized facility needs
  - c. Infrastructure access
2. Create a communication mechanism with the local private sector real estate industry. This could be a periodic roundtable.
3. Update and maintain Northland Connection website, assess what more could be listed
4. Develop a spec building tool kit resource for local municipalities

### Who should be at the table

- Real estate industry
- Developers

### Who should lead

- IEDC / APEX
- 

## Integrate Technology and Knowledge-based services into local economy

### Work to do now

1. Continue work on incubator / accelerator and Forge

2. ID buildings that could be candidates for rehab to house this activity
  - a. Including spaces outside county
  - b. Consider private attraction and/or facelift incentive program
3. Knit the network of entrepreneurs
  - a. Events
  - b. Marketing, social media, in-person meetings
  - c. How to expand to Twin Cities, Rochester?
  - d. Identify recruiting targets
  - e. Leverage manufacturing innovation group

**Who should be involved**

- ICC Engineering students
- College and high schools
- JET / Career Pathways
- Local manufacturers

**Who should lead / IEDC role**

- This work area is a significant priority yet existing organizations may lack the capacity to take efforts to the next level

[Broadband Access](#)

**Who should lead / IEDC role**

- Economic development organizations should not lead on this issue at this time and fill a role of information broker