

# WINDSOR-ESSEX REGIONAL

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## Chamber of Commerce

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOR WINDSOR & ESSEX COUNTY

#### Issue:

The region of Windsor and Essex County is still lacking a fully functioning Economic Development Organization that would spearhead a regional economic development strategy. The process of developing a renewed regional approach to economic development by the City of Windsor and the County of Essex is yet to produce the desired outcomes, which are a new structure and a sound regional strategy for economic development.

#### Background:

- In the spring of 2003 City of Windsor and County of Essex officials held two separate workshops to address the issue of economic development and tourism services in the region. As a result of this consultation process the City and County formed a CAO Task Force to study the issues and report on the findings with recommendations to City and County Councils.
- The City of Windsor formed Enterprise Windsor in March 2004. The City named Dennis Perlin as the head of the organization, which then existed parallel with the Windsor Essex Development Commission as one of the City departments.
- The Economic Development Commissioner, Paul Bondy retired in the summer of 2004. The City appointed Dennis Perlin as the new Interim Commissioner for the Windsor Essex Development Commission. He retained his position with Enterprise Windsor.
- On November 10, 2004 the City and County Councils adopted a report by the CAO Task Force affirming the regional approach to economic development as the best policy going forward. The report called for a process of developing a regional economic development strategy with the help of a City hired consultant from KPMG.
- The same forum concluded that the region is well served by the Tourism Bureau and no further action is to be taken addressing Tourism and Hospitality. Also, the Councillors agreed to form a new structure for the Development Commission after the adoption of a regional strategy due in the Fall of 2005.

- The Chamber made a presentation at this joint meeting and urged all municipal governments in the region to make Economic Development a top priority, concurrent with resolving the Border situation. The Chamber stressed the importance of a regional approach to solving this emerging issue that transcends municipal boundaries. The Chamber emphasized its role as a fair and honest broker for the process.
- The Chamber recommended that the business community take the lead once there is a new, focused and reinvigorated Economic Development establishment led by a business driven Board of Directors. This would create an incentive for the business community to take an active role in bringing new investment to our region. The first steps would have to be taken, however, by the municipalities.
- In January 2005 the City of Windsor and Essex County appointed a Transitional Board of Directors for the Windsor Essex Development Commission. The Chamber made a presentation to the new Transitional Board and appointed Lindsay Boyd as the Chamber's representative to the Strategic Advisory Committee.
- In January 2005 the Chamber made its third independent presentation to the Advisory Committee through Lindsay Boyd, restating the Chamber's recommendations for the process of creating a new regional strategy and economic development structure.
- In September 2005 the Chamber obtained advanced copies of the draft Economic Development Strategy, the result of the year long process led by the Interim Board of Directors. The Chamber provided its comments on the draft strategy by September 30, 2005 stating that the Chamber has given a favorable assessment of the regional approach as the core value of the process.
- The Chamber stated its dissatisfaction with the final draft document in a number of areas. The Chamber has asked repeatedly for a decision-making Board of Directors comprised and led by business leaders. This was ignored in the final draft. In all, the Chamber provided 10 recommendations (Attachment A) to improve the final draft if there was to be a positive reaction to the strategy.
- On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005, the City and County announced a new Economic Development Strategy for Windsor & Essex County. No firm date has been announced for the formation of a new economic development structure. Secondly, the strategy still needs to be approved sometime in November or December 2005. A series of consultations were conducted on short notice to aid the regional strategy.

- The Chamber commenced a constructive approach to the Economic Development file throughout the Fall of 2005. Working with the City of Windsor, the Chamber stressed the importance of a regional approach and its desire to see the planning process succeed.
- On November 2, 2005 the Chamber hosted an Economic Development themed breakfast with James C. Rogers from Duke Energy, the parent company of Union Gas. The title of the presentation was: *Best Practices in Regional Economic Development: A View from South Carolina*. The Chamber restated its desire for a regional approach to the issue.
- The Chamber position on the process, the strategy and the future Economic Development structure was delivered to the Economic Development Advisory Committee and also communicated to the City of Windsor through the Mayor's office.
- No significant new developments ensued until the end of November 2005.

### **The Chamber's response to the Regional Economic Development Process**

The Chamber has put forward the following five specific recommendations that remain unchanged from November 2004. These recommendations were communicated to the Strategic Advisory Committee and the Interim Board of Directors of the Development Commission:

1. *Any organization or strategy that is developed to look after the economic development needs of the region must be regional in scope and mission.*
2. *The Board of Directors for the new Economic Development structure must have ability to make decisions for the new organization. The majority of the Board members should come from the community business leaders.*
3. *There must be a sense of urgency to the process of establishing the lead organization, including the hiring of a General Manager.*
4. *The Economic Development organization that succeeds the current Economic Development Commission must be re-engineered and built from the top down. The Chamber often referred to this approach as the re-tooling of the Development Commission.*
5. *The Economic Development strategy for the region must be re-engineered by the new organization. Any gains in establishing a strategy for the region so far should be taken by the new structure only as advisory.*

## **Chamber's Recommendations**

- The Chamber believes that the Economic Development initiative commenced by the City of Windsor & County of Essex must be drawn to a conclusion with firm results by immediately appointing a Board consisting of business leaders and providing the resources for the formation of the re-engineered structure.
- The Chamber will provide its leadership in mobilizing the business community to recommend candidates for the new Board of Directors and to support and advance the reinvigorated economic development effort by the new organization. The Chamber will continue to provide forums for discussion and information on Economic Development.
- The Chamber applauds the efforts by the Interim Board of Directors and the elected officials in developing a regional economic development strategy. Recognizing the urgency of the Economic Development file we recommend that the strategy be adopted with a provision that it needs to be fluid and responsive to the needs of the business community.
- The Chamber will work closely with the new economic development organization to find ways to engage the business community in this process, providing expertise and best practices on an as needed basis.
- The Chamber will continue to advocate for improvements to the regional business climate through its advocacy for more favorable taxation, open and seamless borders, emphasis on the role of the private sector in the economy, investment in innovation, research and development and the need for improving apprenticeship and skills training in our communities.
- In conclusion, the Chamber's immediate priorities are a regional Economic Development strategy in its present form, immediate formation of a new economic development organization and inclusion of key business leaders on the new Board of Directors. Recognizing the importance of the strategy the same needs to be a fluid document that will be amended to respond to the changing business climate.