

Edmonds Economic Development Strategic Action Plan

Edmonds is a city of 30,000 inhabitants 15 miles north of Seattle on Puget Sound. A highly desirable residential community in the heart of a major metropolitan regional economy, Edmonds is also a historic former mill town with an intact downtown business district known by residents as the "bowl." Spectacular waterfront and mountain views characterize Edmonds, as does its location as the gateway to the second busiest state ferry route to the Olympic Peninsula. Edmonds residents take pride in its friendly small-town atmosphere, in its safety and quality of life, and in its tradition of community Cultural arts.

In the spring of 1995 the Edmonds community came together to initiate an economic development planning process. This report is a summary of the efforts of that process and an outline of the strategies identified and the actions developed to ensure the longterm economic vitality of Edmonds.

What Prompted This Effort?

Like many other small towns, Edmonds has been subjected to the large economic forces of recent years. It has experienced the globalizing effects of modern technology and communications, the suburbanization of land development, and the tensions between rapid growth on the one hand and the desire to preserve the natural environment on the other.

Edmonds has seen dramatic growth in office and condominium development, increases in traffic, and rising land prices and rents. Affecting Edmonds in particular have also been recent trends in retailing: the advent of regional shopping malls and warehouse stores offering discount pricing.

These developments created intense competition for the small retailers of Edmonds, particularly those in the historic "bowl" area where the building stock and the parking supply date back half a century and more. During 1994 and 1995, the downtown business district saw a number of business closures that resulted in vacant storefronts and concerns about a potential erosion of the city's sales tax base. Some new businesses attempting to locate found obstacles and decided to go elsewhere. Residents began complaining that the variety and selection of goods no longer met their day to day needs. In response to these concerns, a community task force was formed.

Who Was Involved?

At the behest of City Councilmember Barb Fahey, a public meeting was called and some fifty local civic leaders, business people, and citizens came together to discuss their concerns and what actions might be undertaken. The group decided to take two paths: to initiate an economic development planning process with the community to address longer term economic issues and to form a downtown-oriented shorter term action planning group to address immediate business development ideas.

The short term action group channeled comments, issues and ideas to the overall plan, and facilitated problem-solving on immediate issues.

The longer term group formed a steering committee, solicited resources from various participants and hired a consultant to facilitate a community process. The Steering Committee consisted of representatives of the four initial funding partners: the City of Edmonds, the Port of Edmonds, the Edmonds Chamber of Commerce and the Edmonds Arts Commission, as well as three business representatives. Subsequently three local banks contributed additional support to the project; they were First Interstate Bank, Frontier Bank, and Pacific Northwest Bank.

A larger community task force was also convened which decided to call itself the Greater Edmonds Advancement Team, or GREAT for short. This task force was open to the public and held a series of five meetings between June and October to discuss issues, develop ideas, review lessons from past planning processes, assess available resources and, finally, develop a strategic action plan. Members of the GREAT task force and the Steering Committee are identified on the inside front cover of this report.

What Was the Process?

Under the direction of the Steering Committee, a work plan was developed for the community process that sought to involve as wide a range of Edmonds citizens and businesses as possible. The following tasks were carried out:

Stakeholder interviews were conducted in person and by telephone with over 40 business owners and managers from different sectors and different parts of town, as well as elected officials, members of the arts community, other non-profit groups, and residents. Interview questions asked about the perceptions of the health of the local economy, strengths and weaknesses of Edmonds as a place to do business, effectiveness and role of various organizations, and suggestions for strengthening the local economy.

A community economic survey was published in the Edmonds Paper soliciting the views of the citizenry at large. One hundred twenty-five survey responses were received. The results were incorporated into the work of the GREAT task force.

An assessment of resources and past plans was undertaken to compile information about the community's history of economic development-related planning and past recommendations that had been made.

A strategic framework of three goals and five strategies was developed based on the input of the stakeholders, the community and the GREAT task force.

Action items were identified from among the many dozens of ideas and suggestions received from participants. These action items were prioritized and organized into the strategic framework.

An organizational assessment was conducted for the entities involved with the economy of Edmonds. This assessment identified organizational missions, roles and resources as well as potential new roles and resources. The assessment was the basis for the development of the task assignments included in this strategic plan.

What Was the Result?

This economic development strategic action plan is the final result of the six-month planning process. It incorporates the views and suggestions of several hundred people and represents countless hours of discussion and meetings. This action plan recommends five broad strategies and fifty-three specific actions to build on the strengths of the Edmonds community and to deal with its weaknesses.

Key organizations are identified to take lead responsibility for various actions. These include the City of Edmonds, the Edmonds Chamber of Commerce, the Port of Edmonds, the Edmonds Arts Commission and the Downtown Merchants Association. A new economic development partnership entity is also recommended to take on tasks for which no existing organization is available and to provide coordinating and planning functions for the entire range of economic development activities.

The purpose of the Edmonds Economic Development Plan is to develop an integrated strategy for Edmonds that advocates for business and recognizes the role that the vitality of business and a strong and diverse business environment play in the over all wellbeing of the community.



Strategic Economic Development Framework for Edmonds

The Plan identifies 3 goals and 5 strategies.

Goal 1: Commitment to Economic Vitality

To develop a long-term commitment by the city, the port, civic and business organizations, and the community at large to a vital and diverse economy.

Goal 2: Preservation of Community Values

To highlight and ensure preservation of the community's assets and values: the visual beauty, the location, the friendliness, the small town feeling, and the high quality in public services and business offerings.

Goal 3: Cohesive Identity

To develop a crisp and cohesive identity to actively market Edmonds that incorporates the full range of its economy: marine activities, the retail sector, services, the arts, recreation, and special events.

Strategy 1. Improve the business climate in Edmonds. Public, private and community attitudes and policies should make business feel valued as a cornerstone of the Edmonds quality of life.

Strategy 2. Organize community resources to capitalize on opportunities and maximize linkages, Work toward a high degree of cohesiveness and collaboration among the many institutions, organizations, and volunteer groups in Edmonds to create a unified vision and direction.

Strategy 3. Promote Edmonds locally and regionally as a place to visit, shop and do business, Communicate a cohesive message to a variety of audiences in support of the community's events, attractions and businesses.

Strategy 4. Support and develop the Edmonds retail sector. Pursue all appropriate means to ensure continuation of a vital retail economy and a strong sales tax base.

Strategy 5. Identify and develop infrastructure improvements that support the local economy, Recognize that attractive and functional business, shopping and visitor districts require a base of physical structures to be successful.

Strategic Economic Development Actions

	Lead	Major Interest
Strategy 1: Improve the Business Climate		
1. One-stop permit guidance for new locating businesses	City	Chamber
2. Develop ADB guidelines and improve response time	City/Chamber	
3. Review parking requirements and in-lieu parking fees	City/Chamber	
4. Review restrictions on sidewalk activity	City/Merchants	
5. Ensure consistent applications of rules and regulations	City/Chamber	
6. Review development ratios for downtown mixed use	City/Chamber	Developers
7. Selectively review the rationale for building restrictions	City/Chamber	Developers
8. Communicate benefits of infill development	City/Chamber	Developers
9. Review restrictions on waterfront uses	City/Port	
10. Review City interpretation of ADA regulations	City/Chamber	Developers
11. Review building codes to make housing more affordable	City/Chamber	Developers
12. Review City light industrial zoning and capacity	City/Port	
Strategy 2: Organize Community Resources		
13. Form a business recruitment team (drug store, shoe store, pizza parlor, bagel deli, arts-related, night club, interactive art studio)	Partner-ship	Merchants
14. Formalize an economic development entity	Partnership	
15. Better partnerships/tie-ins with events & festivals	Partnership	
16. Encourage Chamber to offer more support to retailer's	Chamber	Merchants
17. Establish better lines of communication between groups	Partnership	
18. Review structure of EVB	EVB/Partnership	
19. Group visits to Issaquah, Kirkland, LaConner to learn lessons	Partnership	
20. Develop partnerships with service clubs, public agencies and educational institutions	Partnership	
21. Develop "Friendliest Town" Campaign	EVB/Partnership	Merchants
22. Provide more public information on Port benefits and services	Port	
Strategy 3: Promote Edmonds Locally and Regionally		
23. Develop a cohesive marketing identity and plan for Edmonds	EVB/Partnership	Chamber/Arts
24. Develop a packet of demographic data for business recruitment	Partner-ship	
25. Compile market research information on Edmonds and region	Partnership	
26. "Buy Local" promotion campaign	EVB/Partnership	Merchants
27. Developer stronger year-round visibility in tourism publications	EVB/Partnership	Chamber
28. Develop a cultural tourism plan with arts groups	Arts Commission	
29. Tour packaging with regional hotels/convention centers	EVB/Partnership	Chamber
30. Film initiative: develop resource list and photo inventory	Chamber	
31. Transit advertising for Edmonds on CT buses	City	
Strategy 4: Support the Edmonds Retail Sector		
32. Joint retailers' strategy to open Sundays and one evening a week	Merchants	
33. Develop a directory of downtown businesses (sign)	Partnership	Merchants
34. Joint retailers' advertising in regional papers and other media	Merchants	

35.	Offer seminars/consultation in retail merchandising	Partnership/Chamber/Merchants
36.	Downtown street fair(s)	Partnership/Merchants
37.	Welcoming committee for new businesses	Partnership/Chamber/Merchants
38.	Indoor farmers market	Partnership
39.	Revive Second Sunday Art and Antique Walk	Partnership/Merchants

Strategy 5: Initiate Infrastructure Improvements

40.	Work with WSF to create ferry holding, making access to local businesses possible	City/Port
41.	Install public restrooms in downtown	City/Merchants
42.	Improved linkage between Main Street and waterfront	City
43.	Improve downtown parking including compact car spaces	Partnership
44.	Transit circulator (LINC model)	City Port/Merchants
45.	New performing arts center	Arts Commission/Partnership
46.	New aquatic facility	City
47.	Redevelopment project, e.g. artist live/work/retail space	Partnership Developers
48.	Downtown directional signs to waterfront/boardwalk	City
49.	New maritime museum/marine science center	Partnership/City
50.	Continuous boardwalk from Bracket's Landing to Pt Edwards	City/Port
51.	Review City lease of storage building on 5th Avenue	City
52.	Expanded marina	Port
53.	Develop a plan of capital beautification improvements	City

Recommended Implementation Plan

Each of the 53 specific actions includes identification of a lead organization from among the City, the Port, the Chamber of Commerce, the Retail Association, and the Arts Commission. Where an existing entity is not available for a specific action, a new partnership entity is identified. It is recommended that this new entity be formed on the structure of the existing Edmonds Visitors Bureau and its three partner's (the City, the Port and the Chamber of Commerce). It is assumed that volunteer citizen committees will carry out much of the work of the plan.

Phase I

A first phase of plan implementation is recommended for the October-December 1995 time frame. To begin organizing the resources for plan implementation, three immediate steps are needed:

1. Market Research. Formation of a task force to gather and develop demographic and market data to be the basis of any future promotion, marketing and business recruitment efforts.
2. Resource Development. Formation of a task force to identify and evaluate the feasibility of acquiring financial and human resources for economic development plan implementation.
3. Business Recruitment. Formation of a business recruitment task force to begin working with merchants, landlords and the community to identify and approach potential new businesses for location in Edmonds.

The resources of GREAT, the Steering Committee and outside groups such as the Snohomish County Economic Development Council and the Snohomish County Tourism Information Bureau will be called upon to assist with this early work.

Phase II

A second phase of the implementation involves the development of first-year work plans by the identified organizations and the formation of the new economic development entity. Each suggested

task assignment will require the agreement of the respective organizations to make real commitments to carry out specific tasks. Such commitments can be made only pending the identification of necessary resources and capacity in each organization. The following steps should be completed during October 1995 - March 1996.

1. Organizational Commitments. The City, the Port, the Chamber, the Arts Commission and the Merchants Association should develop work plans for first-year actions they commit to working on.
2. Formation of New Entity. The board of the Edmonds Visitors Bureau (EVB) should develop a transition plan for expanding its charter to a broader economic development mission, including revised bylaws and governance structure, budget, staffing and work plan.

Phase III

Upon completion of the first two preliminary research and organizational phases, the third and actual working phase would commence. Each individual organization would be prepared to begin carrying out the tasks it has committed to and the new partnership entity will be geared up to begin its coordinating and other activities, in each case as identified by the individual work plans.

Specific action items will also be carried out by volunteer committees. Some of these committees may already exist under the Chamber of Commerce or other groups. For example, the Chamber's Code Oversight Committee or the Downtown Retailers Association would carry out items these groups are already working on. Some new committees will need to be formed and some existing committees may need to be expanded. The new partnership would coordinate these efforts.