



## AN UPDATE ON ALL THINGS GROW DECATUR | JANUARY 2018

It has been quite some time since there have been any organized *Grow Decatur* meetings or activity. Our apologies are extended to those who were left hanging in their efforts related to the advancement and integration of the Tier 1 Imperatives.

The *Grow Decatur* Leadership Team met several weeks ago to discuss where we are in our *Grow Decatur* activities and where we think we are from a community perspective. We wanted to provide all of you with a more detailed update and share with you our perspective on what we see *Grow Decatur* doing over the next several months.

### GROW DECATUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Leadership Team currently consists of: Nicole Bateman, Ashley Grayned, Ellen Hearn, Bruce Nims, Beth Nolan and Larry Altenbaumer. Over the past several months (for various reasons), the availability of each of these individuals to consistently provide the level of coordinated effort required to support and sustain *Grow Decatur* activities became more limited. However, the Leadership Team's assessment is that in most areas identified as critical imperatives, other organizations are actively engaged in developing strategies and action plans to address these important community issues and opportunities. *Grow Decatur* has always emphasized that the most appropriate model for community success is to have the organizations in our community, which have a vested interest and a defined responsibility in key areas, to be the ones to develop strategies and lead the efforts in those key areas. Since the launch of *Grow Decatur* in February 2012, we have never been as encouraged as we are now in the scope of these efforts and the leadership provided.

We believe the model used by *Grow Decatur* of collaborative, collective community impact is one of the most effective in achieving broad-based community engagement and support and in developing the best overall strategies and actions plans for some of the most important issues and opportunities for the community. We continue to see specific examples of this in the progress that is being achieved and reported in this *Grow Decatur* update.

These specific examples include:

- **The Decatur Park District** - the development of its comprehensive plan for the redevelopment of the Nelson Park area, as detailed in the Lake Shore Landing Project.
- **The Decatur School District** - the development of its preliminary strategic plan and its approach in the development of action plans to support the five strategies identified in the initial planning process.

- **The City of Decatur** – the development of specific strategies and plans as part of a comprehensive focus on the revitalization of our city. Preliminarily, this process has seen the involvement of about 150 community participants and has identified nine areas for further development.

## IMPERATIVE REVIEW

The diagram below depicts the critical imperatives that were identified through a broad-based process of community forums conducted during the latter half of 2015. While certain identified imperatives were tabled or deemed to be issues to be addressed internally within *Grow Decatur*, twelve imperatives were formally included as strategically critical to the community’s future success. A review of each of these twelve follows:

<b>THE 12 IMPERATIVES OF <i>GROW DECATUR</i></b>			
<b>LAUNCHED</b>	INLAND PORT W	WATER SUPPLY W	COMMUNITY MARKETING & BRANDING W D L
<b>TIER 1 - ACTIVE</b>	EDUCATION D	PROSPER & SUCCEED D	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT D
<b>TIER 2 - ACTIVE</b>	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT W	VIBRANT & ATTRACTIVE L	20 TO 40 L
<b>TIER 3 - SUPPORT</b>	HOUSING IN THE CITY L	GROW THE MIDDLE W	LAKEFRONT DEVELOPMENT L
<b>TABLED</b>	RELATIONSHIPS		RECRUITING L
<b>INTERNAL</b>	ENGAGEMENT		FUNDING
<b>WORK</b> More quality jobs for people who live here.		<b>DEVELOP</b> More people who live here are capable of working here.	<b>LIVE</b> More people who work here, live here.

## LAUNCHED IMPERATIVES – INLAND PORT, WATER SUPPLY, COMMUNITY MARKETING AND BRANDING

In the 2015 imperative update process, three previously identified imperatives still surfaced as being critical to the community’s success. However, there was an assessment that meaningful progress had been achieved in each of these areas and that specific initiatives were in place with defined leadership and accountability, supported by a comprehensive multi-year plan, with sufficient resources allocated to provide sustained support for these three ‘launched’ critical imperatives.

## INLAND PORT

Economic Development Corporation of Decatur – Macon County houses the Midwest Inland Port, LLC. This is a high-priority initiative with a well-defined multi-year plan, dedicated leadership and sufficient resources to advance this effort. This initiative is actively underway. Utilization of the intermodal ramp has grown significantly over the past year – with customers from Indiana and Iowa, in addition to more than a dozen from throughout Illinois now utilizing the ramp on a regular basis.

## WATER SUPPLY

The City of Decatur is nearing the successful completion of an approximate \$100 million investment in dredging Lake Decatur and implementing other measures to increase and sustain the city's water supply.

## COMMUNITY MARKETING AND BRANDING

*Limitless Decatur & Macon County* has been established under the umbrella of the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur – Macon County as the comprehensive community marketing and branding initiative. This is another high-priority established effort with a specific multi-year plan, dedicated leadership and available resources. In addition to great progress being made in improving the perception of Decatur as a place to live, work and play, *Limitless Decatur & Macon County* has also utilized targeted campaigns related to Decatur as a safe place to be and support for the many career opportunities available in Decatur today. Perhaps one of the most significant accomplishments of *Limitless Decatur & Macon County* has been the establishment of its *Limitless Ambassadors*, comprised of many community advocates who work to dispel inaccuracies about our community. A recently developed feature for the *Limitless Ambassadors* is the establishment of the Limitless Ambassador Facebook Group. This Facebook Group was established to help better communicate and connect with other Ambassadors.

### JOIN THE LIMITLESS AMBASSADORS ON FACEBOOK!

1. Under the **LIMITLESS DECATUR** Facebook page, click on the “**GROUPS**” tab.
2. Select the “**LIMITLESS AMBASSADORS**” group.
3. Click on “**JOIN GROUP**” at the top of the page.

## TIER 1 IMPERATIVES – EDUCATION, PROSPER AND SUCCEED, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Coming out of the 2015 update was a set of Tier 1 Imperatives – Education, Prosper and Succeed, and Workforce Development. In reviewing these imperatives, it was determined that a comprehensive community effort should be undertaken to advance each imperative individually, while also recognizing the inter-connectivity between these three imperatives. In early 2017, teams were established to identify specific actions to address these critical imperatives. Unfortunately, the lack of active *Grow Decatur* leadership over the past several months effectively stalled this effort. The good news is that in several areas, other organizations are driving these efforts forward.

### EDUCATION

The *Education* critical imperative deserves attention and support. Decatur Public Schools District 61, under the leadership of Superintendent Dr. Paul Fregeau, and with the full support of the school board, has undertaken a comprehensive strategic planning effort addressing education in its broad context for Decatur Public Schools. Some of the initial work warrants specific attention here – and much of the early

conclusions and the community engagement process to support this effort are aligned precisely with the earlier findings of *Grow Decatur* and the underlying *Grow Decatur* process and values. District 61's draft mission statement reads:

The mission of Decatur Public Schools, the destination district of our community, is to unlock students' unique and limitless potential to achieve their personal aspirations as fully prepared, contributing citizens, in a global society through learning experiences distinguished by:

- Commitment to the whole person resulting in student growth and confidence;
- Relevant, innovative, personalized academic pathways that promote passion and pride;
- A learning environment that fosters curiosity and the thirst for achievement and discovery;
- A culture of diversity, adaptability, and resilience;
- Meaningful and lasting relationships;
- Extraordinary school and community connections.

To fulfill this mission, the strategy effort has identified five specific strategies for which action plans will be developed by individual community-based teams. These five strategies are:

1. We will ensure unique, innovative learning experiences for all students.
2. We will ensure a student-focused environment that expands learning beyond the traditional expectations to engage students.
3. We will establish a support network that will identify and address students' physical, social/emotional, and mental health needs to allow each student to reach his/her potential.
4. We will attract and retain talented and invested staff by ensuring they feel valued and supported.
5. We will create and foster mutually beneficial relationships throughout the community.

With this initiative in place, *Grow Decatur* feels very good about the progress that can be achieved in the *Education* area; we are further encouraged that the scope of the District's strategic objectives and strategies address, in part, the integration with issues associated with *Prosper and Succeed* and *Workforce Development*.

WERE YOU INVOLVED IN THE TIER ONE INITIATIVES?

**THEN VOLUNTEER FOR A DPS61 STRATEGY TEAM!**

CONTACT DPS61 AT 217.362.3000 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

*Grow Decatur* representatives recently met with leadership of the United Way of Decatur/Macon County to obtain an update on the comprehensive effort they are leading to address many of the issues that fell under the *Prosper and Succeed* imperative. A game plan has been developed and work is progressing involving a coordinated effort of the United Way and several other social service organizations. For many communities, regardless of size, this challenge continues to grow in scope and significance. It is critical that programs be identified and implemented that address the true underlying factors that result in far too many people in our community having no pathway to any degree of self-sufficiency and longer-term

sustainable success. Too often, our community's response is focused primarily on improving our ability to address the symptoms (an important need), with little in the way of progress in addressing the root causes of these conditions.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

A developing focus and capability is being advanced within Workforce Investment Solutions to lead, coordinate and facilitate activities supporting existing businesses in the central Illinois area with their workforce development needs and helping attract unemployed and under-employed individuals within the community to targeted workforce development programs. Currently, several other organizations, including Millikin University, Richland Community College, and the Heartland Technical Academy, are working in concert with Workforce Development Solutions to improve the scope and effectiveness of workforce development programs and offerings to help businesses in our community hire qualified employees. While there are many resources available to support these needs, Workforce Investment Solutions recognizes the need to serve as the quarterback in matching employer needs with an available skilled workforce, and tailoring workforce development services in a manner that is tailored to the unique needs of individual companies as well as individual prospective employees. There has been a significant growth in job opportunities in the Decatur area over the last year, resulting in a relatively low unemployment rate. This tighter labor market is likely to continue, further emphasizing the value and the opportunity for workforce development programs in helping fill available good quality jobs.

Based on this review, *Grow Decatur* feels that there is defined ownership and good plans in place or being developed to address each of the three Tier 1 Imperatives. Each is currently in a developmental phase with the hopes that specific action plans with defined metrics and targeted timelines will be finalized by the end of the first quarter of 2018. *Grow Decatur* will schedule a wrap-up meeting soon with the team leaders and members who were part of the Tier 1 Imperative effort earlier this year.

## **TIER 2 IMPERATIVES – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (THE NEXT BIG IDEA), VIBRANT AND ATTRACTIVE, 20-40**

For the Tier 2 Imperatives, the path forward is not as well-defined as with the Tier 1 Imperatives, yet many good developments are apparent.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – THE NEXT BIG IDEA**

While not necessarily being addressed as a discrete initiative, much of the developmental work being done by the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur – Macon County is focused on putting in place a foundation of broad-based, regional capabilities to support economic development opportunities of all sizes- both for existing business as well as new opportunities. Of specific note is the recognition and credibility of the EDC as the 'go to' organization in our community for economic development activities. Services and support include incentives under the enterprise zone, recruitment and staffing support, site location and programs provided through a relationship with the Champaign County EDC for small business development. This effort will continue to expand as part of the EDC overall strategy for business retention, development and acquisition.

## VIBRANT AND ATTRACTIVE

This imperative has always been one that defies the development of a very specific, well-defined, self-contained plan. The reality is that this imperative will be best met through a collection of activities supported by a broad-base of community organizations.

The *Beautify Decatur Coalition* is an excellent example of such a focused initiative. Beautify Decatur has enrolled Decatur in the National America in Bloom competition. Decatur has a proven track record in achieving goals, and now we have a goal focused on beautification - preparing Decatur to compete at the National Level. Because of this contest, we are already seeing more community participation and collaboration, increased funding and the implementation of new beautification projects. More results are anticipated as the time grows closer to June 2018 when the judges are expected to be here.

In general, the sense is that there is a good and increasing level of activity taking place throughout our community. And the current thinking is this more grass roots approach to this imperative may well be the best way to achieve meaningful progress.

**INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH AMERICA IN BLOOM CONTEST?**

VISIT [LIMITLESSDECATUR.COM](http://LIMITLESSDECATUR.COM) MORE DETAILS.

**HELP BEAUTIFY  
DECATUR!**

## 20-40

Similarly, this imperative has also defied the ability to develop a self-contained, all-encompassing strategy; yet, as with *Vibrant and Attractive*, there is a sense that some roots have been established and some progress is being made. Networks of young professionals at larger businesses have emerged and a similar effort is being coordinated by the Greater Decatur Chamber of Commerce for smaller businesses. It is believed that the best near-term approach is to allow these networks to further develop and evolve and then determine other actions that might be supportive of this imperative.

## TIER 3 IMPERATIVES – HOUSING IN THE CITY, GROW THE MIDDLE, LAKEFRONT DEVELOPMENT

The *Grow Decatur* approach to these three imperatives was to be supportive as needed – but, otherwise, to not be actively involved. Perhaps that is the best formula for success as two of these imperatives (Housing in the City and Lakefront Development) have achieved significant next steps and the third (Grow the Middle) will also be addressed as part of the EDC strategy review.

### HOUSING IN THE CITY

Since arriving in Decatur, City Manager Tim Gleason has identified the revitalization of our core community as a high priority initiative. Most recently, the City hired Raymond Lai as its new Community Economic Development Director who will work with the community to develop a community revitalization strategy. A comprehensive effort seeking to engage a large cross-section of the community has been launched to develop specific objectives and supporting plans to move this effort forward, with nine major areas of focus:

- Connectivity and Partnerships
- Housing, Building and Land Re-use
- Community Appearance
- Local Government Regulations  
Energize Existing Neighborhoods
- Economic and Social Growth and Vitality
- Community Health and Wellness
- Jobs and Job Readiness
- Inner City Opportunities

## **GROW THE MIDDLE**

Within the scope of activities of the Economic Development Corporation of Decatur – Macon County, *Grow the Middle* has not been specifically identified. Yet, as is the case with the *Economic Development (the Next Big Idea)* imperative, *Grow the Middle* efforts will be an integral part of the focus of the comprehensive set of services and support capabilities- many of which will target the retention and growth of existing businesses. Many of the elements deemed necessary to provide this support are either in place or are being developed. Further, the EDC is increasingly recognized as the ‘go to’ organization for most non-retail economic development activities for both existing and prospective businesses.

## **LAKEFRONT DEVELOPMENT**

The Decatur Park District unveiled its master plan for the development of Lakeshore Landing in September 2012. This ambitious plan was the product of many months of engagement with the community and many iterations of ideas. Some early work was successfully achieved with the development of the two new miniature golf courses; however, other major components of the plan, including a new aquatics facility and an amphitheater were placed on hold due to State of Illinois funding issues. In Fall 2016, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation announced its funding support for the amphitheater and additional support for Scovill Zoo. In 2017, the new Nelson Park Ropes Course and batting cages opened and the planned development of the new aquatics facility continues. While there are still several elements of this plan to be addressed, significant progress is being made on multiple fronts.

## **OTHER GOOD NEWS**

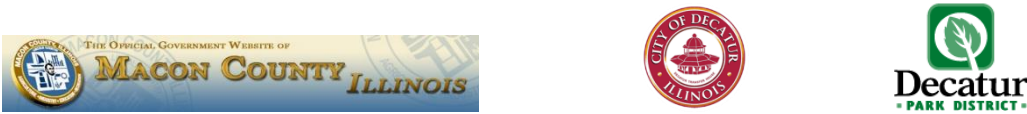
As is hopefully conveyed in this summary assessment of these various imperatives, good progress is being made across the broad spectrum of imperatives previously identified by the community as its priorities. Importantly, most of this work is being done by good quality organizations with the vision, leadership and passion necessary to achieve success for the greater Decatur community - and many of these efforts are being done in a process that seeks to engage the broad community in the development of specific plans. Furthermore, there are visible signs of increased cooperation, coordination and collaboration among these various community-focused organizations and better-quality communication. All of this is consistent with the proven recipe for success, and our community should be proud of the progress being made and the efforts being pursued.

While there are several organizations specifically identified as key leaders in the summary of the imperatives, there are many other organizations actively involved in key leadership and support roles. This includes businesses, governmental units, community service organizations and labor- including those who comprise the *Grow Decatur Stakeholder Committee*. In addition to those organizations highlighted in the imperative summary, the *Stakeholder Committee* includes:

**BUSINESS AND LABOR**



**GOVERNMENTAL UNITS**



**EDUCATION**



**COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT**



In addition to the members of the *Stakeholders Committee*, there is also a large group of active participants which make up what is called the *Community Constituents Committee*.



A meeting will be scheduled with these two groups at the beginning of 2018 to discuss the overall status and game plan for Grow Decatur and to seek their guidance regarding the next steps.

There is one other group with which we hope to schedule a meeting in early December, *The E-6*. The *E-6* group comprises the six largest private employers in our community, a group that has helped identify areas of focus that they believe are specifically helpful to them regarding ongoing business growth and development as well as the recruitment and retention of employees. The purpose of this meeting will be to review *Grow Decatur's* current assessment and plans, and address any matters that may warrant special attention.

## SUMMARY

In earlier *Grow Decatur* presentations, we frequently highlighted the positive developments that have taken place in our community. There are many tangible signs of economic progress that should also be celebrated. The following partial list is reflective of what has been achieved in our community over the past three years:

- **\$200M** by Fuyao Glass in a Glass Production Facility
- **\$31M** by Millikin University in Student Center University Commons
- **\$25M** by Akorn in New Warehouses & Production Facilities
- **\$15M** by Howard Buffet Foundation in Law Enforcement Training Center
- **\$11M** by Union Iron in a New Manufacturing & Production Facility
- **\$8.4M** by Aramark in a New Distribution & Operations Facility
- **\$5M** by Ameren Illinois in a Gas Operations & Distribution Control Facility
- **\$3M** by Busey Bank in a New Information Technology Center

In addition, the consolidation of new production lines into the Decatur Caterpillar facility, along with an upturn in activity in the mining truck sector has resulted in the addition of hundreds of jobs at Caterpillar in the past 10 months.

We would like to also acknowledge the many contributions made by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation in recent years. We are pleased that most of the projects and initiatives designated for funding by the Foundation are well-aligned with the set of strategic community imperatives developed in the *Grow Decatur* process. The Howard G. Buffett Foundation provided the initial funding for the Community Marketing and Branding Initiative, and the Foundation has been an ongoing supporter of a variety of education projects through the Decatur Public Schools Foundation. Additional support has been provided over the past year related to the United Way of Decatur and Macon County, the Boys and Girls Club, the Decatur Park District's Lake Shore Landing, DOVE, the expansion of the Children's Museum and the new train connecting the Children's Museum with Scovill Zoo. The new State of Illinois Law Enforcement Training Facility is one of several projects being funded by the Foundation to advance quality law enforcement as a critical component of community safety. The Foundation has made a major contribution to help advance the City of Decatur's Community Revitalization Project and most recently an additional generous gift to the Decatur Public Schools Foundation for the establishment of the Dwayne O. Andreas Ag Academy. While

there are many great initiatives being undertaken by many quality organizations to address many critical imperative areas, the funding support from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation is dramatically accelerating the progress that is transforming Decatur into a robust community. Thank you, Mr. Buffett.

### **MORE TO BE DONE**

None of this is to suggest that we are, as a community, where we want to be; nor does it suggest that even with the results from the action plans in progress and being developed will we be fully satisfied with the outcomes. Sometimes it appears progress is being measured in inches – and we are all impatient with respect to our aspirations for the future. We believe the foundation upon which future progress will be based is strengthening, and we believe the pace of progress is accelerating. If any community has what it takes to be successful, Decatur is that community.

Happy New Year; we'll be in touch!

Sincerely,

The *Grow Decatur* Leadership Team

Larry Altenbaumer | Ashley Grayned | Bruce Nims | Nicole Bateman | Ellen Hearn | Beth Nolan