

Town of Dekorra, WI Economic Improvement Strategy

Report to the Economic Development Administration

February 16, 2011

This Economic Improvement Strategy, prepared with funding support from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), shares the Town's approach for economic growth. It focuses in particular on advancing high-quality economic development within the Town's utility district area, located at the interchange of Interstate 39-90-94 and County Highway CS. This Economic Improvement Strategy also provides direction for economic development in limited planned locations along U.S. Highway 51 and Lake Wisconsin. An early product of this strategy—and really a key component of it—is a website designed to communicate and market Dekorra's economic opportunities to businesses, developers, and investors.

Overview of Dekorra's Economic Improvement Strategy

The Town of Dekorra is “beautifully situated” in southern Wisconsin, just minutes north of the City of Madison, Wisconsin's state capital and home to the state's flagship university, technical institutions, and centers of innovation. The Town is also only 20 minutes south of the Wisconsin Dells, ranked the #1 U.S. Family Destination by TripAdvisor.com.

Today, Dekorra maintains a relatively diverse economic base for a community of its type and size. In recent years, the Town as a whole has experienced a growing and increasingly affluent population, but is still predominately characterized by farmlands and rolling, wooded hills. However, much of the Town's commercial and industrial development is of middling quality, and tax base and job opportunities could be improved. The presence of several key assets in the Town—such as direct access to the “triple” Interstate 30/90/94, U.S. Highway 51, and the Wisconsin River and Lake Wisconsin—has provided additional opportunities to promote higher-value commercial and industrial development.

The Town's objective is to produce greater tax base and more numerous and higher paying jobs, as well as improve the aesthetic appearance and image of the Town through redevelopment of already developed but aging sites and areas.

Described in the remainder of this report are the Town's more specific assets and opportunities for economic growth; its vision for economic development activity associated with and close to the Town's major transportation and natural assets; and implementation techniques for further articulating and achieving the Town's strategy.

Dekorrra's Assets and Opportunities

The process to develop this strategy, which was focused on creating an economic improvement website, took place in 2010. In preparation for a public kick-off meeting in May 2010, the Town's economic development consultant developed a preliminary list of Dekorra's economic assets and opportunities. During the kick-off meeting, groups of community participants modified these lists (see Figures 2 and 3). The outcomes, presented in Figures 2 and 3, were used to help the Town solidify ideas about how it wanted to market itself, particularly through its new economic improvement website.

Figure 1

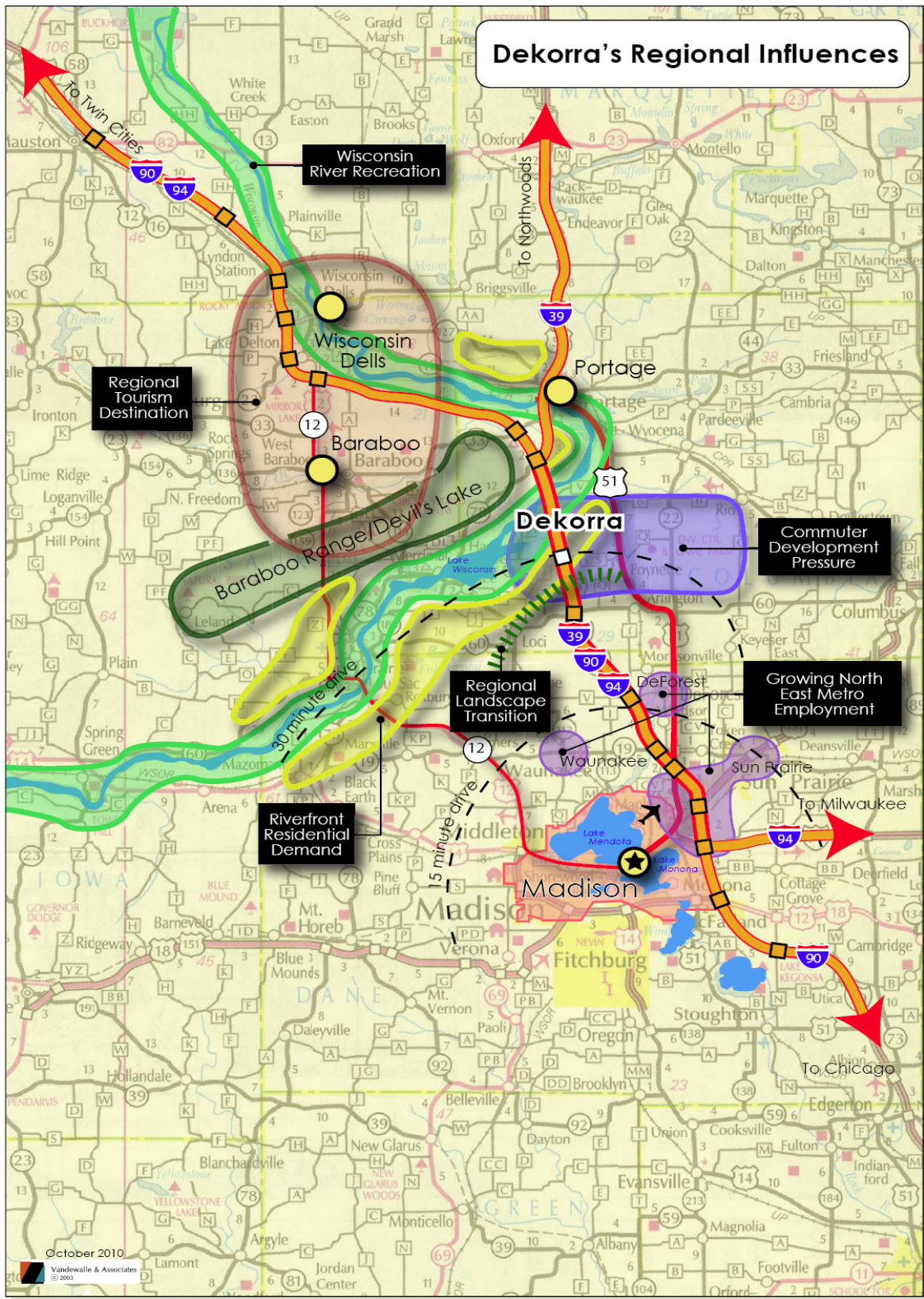


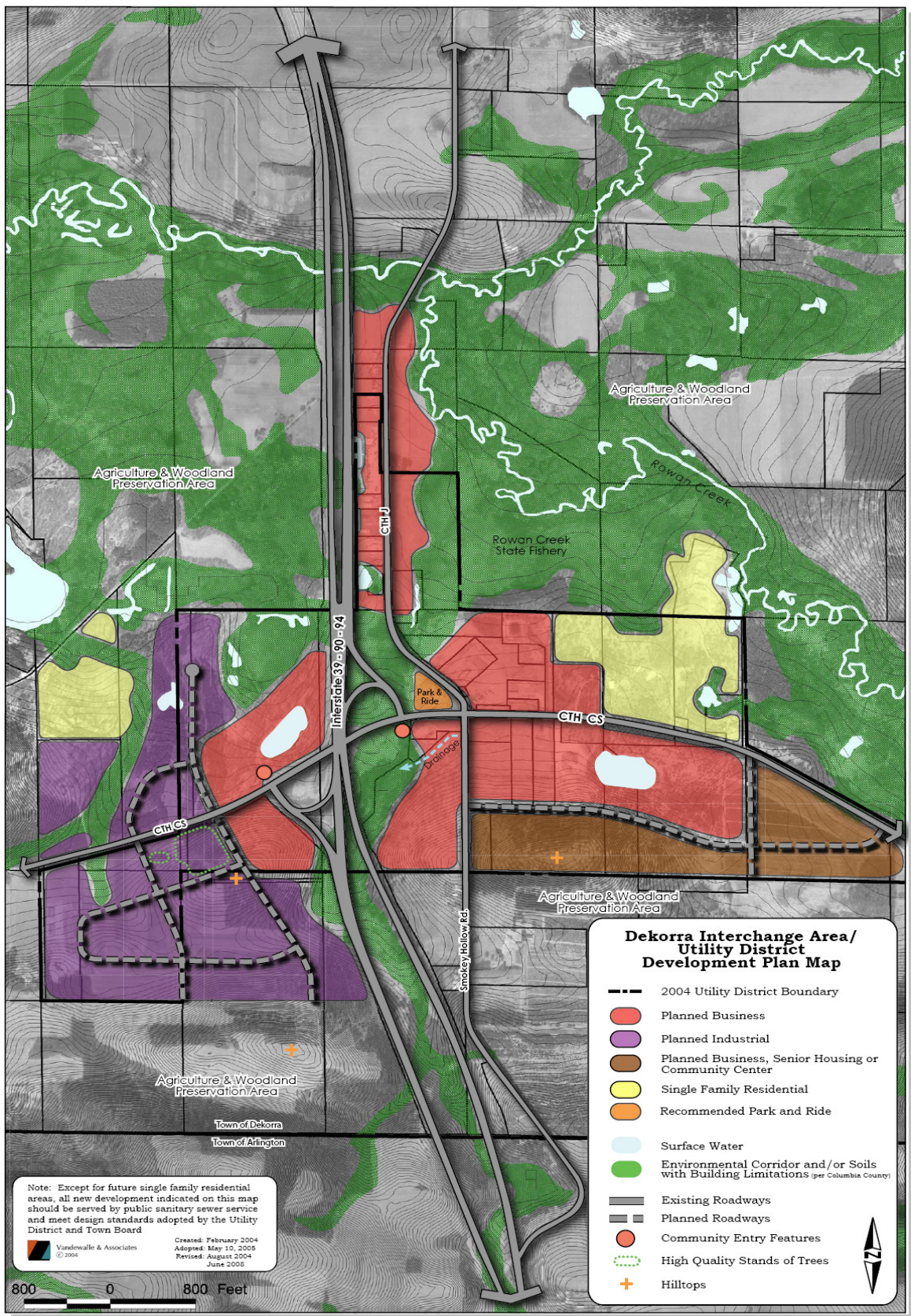
Figure 2: Town of Dekorra ASSETS for Economic Improvement

Environment and Geography	Infrastructure
Wisconsin River and Lake Wisconsin	“Triple Interstate” (39,90,94)
Natural Beauty (rolling, wooded countryside; dramatic views)	Utility District/sewer service/treatment plant
Designated natural areas (Muir Park, Hinkson, Rowan, and Rocky Run Creeks, wildlife areas and State fisheries)	Interchange
MacKenzie Education Center	Power Plant
Proximity to population and innovation centers (Madison, Chicago, Minneapolis)	Rail Corridor
Positioning and Marketing through Thrive	Busiest rest areas in State
Access to higher education	Good roads
Economy, Tourism & Recreation	Human Capital
Proximity to Wisconsin Dells	“The Grade” and bridges to Sauk County
Lake Wisconsin is tourist destination	Local parks and boat launches
Recreation gateway to Dells/north	Massive “Circle City” population/market
Trout Fishing	High local incomes and education
Boating destination	Established “Baby Boom” resident base
Waterfront living, dining, and lodging	Local “movers & shakers”
Cabins/Camping	
Food processors, plastics, health care as other key area industries	
Economic development opportunity areas generally remote from residential areas	
4 th of July Celebration	

Figure 3: Town of Dekorra OPPORTUNITIES for Economic Improvement

General/Town-Wide	Lake Wisconsin Waterfront
Nature-based recreation & education	Retirement destination (low maintenance living options)
Hinkson, Rowan, and Rocky Run Creeks	Sustainable design opportunities (e.g., stormwater management)
Unified community wayfinding signage	Redevelopment in “Grade” area
Bike-friendly community (capitalize on regional cycling destination)	Utility District/Interchange Area (see further description of area below)
Rest Area kiosks as marketing opportunity	“Celebration Center”—pavilion, fireworks, events, fishing pond
Further collaboration with County and Poynette	Local products outlet(s)—meat, dairy, wine, etc.
4 th of July Celebration/Festival	Innovation Center—business development for local “baby boom” entrepreneurs
Highway 51 Corridor (see more detailed description of areas below)	Preliminary Welcome Center--Lake Wisconsin, Dells, “Northwoods”
Rail-based industries	Outfitters--fishing, paddling, boating, climbing, biking, etc.
New uses related to power plant (greenhouses?, waste processing?)	Lodging
Highway 51 upgrades	Dining
	Ag, Forestry, and Tourism Incentives (TIF)

Figure 4



Economic Improvement Areas

As refined through the process to create this Economic Improvement Strategy, there are three locations where economic development is planned and appropriate in the Town.

Interstate 39/90/94 Interchange Area (Utility District)

This area surrounds Dekorra's interstate interchange, and includes Dekorra's utility district. This is the only area within the Town that is served by public sanitary sewer service. Future development and redevelopment in the utility district and on adjoining lands is envisioned to include commercial service and retail uses designed to serve the community, visitors, and the traveling public, with the additional potential for industrial and distribution uses (see Figure 4). A sampling of desired types of businesses include hotels, restaurants, a business that could also serve as a welcome center and/or a "celebration center" for the area, an incubator for small business start-ups and acceleration, and specialty retail stores such as an outlet for locally-produced food and beverage products. Desired future uses and site and building design standards for this critical and highly visible economic development area are further articulated within the Town's Interchange Area Design Guidelines document. These guidelines are implemented through a Town architectural review committee's review of new development projects.

U.S. Highway 51/County Highway V/J Intersection

In addition to direct access to a major U.S. highway through the Town, this area in the northern part of Dekorra is also flanked by a major freight rail line and is close to Alliant Energy's Columbia power production facility. The Town envisions future economic development at this intersection, which is already home to two small businesses. Future development will include a mixture of indoor manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution uses, with associated office and commercial uses. Particular opportunities associated with rail service and proximity to the power plant may be pursued, such as commercial greenhouses. Site and building design in this area of the Town will need to be particularly sensitive to natural features and the rural character of nearby lands.

Lake Wisconsin Area

The eastern shore of Lake Wisconsin is home to numerous year-round and seasonal homes. There are also a few areas where non-residential development, mainly serving residents and vacationers, has occurred. These include lands in the historic Dekorra "village" area near the northwest corner of the Town, and lands south of "The Grade"—a highway crossing over the lake near the Town's southwestern corner. Future development and redevelopment of commercially planned and zoned areas of the Lake Wisconsin area will include smaller scale commercial uses that support the surrounding neighborhoods, permanent and seasonal lakefront residents, and tourists. Potential future uses include inns, rental cottages, bed and breakfasts, offices, restaurants, gift and other retail shops, personal or professional services (e.g., salon), recreation outfitters, art studios, and daily shopping and services.

Managing the Environmental Impacts of Development

The Town recognizes that its natural environment is a central component of what makes Dekorra special and provides the basis for its existing economy and many of its economic development opportunities. In addition, each of the Town's three economic development areas are located in proximity to natural areas and floodplain. As such, Dekorra's Economic Improvement Strategy is designed to leverage its natural assets, while simultaneously reducing the impact of future development on natural resources. Dekorra will accomplish this via the following efforts:

Concentrating Development in Limited Areas

Broadly speaking, the Town's plan is to direct economic development only to a few specific areas, thereby preserving the vast majority of Town's land as open space. Concentrating development into well-planned, discrete locations allows for the more effective and efficient mitigation of negative environment impacts. This includes the ability to provide sanitary sewer service to the utility district/interchange area, instead of large septic systems that have greater soil and groundwater contamination potential. The Town's Comprehensive Plan also specifically directs development out of environmental corridors.

More Accurate Floodplain Mapping

As part of the same EDA grant, the Town has completed a technical floodplain study for the utility district/interchange area. This study has resulted in more accurate mapping of floodplain boundaries in this portion of the Town. More accurate floodplain mapping will be particularly important along County Highway J north of County Highway CS, where old (incorrect) floodplain maps would have significantly limited economic development activity.

Providing Clear Information on Environmental Constraints

The Town's new economic opportunities website (described below) utilizes the Town's natural resource database to help characterize, filter, and market sites for development/redevelopment. It allows users the ability to filter properties with environmental constraints, such as floodplains, wetlands, and soil limitations. It also provides additional information about the natural features of each key economic development site highlighted through the website, such as the presence of steep slopes and woodlands.

Requiring Development Design Standards Focused on Resource Protection

All new development in the Town must comply with progressive Town stormwater management standards, as articulated within the Town's subdivision and site plan review ordinances. The subdivision ordinance also includes particular standards designed to preserve steep slopes. New development proposed for the utility district/interchange area of the Town must also comply with design standards intended to manage the development's impact on the natural environment. Articulated within the Town's Interchange Area Design Guidelines document, these include standards for low-impact site preparation and grading, thoughtful parking lot and other impervious area design, retention of pre-existing vegetation, and provision of green space and new landscaping.

Economic Improvement Strategy Implementation

In order to achieve economic development in the three planned areas indicated above—and to minimize environmental impacts—the Town has developed and will methodically implement its Economic Improvement Strategy. The activities described below will be considered for implementation to advance economic improvement in the three geographic areas, with a particular focus on the utility district/interchange area.

The Town's ability to implement a complicated economic improvement strategy is limited. The Town has a very small staff and no designated organization, committee, or individual devoted to economic development. Further, compared to cities or villages, towns in general have limited economic development powers under Wisconsin Statutes. Therefore, creativity and simplicity in developing a viable economic strategy are critical.

Creation of a Town Economic Improvement Website

In January 2011, the Town launched its economic improvement website, as part of this EDA supported effort. The website is aimed at marketing the community's assets and disseminating information about the Town's economic development opportunities.

The creation of the economic improvement website was considered by the Town to be an integral component of this Economic Improvement Strategy. Businesses and developers increasingly rely on the internet to conduct their initial screening of communities and potential development locations prior to formerly contacting property owners, brokers, or the community itself for more information.

Therefore, Dekorra's website is viewed by the Town as a critical way to reach prospective business owners and developers, and a strategy for differentiating Dekorra from other communities in the state and Midwest that have similar economic assets, such as interstate interchanges.

The Town's new economic improvement website:

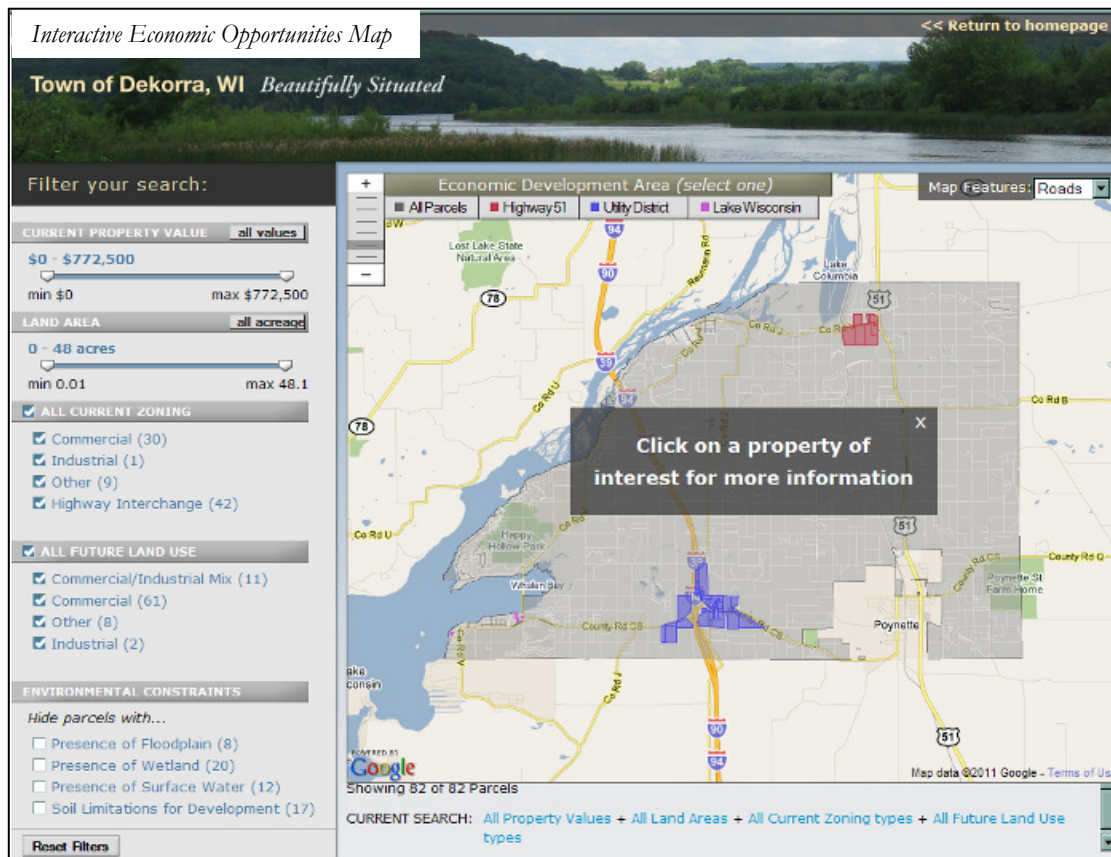
1. Summarizes the Town's vision for economic development.
2. Communicates the Town's many assets for economic development, both Town-wide and geographic area-specific.
3. Provides "community profile" information to help prospective businesses learn more about Dekorra.
4. Provides the Town's policies for economic development and land use, particularly through links to the Town's Comprehensive Plan and Interchange Area Development Plan map.
5. Provides the Town's Interchange Area Design Guidelines, which describes design policies applicable to the utility district/interchange area and lists the Town's desired range of businesses for this area.
6. Includes an interactive "economic opportunities map" that allows users to gather detailed information about available properties within the three economic improvement areas, and to search for properties based on a number of criteria that they control (e.g., site size, assessed value, etc.).

The Town will also need to "get the word out" that this website exists as a resource. It has already hit the major search engines. Advising county and regional economic development professionals, local and regional commercial real estate brokers and developers, and other potentially interested parties of its existence will be a next step.

Ongoing maintenance of the website will be critical. The Town's contract with its economic development consultant provides for one year of maintenance of this economic improvement website. In the mean time, the Town is working to develop a general Town information website, which may absorb this economic improvement website once complete.

Local governments are also quickly finding that social and professional internet media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, are additional, affordable ways to reach their constituents and others who may be interested in the Town. In its review of digital communication tools, the Town may consider these options as well.

Figure 5: Dekorra Economic Improvement Website
www.dekorrabusdevel.com



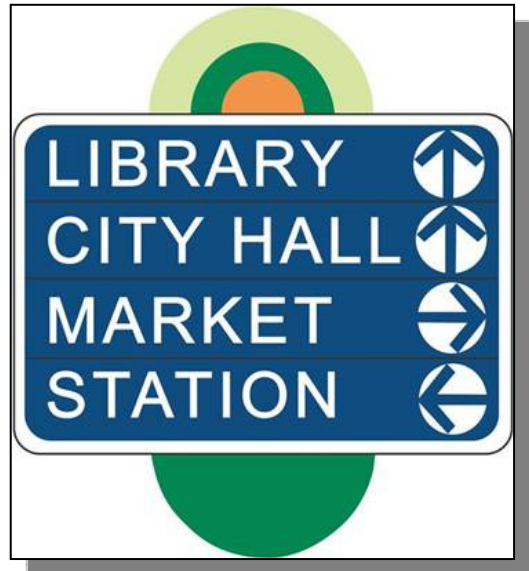
Continued Public Infrastructure Investments

The Town and area property owners have already made a considerable investment in extending sanitary sewer to the utility district/interchange area. As development demand dictates, there are opportunities for further sewer extensions in this area, such as east along County Highway CS.

Each of the Town's three economic improvement areas is adjacent to one or more U.S., state, or county highway. The Town will therefore continue to advocate for improvements and access policies that both assure safe traffic flow and maximize business development opportunities on adjacent lands.

The County Highway CS interstate overpass will be reconstructed in 2011. The Town successfully advocated for continual access during construction, additional permanent lighting to increase safety and visibility, improved aesthetic design, and wider bridge width to facilitate current and future bike and pedestrian use. Bike and pedestrian use would increase in the area if a proposed trail linking the MacKenzie Education Center, Poynette, the Rowan Creek, the utility district/interchange area, and Lake Wisconsin is implemented. Such a trail would increase tourism potential in this area, if properly executed.

Finally, the Town may consider a community entryway and wayfinding sign system, with the most critical location for such signs near the ends of Interstate 39-90-94 ramps. Entryway signs announce that one has entered a community. Wayfinding signs direct visitors to key destinations in the community. Any effort to install entryway and wayfinding signs should be accompanied by removal of pre-existing, redundant signage.



Generic example of a wayfinding sign

Consideration of Development Incentive Tools

To encourage development in the Town's economic development areas, and particularly in the utility district/interchange area, the Town may explore the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Within a TIF district, the local government may borrow funds to install necessary public improvements or to fund development incentives. Once new private development occurs in the TIF as a result of these efforts, the principal and interest payments associated with the borrowing are made with the additional property tax revenues.

Under Wisconsin Statutes, towns do not have the same abilities to use TIF districts as cities or villages. Still, towns are authorized to establish TIF districts (and direct TIF expenditures) to promote agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, and tourism development. Fortunately, many of the Town's desired business types within the utility district/interchange area fit into one of these categories. There may be further opportunities for TIF were the Town to enter what is called a "cooperative plan" with the Village of Poynette, which may address a wide variety of intergovernmental boundary, land use, and economic development issues.

There are some other possible avenues for creating development incentives through direct Town action. Those could include, for example, creation of a Community Development Authority (CDA) that could buy and resell land, among other powers. However, due to staffing limitations and the risk associated with this type of activity in an uncertain real estate market, creation of a CDA is not advised at this time.

Pursuit of Grants and Other Funding Support

The Town will continue to work independently and with other agencies in the pursuit of grants to advance economic development in the utility district/interchange area, and to a lesser extent in the other parts of the Town that are targeted for economic growth. Grants to enable business and job creation will be the particular focus. While the state of federal and state grant programs is in a state of flux, potential grant opportunities may include the following:

1. *Community Based Economic Development Program (CBED)*: Through this program, the Wisconsin Department of Commerce currently offers funding assistance to local governments and community-based organizations that undertake planning, development, and technical assistance projects that support business development. Using CBED program funds, local governments can finance economic development plans, small business and technology-based incubator grants, revolving loan programs to provide funding support to local businesses, and entrepreneur training programs for at-risk youth. Funds are available on an annual basis through a competitive application process. Application materials are available from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.
2. *Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program*: This state program, administered by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, is designed to support the costs for amenities associated with transportation projects, generally state or federal highways. Eligible activities may include streetscaping, landscaping, and bike/pedestrian improvements. Funds are generally available every other year through a competitive application process.
3. *Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)*: This federally funded program is currently administered for non-urban locations in Wisconsin by the state's Department of Commerce. Grants for improvements to public infrastructure where the direct result is the attraction or expansion of a business that brings quality jobs into the community.
4. *Brownfield Redevelopment Funding*: The Wisconsin Department of Commerce currently manages the Blight Elimination and Brownfield Redevelopment program. This program provides funding for the assessment, remediation, redevelopment, and acquisition of contaminated brownfield sites for the purposes of blight elimination and redevelopment. Eligible projects must advance economic development and positively impact the environment, and may include activities like environmental investigation, removal of underground tanks, land acquisition, site and building clearance, and infrastructure improvement.
5. *Renewable Energy Incentives for Businesses*: A Focus on Energy program provides financial incentives to businesses to take advantage of clean, green, renewable energy, such as wind, solar, biomass, biogas, and biodigesters. Further, the U.S. Department of Energy periodically issues competitive funding through the Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, Industrial Technologies Program, and other offices. The Town can monitor whether any programs align with local needs or business opportunities or present partnership opportunities as they arise.

Continue to Pursue Collaboration where Appropriate

The Town recognizes that with its limited in-house resources it will be an ongoing challenge to manage economic improvement on its own. As such, the Town will continue to pursue opportunities to work with other appropriate agencies or organizations on economic improvement efforts. This may include collaborations to help the Town respond to questions from potential business owners or developers, manage the economic improvement website, recruit businesses and investors, assist in identifying and procuring funding, and other activities. Potential organizations that could assist the Town include the Columbia County Economic Development Corporation and the Town's engineering, planning, and legal consultants. In addition, the Town may consider forming an informal committee—or expanding the scope of an existing one such as the architectural review committee—to help direct its economic improvement activities.