



Guest Editorial: First Stop Shop

In this day and age, Scott County needs to develop a more coordinated, rapid-response system to handle new economic development leads. And if we're going to remain competitive in the regional marketplace (not to mention meet our job creation goals), we also need to answer existing business inquiries. These were key findings from discussions with local business leaders, who were asked to evaluate the County's prospects for long-term employment growth. Rather than stretching the budgets and staff resources in each of the cities, townships, and county to provide these services, local business owners recommended a central clearinghouse of up-to-date information on the County's available land, and buildings -- and a single point of first contact to assist businesses with their needs.

In response to this call to step up our game when it comes to economic development, the Scott County Association for Leadership and Efficiency (SCALE) is in the process of establishing the County's first-ever First Stop Shop. The First Stop Shop will provide site selection services; comprehensive data collection; customer service education and training; and assist cities, townships, and county in their economic development goals.

The First Stop Shop is a key component of one of SCALE's primary goals: the development of a unified plan to create enough jobs in Scott County by 2030 to accommodate 50 percent of our local labor force. While that may not sound impressive at first glance, let's take a look at where we are today: The 2010 Census indicated that we currently have a county labor force of 70,000. Today, only 24 percent of our labor force is employed in Scott County -- a whopping 44 percent of our labor force commutes across the Minnesota River to job centers in Hennepin County. These long commutes invariably result in more congestion on the County's river crossings, and often impact the quality of life for many of our residents. In 2010, there were 43,000 job opportunities in Scott County; to achieve our labor force employment goal, another 37,000 jobs need to be created by 2030.

A number of factors are critical to attracting job growth in Scott County. First, we can't forget about our current businesses. Statistics show that the greatest percentage of job growth is internal. In other words, those businesses already here will grow and expand. Maintaining quality services and infrastructure at affordable levels are just a few of the factors valued by business owners. Second, we must have adequate land opportunities to serve both those looking to expand and new business looking to locate in Scott County. While you may think we have all kinds of land in Scott County, the fact is that we have only eight sites in all of Scott County greater than 10 acres that can be classified as "shovel ready." Third, we need quality transportation systems that will allow businesses to receive raw materials, ship finished products, and have good access for employees and customers. Fourth, we need to develop a culture that promotes business expansion and development.

In each city and township, there are limited financial resources to develop their own economic development strategy to promote job growth and retention. While local autonomy is always desirable to address the uniqueness of each community and its vision, all of the SCALE partners understand the benefit of attracting new business development on both a local and regional level.

As such, the First Stop Shop will direct business prospects to those communities that can best accommodate their needs. Serving in a liaison capacity, the First Stop Shop will also assist both the community and the business prospect in completing the development project. In addition, the First Stop Shop will serve as a key resource in providing direction and advice to local elected officials on how they can enhance their ability to retain and attract business development.

The First Stop Shop is not meant to be just another layer of bureaucracy involved in local economic development activities. To the contrary, it is intended to unify and streamline our local governments' business development services to better position ourselves in the regional and global marketplace. It also reflects the overarching mission of SCALE of forging new and innovative ways to work together to provide superior services to our residents and businesses.

Credit: Brad Davis, Scott County Planning Manager, and Barry Stock, Savage City Administrator, on behalf of the SCALE Transportation and Economic Development Committee