

The building blocks of economic development

By AMM Staff

On February 28, 2006 at the annual Municipal Officials Seminar & Trade Show, the AMM offered a session aimed at showing delegates that economic development (ED) isn't just a buzzword – it's a valuable process for communities to identify strengths and capitalize on opportunities. What a session it was! Six speakers presented a comprehensive overview of ED – what it is, how it can be implemented, and what it can do for your community.

Community Economic Development – The Basics

Tammy Hudyma of the Economic Developers Association of Manitoba began the session with the appropriately titled presentation, 'Community Economic Development Basics.' Tammy began and finished her presentation with the mantra that "*community economic development is development of the community, by the community, and for the community.*" In between, she provided a succinct overview of just what economic development is (see sidebar).

More importantly, Tammy explained just what community economic development does *for* a community – it brings community members together out of a common

concern for the community. This concern could rise from:

- youth out-migration
- lack of jobs
- business closures
- decaying infrastructure
- decline in community services

...not to mention a response to external pressures to develop the community. Community economic development addresses these concerns by providing jobs, creating wealth, increasing the tax base, etc. – in short, by providing long-term prosperity in an ever-changing economy.

Tammy stressed that CED is a long-term development and **not** a silver bullet. There are no overnight successes, as it is a process that requires community involvement,

participation and direction. However, the rewards (more people, better paying jobs, more options, more activities in your communities, more volunteers, more kids in school, broadened tax base, and a shared vision) are worth it!

Definition of Community Economic Development (CED)

CED aims to improve the long-term economic viability of communities. It involves managing economic change to effectively meet a community or area's needs and objectives through emphasis on self-help, participation, partnerships and control. It is based on a 'bottom's up' philosophy that relies on using the community's own resources – people, capital, management, creativity and pride—to improve economic well-being.



The Building Blocks of Economic Development Presenters: (L-R) Back – Dean Yaremchuk, City of Portage la Prairie; Jean Beaumont, AMBM; Joy Dornian, Souris Glenwood CDC; Larry Tétrault, RM of La Broquerie; Front – Mona Cornock, MAFRI; Christine Landry, CFPM; and Tammy Hudyma, EDAM.

The City of Portage la Prairie's recipe for ED success

Dean Yaremchuk, Economic Development Director for the City of Portage la Prairie, was the first of two community champions presenting during the session. Dean provided an overview of Portage and the surrounding area, gave a history of how the City's economic development department evolved into what it is today, and outlined some of the region's many economic development accomplishments. These include being the first community to eliminate business tax in 1992; establishing the first tax sharing agreement in the Province with the RM of Portage la Prairie; successfully attracting large industries to the area largely due to state of the art water and waste water plants; and successfully creating a positive climate for local businesses to grow.

The City of Portage la Prairie's list of 'what we do and why we think it works' could certainly serve as a blueprint for any community striving to achieve economic development milestones. It includes the following tips:

- Recognize economic development does not work in a vacuum.
- Recognize the need to communicate and work closely with neighbours to remain competitive.
- Do not rely on past successes – develop an aggressive approach.
- Ensure you have accurate and appropriate information that business and industry needs to make informed decisions.
- Use a strategic planning process to annually identify Council priorities and allocate resources in those defined areas.
- Follow-up on every lead consistently and ensure confidentiality without exception.
- Approach economic development as a team and draw in the key players as the situation dictates.
- Keep community messaging positive, accurate and consistent.
- And, finally - continually move forward.

Not included in the above list, but certainly understood throughout Dean's presentation, is the importance of *believing* in your community. Simply stated, there is power in a positive attitude. "There are a handful of communities in the province that can go

after some of these larger economic development opportunities," Dean explained, "and we certainly see ourselves as a member of that group."

Community Futures Partners of Manitoba

The next presenter was **Christine Landry** of Community Futures Partners of Manitoba (CFPM). CFPM is an association representing 16 Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) established throughout rural and northern Manitoba.

Christine explained that CFDCs are arms length organizations that rely on locally appointed boards. They have two main functions: administering loan pools and supporting economic development.

Economic development initiatives include:

- acting as a resource to support local vision of where the communities want to go
- planning and strategizing economic development
- helping to identify opportunities
- promoting the region/community

Christine said that there are thousands of successful projects in existence including tourism, recycling programs, seniors facilities, and day cares.

For more information on Community Futures Partners of Manitoba, visit www.cfpmb.ca or see page 30.

Community Economic Development 101

Joy Dornian, Economic Development Officer with the Souris Glenwood Community Development Corporation, captured the audience with her "five minute course in what took her umpteen years to learn!" Her aptly titled presentation, 'Community Economic Development 101 – the Condensed Version' provided a welcome snapshot to what is sometimes an anything *but* straightforward topic.

Joy explained that community economic development is a long-term investment and, like all good investments, the rate of return is greater with an investment strategy and resources dedicated to implementing that strategy. The benefit, she explained, is in the future dividends.

According to Joy, community economic development requires – first and foremost

- a *plan*. Time, energy and resources are also key requirements. It is important that we research projects that fit our values, our resources, and our ability to make them happen. It is also important that our goals are both achievable and realistic.

Joy stressed that working collectively, we have more resources, more ideas and more ways to make things happen. "Why do we restrict ourselves to imaginary or arbitrary boundaries?" she asked. "Working collectively, we have so much more to offer."

Bilingual communities beat the odds

"Ask high school students what they look for in a community," said **Jean Beaumont**, "They consistently answer – jobs and places to live." The Executive Director of the Association of Bilingual Municipalities of Manitoba (Association des municipalités Bilingues du Manitoba) obviously took this feedback to heart. With youth migration out of communities a recurring problem in rural Manitoba, bilingual communities seem to have beaten the odds: 12 out of 15 of these communities have either grown or maintained their population over the past 10 years.

To what did Jean attribute these successes? Like the other presenters, he stressed the importance of communities working together, and of realizing that it takes a long time – but if there is vision within the community, it will happen. He also noted that it is very important to establish community economic development initiatives with paid staff to avoid volunteer burnout. "Councils have an incredibly important role," Jean said. "They must see community economic development as an investment."

For a more in-depth look at Manitoba's Bilingual Municipalities' creative approach to economic development, see page 50.

MAFRI & Community Economic Development

Mona Cornock, Director of Economic and Rural Development Branch, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI), explained the core priority of GO Centres in terms of CED. She also outlined what community economic development is about, including:

“ Working collectively, we have so much more to offer. ”
 – Joy Dornian, Souris Glenwood Community Development Corporation

- identifying community needs and opportunities
- building community capacity - local skills and expertise
- making decisions locally
- investing locally
- employing local residents over the long term
- producing and using local goods and services
- building individual and community pride, self-reliance and leadership

Mona also provided an overview of the Creating Opportunities consultation process, and described the new positions (related to economic development) in GO Centres located in 11 areas throughout Manitoba.

While MAFRI's core priority is rural in nature, it definitely transcends any rural/urban boundaries. As did virtually every other session presenter, Mona stressed that economic development is a long-term process. She also noted that communities must be flexible - plans must evolve as our communities change and grow.

For more information about MAFRI, and for success stories from Go Centres across the province, see page 42.

“The best way to predict the future is to create it”

It is unlikely that anyone fortunate enough to be in the audience when the final session presenter, **Larry Tétrault**, took to the stage will forget hearing about the RM of La Broquerie. Larry's infectious enthusiasm illustrated what a true community champion needs to be – strong in spirit, unwaveringly loyal to community – and with a healthy sense of humour thrown in for good measure.

La Broquerie's successes are numerous. One of the fastest growing communities in the past five years in Manitoba, it has grown in population from 2,900 to 3,800 since 2001. During the same time period there have been 272 new housing starts. “This kind of growth is not an accident” stressed Larry. “It took time, effort, dedication and money.”

Larry's message was definitely in line with those of the other presenters. He encouraged communities to have a development plan and a vision of what they want their community to be. He stressed the need to keep youth in the community by providing them with options and services, and noted that economic development should be regional, national and international.

Above all, Larry stressed the importance of leadership, challenging the audience with these words: “As leaders you are elected, and have the responsibility, to be visionaries and lead your communities to success.” Not words for the weak, and Larry readily admitted La Broquerie's success has not always followed a smooth path. Admitting the Municipality has experienced some growing pains, the lively Economic Development Officer also hinted at the challenges La Broquerie's journey presented on a more

personal level. “As Woodrow Wilson said, ‘If you want to make enemies, try to change something.’” And in Larry's own words? “But it's worth it!”

The AMM thanks all of the presenters who took the time to share their expertise with our MOS delegates. Powerpoint presentations from this session are available on the AMM website at www.amm.mb.ca.

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