



SWIFT COUNTY RDA 2020

Swift County Rural Development Authority Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2020

Abstract

An implementation approach that focuses on actionable, realizable, aspirational but realistic goals, to attract residents, build on existing resources and talent, and best position Swift County and our Cities to attract new investment.

Jen Frost, Executive Director
Jennifer.frost@co.swift.mn.us

Summary

In 2008, Swift County RDA developed an Economic Development Strategy building on Economic Gardening and our County's resource rich, Renewable Energy opportunities. In 2011, the RDA began implementing a branding and marketing strategy for Swift County. This marketing plan lays the framework for continued economic development success through 2016, while building on core high level goals and existing successful programs.

Mission: **Swift County RDA provides opportunities for economic and community development in Swift County**

How?

- **Investment Readiness**

The RDA will seek to enhance opportunities for the expansion of local business and the attraction of new business investment, entrepreneurs, and residents to Swift County.

What does it mean to be “investment ready” in a rural community like Swift County?

Investment attraction is challenging regardless of location. Understanding the businesses we are competitively positioned to attract and the needs of those business - whether it be a start-up business, retailer, agri-business operator or larger industrial plant – is critical to our success. This includes understanding the capacity of our local communities to receive these investment opportunities: What is the availability of serviced or “shovel-ready” land, vacant buildings, housing options & pricing, workforce considerations, supporting assets/activities, local amenities, etc. To be successful Swift County should set a 2020 economic development goal to build an *Investment Readiness Tool-kit* for the County and each community. And by doing so the RDA will, most likely make strides toward its other high level goals:

- **Pursue Partnerships and Outreach in the Community**

The RDA will take a leadership role in advocating and supporting strategic and collaborative economic development partnerships

- **Effective Marketing and Promotion of Swift County**

The RDA will ensure that the County is effectively promoting the assets, talents and opportunities available by enhancing the profile of the County to a targeted audience of visitors, prospective residents, and business interests.

- **Growth in Key Industries**

The RDA will encourage and support the growth and expansion of the County's existing industry base of Energy & Environment, Agriculture & Agribusiness, Manufacturing and Health & Social Services; and will seek to create focused opportunities for future investment attraction.

Table of Contents

Introduction..... 4

 Context.....4

 Recommendations.....4

Four Goals to Grow Swift County.....4

 1. Build Social Capital.....4

 2. Enhance the Built Environment.....5

 3. Develop Talent and Entrepreneurs.....5

 4. Tell our Story.....5

New Strategic Programs.....6

 Introduction.....6

 Target Audiences and Messaging.....8

 Land and Space Program.....9

 Economic Gardening Program.....16

 People & Places Program.....22

 Projects that Support All Programs.....24

Human Resources.....27

Budget.....28

Implementation Schedule.....29

Key Performance Measures.....33

Conclusion.....34

Introduction

Context

Swift County RDA Boards have developed the RDA's current Economic Development Strategic Plan in 2008. Since then, the RDA has actively pursued the goals, strategies, and tactics laid out in the plan and launched new programs, won grants, capitalized new loan funds, and created an RDA branding strategy. This action plan, which includes direction for the RDA and its economic development marketing strategy, will lay the framework for success in economic development through 2020.

Recommendations

Based on Board direction and informed by planning exercises, the RDA will maintain its four overarching recommendations to focus on through 2020.

- 1. Build Community Capital**
- 2. Enhance the Built Environment**
- 3. GROW Talent and our Entrepreneurs**
- 4. Tell our Story**

These four recommendations enable RDA to focus on needs of Swift County's small town, rural economy to create an environment that enables success in our key sectors: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Energy & Environment, and a new focus on Culture. Culture, is tied to technology, arts & recreation and enhances Swift County's "Quality of Place" which is key to attracting residents. Residents are integral to Swift County's future.

Four Goals to Sustain Swift

1. Build Community Capital

As reported by University of MN – Extension facilitators, social or community capital centers on the idea that social networks strengthen a community and enable it to better resist economic challenges and benefit from economic opportunities. RDA has identified three key approaches to building social capital in Swift County

Build community capital cont.

	High Priority 2017-2018	Medium/Low Priority 2019-2020
Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop, implement ongoing online quality of life initiative to attract new residents/tourists Media initiatives to profile local business and resident quality of life 	
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a network development initiative. Expand Capacity of Local Leadership to create peer group/city champions. 	
Buy Local – Eat Fresh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate Savor Swift Campaign to include local food events, and #SavorSwift Map Initiative to increase local food economy in Swift County 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for local buying program for Swift County government to promote local buying in action.

2. Enhance the Built Environment

The built environment is the physical reflection of the social community and shapes how we interact with one another. The RDA has four tactics for enhancing our built environment.

	High Priority 2017-2018	Medium/Low Priority 2019-2020
Land Inventory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop - Implement online land, space & home inventory and maintenance program 	
Key Sectors & Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key Sectors & Sites Matching 	
Public Places & Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the County’s Tourism Product Explore local option or hotel tax to enhance development activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome Signage and Way-Finding Downtowns & Main Streets Façade Improvement
Land Use & Infrastructure Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality & Availability of Housing Inventory Capitalize on Broadband Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore changes to land use < 40 acre new home to attract new residents

3. GROW Talent and Entrepreneurs

Swift County recognizes that growing local talent is key to sustainable growth.

	High Priority 2017-2018	Medium/Low Priority 2019-2020
BR&E (Business Retention and Expansion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain Regular Communications with largest employers Expand understanding of County/Region’s ag sector & opportunities/demand for value-add and agri-business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define new BR&E initiatives to include key sectors, value-added & ag processing, and business incubation & innovation.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop action plan, create partnerships and implement tactics
Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain Swift County HR Network Expand website to include “Workforce Resources” section for employers and prospective & current residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and Implement Workforce initiative plan to build on employee attraction efforts
Business Resources	Update and expand “Business Resources” section of webpage w/map layers	

4. Tell our Story

People are reached most effectively through stories. Stories, not data are the best way to form an emotional connection with audiences. Tell our Story goal supports the three other goals by shaping how Swift County communicates to audiences.

	High Priority 2017-2018	Medium/Low Priority 2019-2020
Land & Space & Home Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive promotion of key properties to key target audiences 	
Land & Space Resource Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of planning and development tools and resources to local realtors and developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County/Community “Open House” for commercial properties
Content Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content development schedule and create new content – web, social media, photos, video Review and update and expand content/stories 	
Outreach and Content Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Website Development Community website Development Business communication Initiative Social Media Outreach Pro-active lead management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals (creative class, residents, alumni, other target individuals) communications program Media and social media Initiatives

New Strategic Programs

Introduction

The four defined goals define a strategic approach to

1. **Attract residents,**
2. **Build on existing resources and talent, and;**
3. **Best position the county to attract new investment**

To incorporate action into the framework, it is necessary to reposition and shape the goals into something concrete that RDA staff can act on. The goals have been organized into three programs with related initiatives to achieve the objectives of the RDA Board’s planned strategy. An implementation approach that focuses on actionable, realizable, and realistic but aspirational goals is proposed. Programs that are results-oriented and implementable by Swift County RDA staff are identified below.

Land and Space Program (Investment Attraction)	Economic Gardening Program (BR&E/Skills)	People & Places Program (Creative Economy Development)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land & Space & Housing Inventory Key Sector & Sites Land & Space & Housing Promotion Land & Space & Housing Resource Promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) Networks Workforce Development Business Resources Buy Local/Eat Fresh 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of Life Networks Community Profiles Public Places/Tourism Heritage/Culture
<p>Tell Our Story Content Creation Outreach and Content Dissemination</p>		

The two initiatives that support the *Tell our Story* goal: Content Creation and Outreach and Content Dissemination; are utilized by each of these programs to different degrees with different target audiences and adjusted messaging.

Target Audiences and Messaging

Target Audiences and messaging will vary according to program.

	Land and Space Program (Investment Attraction)	Economic Gardening Program (BR&E/Skills)	People & Places Program (Creative Economy Development)
TARGET AUDIENCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurs • Realtors • Developers • Site Selectors • Business Executives • Current and Prospective Residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing Local Businesses • Prospective Entrepreneurs • Academic/School partners • Associations and Organizations • City officials/Peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Class Individuals • Media • New/Current/Past Local Residents • Rural High School Alumni • Recreation, Heritage and Arts Organizations
KEY MESSAGING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your business will be successful in Swift County • Land, Space & Homes are available, and easy to find • We can help you • Data for comparison and decision making are readily available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swift County has a solid, diversified and growing local economy • We foster networks and collaboration to help our businesses grow • We support and appreciate our local businesses • We have tools & incentives to help you succeed • We can help you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swift County offers a unique quality of life in an innovative and “connected” rural location near multiple micro-politans. • See and hear about living and working in Swift County directly from residents • Explore our recreation, arts, food, heritage, and culture • Welcome Home

The next sections outline the three programs and their respective initiatives in more detail and describe tactics and tools for implementation.

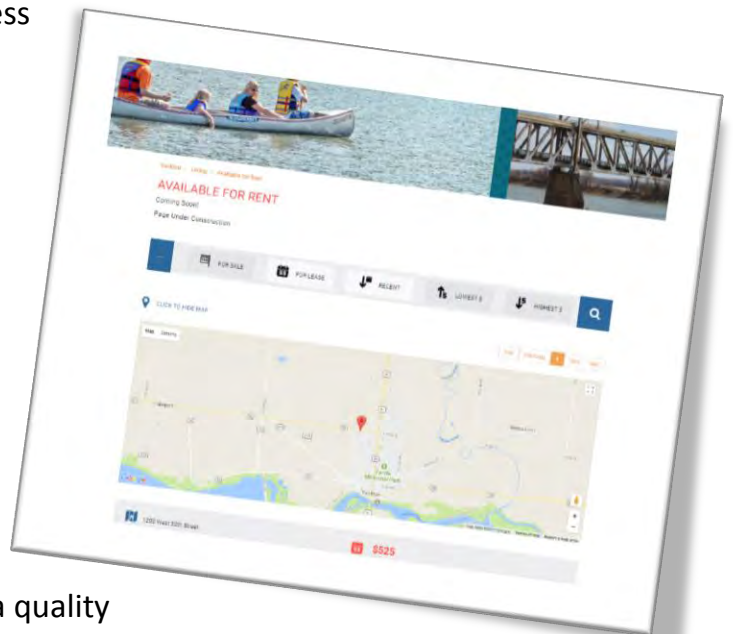
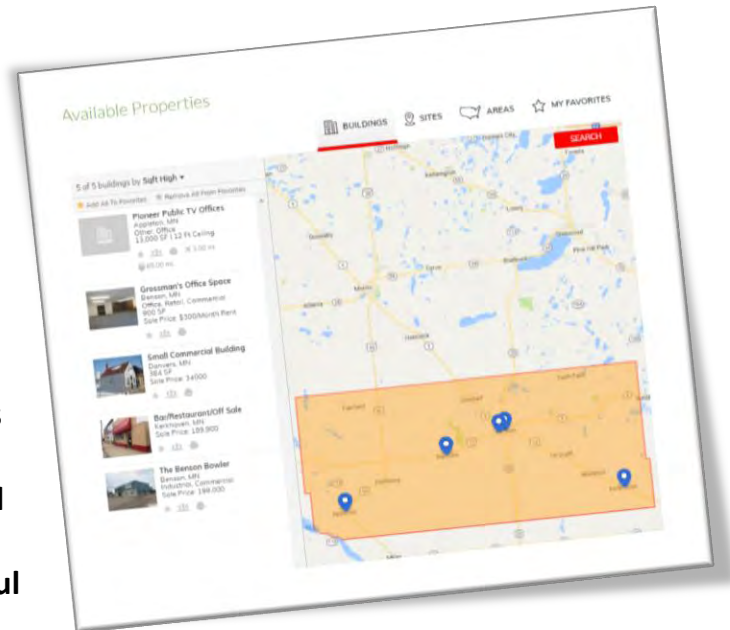
Land, Space, and Housing Program

Introduction

A community must be able to provide space for new businesses and for the expansion of current businesses, and quality housing to attract workforce. Having land, buildings and housing is part of the overall strategy of growing the local economy; the other key part of the strategy is to plan and promote the available land, space and housing. **We must enable businesses and prospective residents to find appropriate space easily and help them become successful in their new locations.**

When site selectors, entrepreneurs or business executives explore options for expanding or relocations, they do a lot of research to find appropriate land that suits their infrastructure, human resource, supply, location, and budgetary needs. These and many other factors influence the location decision. They will visit communities' websites or contact a real estate agent. They often consider many locations before narrowing it down and then deciding on one. The process is similar for workforce recruits. Quality of Place factors such as healthcare, schools, childcare, recreation, shopping, entertainment, cost of living, and a quality homes are considered in making a move.

Since these site seekers and workforce recruits are considering many places, it is important for Swift County to stand out early in the process. Every community in



Minnesota can feature their locally available land and space and homes; so how can Swift County be different and effectively attract investment?

Swift County can accomplish this by becoming proactive in promoting the County's available land, space, and homes. *Part of this plan requires extensive background work to establish the availability and quality of land, space, and housing to create a complete inventory list.* This is a common strategy employed by every community that seeks to attract investment. To be competitive and different Swift County will have to take land, space, and homes promotion to the next level.

In addition to creating an inventory and promoting currently available land, space, and homes the RDA should consider creative methods of land use and planning to allow for the expansion of businesses and to free up additional areas for suitable development. To fully develop this creative land, space and home program and to become proactive in its promotion, the RDA should explore several avenues:

- Land, Space and Housing Inventory
- Land, Space and Housing Promotion
- Key Sectors & Sites

Land, Space and Housing Inventory

An accurate current inventory of land, space and housing will enable effective promotion and marketing for investment attraction.

- *Assemble and maintain an inventory of available commercial and industrial properties (building and land) that can be re-used or re-purposed for new or new-use enterprises.*
- *Assemble and maintain an inventory of available housing properties (dwellings and land) that can be rented or sold and occupied as a home.*
- *Both lists need to be regularly updated and maintained and will require input from Realtors/brokers, property owners, Cities & County.*

Once a list is assembled, putting it to work will be the most important step...

Employment Land Strategy & Gap Analysis

The purpose of this strategy is to understand what land and space is available and to determine where current and future demand is coming from. This analysis will serve as the foundation for developing an effective, targeted promotional program and should

take all types of land and space into consideration including commercial, industrial, retail, agricultural and housing.

- A complete inventory will form the first part of an employment land strategy. The inventory will identify all potential land and space, including both city/county owned and privately owned. Besides identifying current zoning, service and “for sale” status, this inventory will be utilized to develop the employment land strategy.
- After completion of the employment land strategy, the inventory will be further used to identify which land and space can be promoted where and to whom and then used for promotion itself, or for development.

This process is further described below.

Inventory Data Upkeep

As the inventory data will be changing constantly, an annual data update should be conducted. Holding an annual “open house” and/or brokers/realtors’ forum can assist in this function, as can an intern. (Module will include realtor/owner user tool to submit listings, changes, and updates)

Sector/Space Matching

Swift County currently has four key economic sectors: agriculture/agribusiness, energy and environment, manufacturing, and culture. These sectors each have needs in terms of the types and attributes of the land and space they require. The requirements can be tangible, such as infrastructure needs for a manufacturing business, and intangible such as ‘creative spaces’ for a design professional. Site selectors, entrepreneurs, and business owners look at specific needs or attributes when making a location decision. This process is similar for siting new housing development. Once a land use strategy is completed and an inventory created, interested parties would need to be able to make a choice from spaces available...

Web-based Inventory Updates

To allow ease in searching for available land and space the following actions need to be taken:

- Increase information sharing with owners, developers, realtors to inform them that the Swift County website (LOIS by County and City) can provide an alternate, no cost channel for promotion of their listings. “Print Brochure”
- Implement a maintenance program/calendar to keep feature properties and link pages up-to-date. This may require manual email reminders to users.

Land and Space Promotion

Targeted land and space promotion can include:

- **Tradeshows/Conferences (Biomass)**
- Partnerships (MN DEED)
- Advertising
- Community/City Profiles
- Content/Photos/News/Press Releases
- SEO Search Engine Optimization (high & low tech)
- Developer/Realtor promo & social media
- Memberships



Tradeshows and Conferences

A review of previous conferences attended has been conducted: Bio 2006 (Chicago), International Bioenergy 2008 (Mankato), International Biomass 2011-2017 (St. Louis – partnered with Benson and AURI), 2012 (Denver – partnered with Benson), etc... Some may continue to be of interest and some new ones should be explored.

Attendance at a tradeshow or conference marks the beginning of a potential relationship. The event offers an opportunity for Swift County RDA to increase the size of their network, their prospect list, their partner list, realtor list, developer list, media list and so on. It is the ongoing follow up work that will turn that prospect into a new business location or new housing development.

(International Biomass 2018 will be held in Atlanta. Benson is planning to attend.)



Partnership with MN DEED

Partnership with MN DEED and other industry specific organizations for familiarization or “fam” tours and other joint promotional activities is always considered and can provide opportunities for extending the reach and budget of the RDA budget through joint projects. Further cooperation and discussion with like-minded organizations will be a benefit and should be sought for various projects discussed in the plan.

Advertising

The purpose of advertising is to be easily found by site selectors and businesses already interested in locating in Minnesota or the region. The goal of advertising is to create enough interest that a prospect would go the website. A unique URL could be used in the ad, directing a visitor to a unique landing page to better track advertising results. Prairie Business, Minnesota Business and Biomass are examples of periodicals to consider advertising in.

Recent calls have been made to get Swift County to advertise in FOCUS periodical for no cost by encouraging the local business community to purchase advertisements. This model may better serve our needs in periodicals that target workforce/people interested in making a move in their lives or are looking for work in our key sectors.

Community and City Profiles

Swift County has access to practical demographic, county, and municipal profiles. These profiles should be updated to provide a comprehensive yet quick look at the opportunities for investment, the key reasons for locating in Swift County, the quality of life and feature unique information about each of our communities. The profiles could be used in print versions at conferences and in bid submissions to site seekers. The information once developed jointly with the community, should be reviewed, and updated every 2 years.



Content and Press Releases

The creation of content including photos, text, stories, news and press releases is an ongoing task that creates material required to effectively develop a communications program that enables Swift County RDA to build relations with site selectors, business owners, DEED staff, relevant networks, realtors, developers and prospective residents. There is a lot of “noise” in the community attraction and development spectrum. It is critical to have a program that makes it possible to stay at “top of mind” with interested parties.

Developer/Realtor promo and social media

A targeted communications program should be developed specifically to keep realtors, property owners, and developers, etc. informed about land and space opportunities in Swift County. The communications program will include email and social media with a focus on promoting new available space, but should be anchored with a workshop, realtor forum or one-on-one meetings as necessary, to build a “Realtor” Network. This will require ongoing management and expansion of the list of realtors and developers.

Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the visibility of a website or a webpage in the highly desired “natural” or unpaid search results, by having a high ranking. For our purposes Swift County RDA should start a basic, SEO effort of three - five important webpages. These will be selected based on their relevance to the current economic development strategy and traffic potential. The initial targeted pages could be:

- **Business Resources:**

It is critical to target those members of the community who are looking for help and not aware of the resources and service that the county can provide.

This is often part of BR&E visits to existing businesses and banks.



- Featured Land and Space:** Site Selectors and business owners very often look to the web to inform their location decisions. Optimizing a key property page (e.g. “Appleton Innovation Center” as a pitch for the Pioneer Public TV building) may better connect with people.
- Living and Working Here:** Creative workers are more plugged-in to the web and social media than average. Targeting these people, who may be looking for relocation options, is a natural fit. (Welcome Home – tips for returning residents or New to Swift – for new residents)
- Employment Resources:** This section has many options. We can use as a listing module and link to pre-defined search at Minnesotaworks.net, as well as profile Swift County’s largest employers. The HR Network should inform the RDA as to which option to focus on.



RDA should review its priorities, web stats and industry guidelines to determine changes when necessary.

Memberships

Currently members of IEDC (International Economic Development Council) and MAPCED (Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers), the RDA should continue these memberships but explore opportunities to expand investment attraction and network activities to the County. This could include sponsoring memberships of RDA Board Members in organizations where they would represent the RDA and champion our sites available for investment.

Economic Gardening Program

Introduction

The attraction of new businesses to a community is sometimes considered the ideal – and sometimes only – method of encouraging economic growth. However, Swift County RDA recognizes that this method does not guarantee long term stability, as firms may move out when incentives dry up or if they find a better location. It also can be a difficult method to implement as many communities try to attract the same large firms and tremendous effort and costs may be incurred to chase and market to all potential site selectors and businesses. Finally, there are a range of factors in location decision that cannot be controlled by the RDA –wages, access to raw materials, transportation infrastructure, and more.

While cognizant of our need to be accessible to site selectors and ready to respond to RFPs as our Land, Space and Housing program is focused on, Swift County RDA has made it a priority to focus on supporting the existing local business community to encourage economic growth. This is where the concept of Economic Gardening comes from, and its goal is long-term, sustainable economic growth.

Economic gardening is tactically more efficient than attracting new external businesses: Residents and businesses are already located here because they want to be here. *They do not have to be convinced to move and settle in a new location.*

For Swift County RDA “Economic Gardening” is comprised of a broad set of actions that work together to create a fertile ground for existing businesses and prospective entrepreneurs, as well prospective entrepreneurs and residents.

The following programs work in tandem as part of Swift County Economic Gardening:

- **Business Retention & Expansion Program**
- Start-up Assistance and Business Planning
- Loan Funds
- Business Resources
- **Networks**
- Buy Local/Eat Fresh



More information on each follows:

Business Retention & Expansion Program

The true value of a business retention and expansion (BR&E) program lies in fostering a healthy business environment. Creating relationships to understand the concerns of local businesses while creating opportunities for the expansion of local firms can have a direct impact on the local economy of Swift County while also indirectly creating opportunities for the attraction and creation of new opportunities.

A key element of any BR&E program is being available and being attentive to the needs of the local business community. Working in tandem with Chambers of Commerce, Community leaders and Peer development groups is an important part of supporting the retention and expansion of local businesses.

The Swift County BR&E Program consists of the following initiatives:

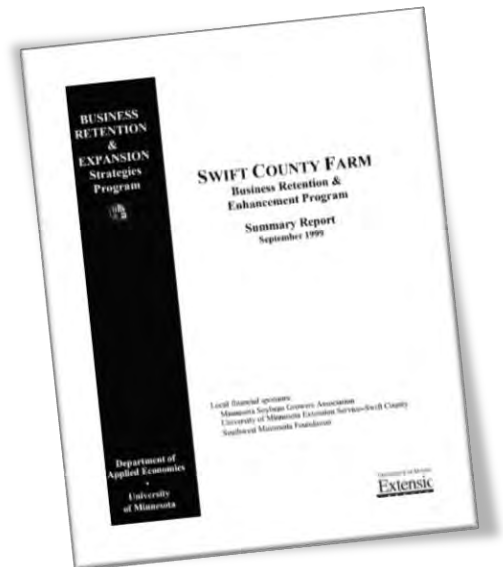
- BR&E Plan
- Communications (Web, Social Media, email)
- Business Survey
- Community Survey
- Holiday E-blast
- Conference Series
- Business Directory
- Swift County RDA – SBDC partnership

As described below:

BR&E Plan

The BR&E program is a critical and integral part of economic development in Swift County. Formal BR&E programs have been in place since the 1990's and have targeted Manufacturers, Agribusiness and Farms BR&E and Mixed-Use. Often credited with helping to ensure Tyler (currently CNH- the county's largest employer) did not leave the Benson area, the Swift County BR&Es have been conducted as full community-wide undertakings as well as modified BR&E Toolkit. The full program has been run approximately every five years and follows the University of Minnesota-Extension BR&E model.

The last full BR&E was conducted in 2009. Swift County RDA should conduct a full BR&E in 2019. The program questions should be identified and mapped against past surveys and present needs and emerging issues in Swift County and its business environment (e.g. Ag program questions relative to 2018 Farm Bill).



Communications (In-Person, Web, Social Media, email)

Regular, and relevant communications will help foster relations with the local business community. Though often conducted through personal visits, utilizing website resources, social media and email; this initiative will enable expansion of the BR&E communications program.

Community/Business Survey & Holiday e-Blast

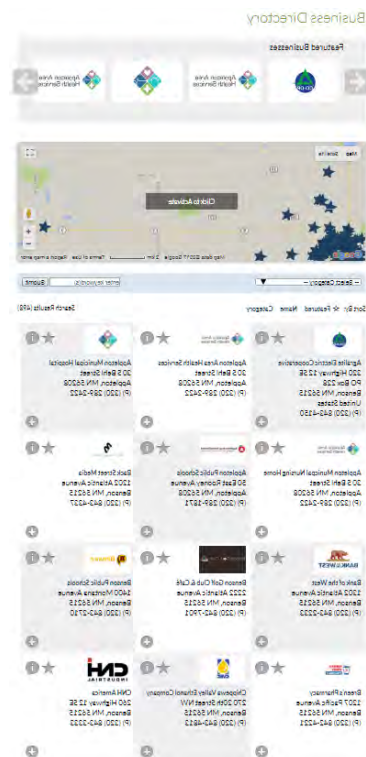
For a few years the RDA celebrated the holidays each December with an annual self-administered survey for community and businesses to track our effectiveness. Utilizing social media and email, a prize was offered (survey taker incentive). Once the surveys were compiled a winner was drawn and an annual email and posting sharing latest survey results and wishing happy holidays was published. This could be rolled in with a regular communications calendar or schedule as we work in greater depth with our cities.

Conference Series

A new initiative, if launched will provide an opportunity to meet with many business owners and can be used to learn more about local issues while providing value and helping business grow. Recommend that training and issue needs identified through business surveys be used to determine conference series. (e.g. Start-up series of classes, workforce development center partnership classes) This could also be a partnership-focused opportunity only, where the RDA assess it only has resources to co-sponsor classes.

Business Directory

The Swift County business directory provides a quick way to find local businesses or to research density of business types. It is an application that exists on the Swift County RDA website. Newly released features now enable more business profiling and video. Thought should be given to how we utilize the Business Directory and if we should use it to feature key employers, key industries, etc., or keep it as a general directory.



Start-Up Assistance and Business Planning

Swift County RDA – Southwest Minnesota SBDC Partnership

The Swift County Small Business Development Center helps small business owners and entrepreneurs to succeed in business. Swift County RDA used to host SBDC office time twice a month in Benson. This offering was cancelled when our SBDC office changed from St. Cloud to the Marshall branch.

The RDA now offers referral service to the Southwest Minnesota Small Business Development Center (SW MN SBDC) consultant assistance to business owners and entrepreneurs including but not limited to:

- Free business counseling
- Financial Projection Assistance
- Business Start-up Assistance

This successful “bread and butter” initiative should be continued.

Loan Funds

Revolving Loan Funds (RLF)

To be investment ready, Swift County RDA should recapitalize loan funds and seek out opportunities for new sources of funding programs. Funds should be flexible to address current business needs and trends. **The One Time Exception Rule should be utilized before June 2018 to free up the limited use State MIF-seeded funds for economic development purposes consistent with this plan.** Absent the One-time Exception funds, the RDA will not have financial resources to achieve its goals.

Loan processes and forms should continue to be reviewed annually to ensure the process is accessible and in line with current underwriting and financing standards.

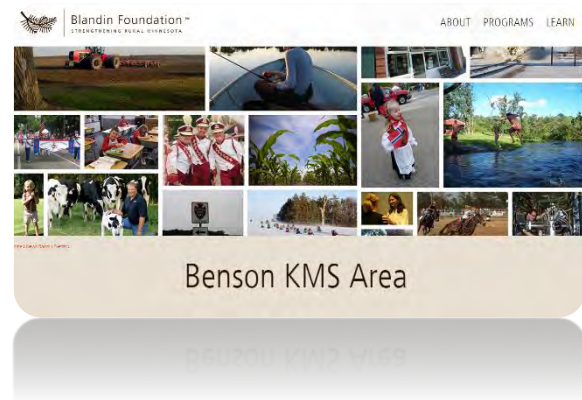
Networks

The creation of social and business networks was cited as a critical, yet missing component of Swift County RDA’s Economic Gardening Program. **Leveraging local talent, experience, and expertise to foster the development of a supportive business environment is a key objective. Networks are not only a tactic to leverage local opportunities but also can be a core building block for long-term economic growth.**

Tactics of this section include:

- Listing and Communication Plan
- Community Champions
- Swift County HR Network
- Swift County Housing Network (realtor, developer, landlords, etc.)
- Local Association Memberships
- Program Development

They are described below...



Listing and Communications Plan

Swift County is full of talented people and unique businesses; bringing them together can produce innovation and build relationships that benefit both individuals and the community. This can be thought of as an asset mapping exercise of networks.

- Create an inventory of existing local/regional networking opportunities including government, art, not-for-profit, volunteer organizations, business organizations, etc. (Include in Living and Working)
- Seek opportunities to co-sponsor events and learning sessions with existing clubs and associations in the County. (Building RDA's network)

Growing our social networks and business networks is an essential component of economic gardening:

- "Advertising" through social media, emails, and personal visits are the first level of interaction.
- Important news and results of networking sessions can be promoted through local newspapers, radio stations and social media channels.
- Spreading information about activities on regular basis is important as it will show a commitment to the program and community members will see the programs' progress.

The purpose of the plan is to create an inventory of network opportunities and provide action steps, along with a communications plan to identify opportunities to develop relations with relevant organizations, as well as promote social activities to enhance residents' quality of life.

School Partnerships - secondary/postsecondary partnerships with local entities should be profiled and featured in communications as a critical component of workforce attraction.

Community Champions Program

Swift County should build a “champions” or “ambassador” program to represent Swift County and promote the County as a place with a high quality of life and a place where many successful business opportunities exists.

Business Resources

Simply developing or having programs of business resources is insufficient; the local community needs to be aware that the resources exist. This step provides for a collection of all resource information on the RDA website for all local and partner business programs and incentives available locally.

Additions to the site should include “**Broadband Resources**”. The purpose of this will overlap in several areas, but the Fiber resources available in Swift County should be promoted by the RDA’s website, partner organizations including ACIRA, media coverage, social media, and information distribution/dissemination through Swift County RDA’s stakeholder email list built from Network initiatives.

Buy Local & Eat Fresh

One of Swift County’s strength’s is agriculture and Swift County RDA should seek to expand the local food production that can result. (e.g. Brewery, Cidery, Food Processing)

Swift County RDA formed a local foods committee in 2010 “Swift County Farm Fresh”, as well as started a local food event in 2009. “Swift County Iron Chef” consisted of several initiatives to promote the local foods economy including: partnering with Public Health to promote Farm to School, building a Swift County local foods brochure and map, becoming an organization partner of “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” and promotion of the Swift County farmers markets.



Swift County RDA should work with Ag/agribusiness to develop an economic development ag strategy to understand issues and define clear direction on matters related to growth and sustainability of local farming and opportunities for value added products to be produced in Swift County communities. Recommended initiatives to consider as priority goals follow...

Eat Fresh #SavorSwift

Promotion of local food establishments/Farmers Markets/Events built around food currently available in Swift County. Should include a map, itinerary/tour, and be piggy-backed on other regional activities/events.

Local Buying

While residents may consider buying local, Swift County should set an example. Swift County RDA should consider advocating for a local buying program for County departments.

People & Places Program

Introduction

The previous sections have detailed programs for promoting Swift county's land and spaces and fostering local entrepreneurship and supporting local businesses. Those programs deal with attracting investment and supporting local business and people. The People and Places program supports both efforts by focusing on the promotion of Swift County's 'quality of place'.

'Quality of Place' is recognized as a key factor in attracting talented, creative people to a community, who in turn create and attract business investment. Creative people want and need to feel at home and connected to the community, in which they live and work and play. They value diverse cultural experiences, unique heritage and easy access to the natural environment. ~ Center for Small Towns

Creating a high-quality of place is beyond what Swift County RDA can do.
Promoting the quality of place that exists, is the RDA's task at hand.

Swift County People and Place program consists of the follow tactics:

- Living and Working Guide
- Quality of Life
- Public Places & Tourism
- **#SwiftlyConnected**

Living and Working Guide & Quality of Life

Swift County provides a high quality of life and has strong assets to promote. Strategically, the best way to promote the existing quality of life is to let real people tell real stories – stories that will affect prospective target audiences on an emotional level. The following needs to be done:

- Content/Stories
- Outreach (Media & PR)
- Social Media and SEO

Content/Stories

Residents and Business will need to be recruited to share their stories: why they chose to move their families to Swift County, what their life is like now, how they are successful, how they manage their careers and why they wouldn't move away under any circumstances. Stories can be recorded on video, photos taken and text versions created. Focus areas should be relevant to current themes. Suggested themes: Food, Alumni, Entrepreneurs, Broadband.

Outreach (Media and PR)

Once an inventory of stories has been created, it becomes important to share the stories widely. Stories should be distributed using existing mailing lists and published on existing websites, but also be part of a new PR program that includes media lists, media relations, community champions and a strategy for getting stories published in larger more urban newspapers and regional magazines.



Social Media and SEO

To create relationships with targeted individuals, social media can be used to effectively share stories, extend invitations for visits, encourage two-way discussion, share photographs or just engage prospects to tour the region and explore the possibility of moving themselves or their family here. A targeted social media campaign can develop relationships with people who are otherwise difficult to reach/find.

A unique SEO program could be designed to specifically find people who are conducting searches with an interest in changing their quality of life.

Public Places & Tourism

Places create community atmosphere and charm. **Swift County should seek ways to improve its tourism products.** Swift County RDA should explore hotel and local option sales tax to support public places and tourism enhancements

Signs welcoming visitors and residents at high traffic entry points has been discussed often by the RDA Board as a desirable addition to our public spaces. RDA should advocate for entry signage branding *Swift County is Enterprising by Nature*. RDA should advocate for way-finding signage and maps for tourist and residents alike.

Projects that Support All Programs

Several projects support multiple initiatives and it makes sense to put together a framework that allows for adaptation of existing projects when new initiatives are added. (When it makes practical sense).

The following projects support all three new program groups and will continue or rejuvenate past initiatives.

- Year in Review
- Newsletters
- Website DNS
- Website Review and Update
- Branded Merchandise
- Printing
- Memberships
- Advertising- Printing
- Advertising- Radio
- Awards Submissions



- Grant Writing

Year in Review

Fair to Fair or Calendar year? That is the question. The annual publication compiles the results and highlights of the achievements by the Swift County RDA/GROW and its programs. It acts as a communications tool, informing partners, stakeholders and prospective investors of the commitment, activities, resources, and results of Swift County's economic development program.

Newsletters

Creation and distribution of the Swift County RDA (or Swift County) Newsletter is an ongoing effort that should be formalized. The newsletter will provide an opportunity to tell success stories, share business resources and provide information about how the County/RDA can help businesses invest and grow.

Website Review and Update

The Swift County RDA website www.swiftcountyrda.com received a complete facelift in 2009, and overhaul with new developers in 2014. The RDA has renewed its contract, added pricing and language to develop child/enhanced partner sites utilizing a shared back end platform. Significant updating, content creation and partner development is now required.

The Web enhancement program is contemplated to promote Swift County as a creative, digital community. The digital presence of our communities needs to be enhanced to successfully market our Fiber Broadband capabilities, and we



are targeting websites of each community/chamber/Swift County. Each entity can choose different options at different price points, or opt for a free profile site hosted on the RDA site. It is anticipated that participation will vary, will require an average of 6-8 weeks per site, and overlap with Economic Gardening's Networks, and Land, Space & Homes' Community Profiles. Site development will be guided by a community's desired messaging, photos and site functionality.

Branded Merchandise

Pens, bags, gloves, mugs, playing cards, etc. Swift County RDA will continue to need branded merchandise for tradeshow, conferences, and local events such as the County Fair. Branded merchandise is an effective method for creating a relationship as people will keep the item, often looking at the logo and make a connection to Swift County RDA, Enterprising by Nature.

Printing

Various printed materials are needed each year, from postcards to brochures or information packets. While many documents are now produced and published online for self-printing, there remains a requirement for some paper-based printed promotional and informational materials.

Memberships

Association memberships such as the Minnesota Association of Professional Economic Developers and National Rural Economic Development Association provide a means of staying informed of economic development trends and provide opportunities for staff learning and training. Overlap with Econ Gardening

Advertising- Print

The RDA utilizes print advertising primary for local limited uses. The RDA should expand this to include targeted ads as the Land and Space program is developed. Key properties could include: Pioneer Public TV Building, Appleton Prison as part of a purchase campaign, Benson Creamery building along tracks in Benson, GROW Building, etc.

Human Resources

The Action Plan in this report stretches the current resources of the RDA & Staff. Successful implementation will require refreshment and acquisition of skills, and good stewardship and innovative use of financial means.

Swift County RDA has utilized interns in the past to assist with these goal areas, and can continue to backfill this way, however, the RDA will not advance its agenda without sufficient resources to succeed. Swift County RDA will have to prioritize action and let some opportunities pass as current resources exist.

Land and Space Program:

- Needs to be detail oriented
- Big picture understanding
- Comfortable working with data
- Able to make connections, initiate communications
- Familiarity with Real Estate Sales helpful

Economic Gardening Program:

- Needs to be flexible
- Spend time on the road (for example, visiting businesses)
- Gather and enter information in database
- BR&E skills/training required
- Interpersonal communication skills required

Places and People program:

- Media and Public relations skills/training desired
- Solid writing skills
- Photography/video editing experience helpful
- Familiarity with local area
- Network development

Budget

Currently we budget according to “class” operating or lending or financing (investing). The RDA should consider budgeting and accounting for programs by Initiative category. As with human resources, tracking time/cost of initiatives when combined with Key Performance Measures should assist in better assessment of program value and help allocate resources and set new goals accordingly.

The RDA could incorporate a project type in 2018 journal entries to trial run this budgeting technique for future years.

Swift County RDA	2018	
	Draft v1	
	2018	
INCOME		
Interest Income Financial Inst	450	Interest on bank balances
Other Income	7,000	\$5k GRO'w loan/\$2k Fair w/Env Svcs
Shared Income CVEC	49,500	99k shares with 50 cent dividend
Shared Income CVEC	(24,750)	HRA share of above
State MIF Close out	120,000	Targeted RDA ED programming fund
Tax Settlement Levy	97,000	Increase to cover personnel costs
TOTAL INCOME	249,200	
EXPENSES		
Ads & Promos	1,000	
Bank Charges	100	
Board Mtg Expenses	3,000	per diem & misc meeting costs
Business Liability Insurance	2,735	same D&O & Bonding
Computer Services	600	
Contract Services	9,000	web and accounting
Employee Related Costs	100,714	
Filing Fees	500	
Investment Expense	4,950	49.5k shares @ 10 cent
Lobbying NOT LOBBYING THIS YE.	-	PR expenses Prison and other events.
Miscellaneous	200	
Office Supplies & Equipment	1,200	
Postage	100	
Printing	1,000	
Registrations	1,000	
Rent		
Special Projects	7,000	Calendars, Fair, Grant(s) match
Dues & Subscriptions	1,200	Member due increases
Telephone	1,340	
Travel Expense: Board	500	
Travel Expense: Staff	3,200	
TOTAL EXPENSE	139,339	
Beginning Balance*	110,000	
Income	249,200	
Expenses	139,339	
Ending Balance	219,861	
Operating Balance Year End E	105,000	
* Beginning Balance includes only those funds designated as "available to operate"		
Jen: \$120k for RDA strategic planning programs including Quality of Place enhancement such as Spif the Swift - downtown development, Multi-year Marketing plan execution of priorities, Study updates required for grant applications such as workforce housing update for multi-family housing development. A decision to do "One-time Exception" must report on economic development activities by Feb. 2019.		

Implementation Schedule

	2017	2018			
	17-Q4	18-Q1	18-Q2	18-Q3	18-Q4
Land and Space					
Land and Space Inventory					
Inventory Land and Space Assets		Inventory Land & Space Available			
Sector Space Matching				Space Matching Program	
Web-based Inventory updates					Data Updates
Land and Space Promotion					
Tradeshows and Conferences			Int'l Biomass		
Community/City Profile Updates		IEDC Data Definition & What makes you Unique			
Content/Photos/News/PR		Content/Photos/News/Press Releases			
Developer/Realtor promo & Social media		Developer/Realtor Promo & Social Media			
Search Engine Optimization		Communication			
Partnerships DEED/Chambers FAM				"Open House" Event	
Advertising					
Housing Inventory		Outreach, Training, Utility buy-in	Inventory Homes/Rentals/Lots		
SCDP					
Economic Gardening					
Business Retention & Expansion Program				Training – Defining Program Goals	
BR&E Plan					
Communication (Web, Social Media, email)		Web, Social Media, email			
Business & Community Survey					Surveys
Expanded Web Development		Swift County RDA, Swift County, Kerkhoven, DeGraff, Benson, Benson Chamber...			
Conference Series Training (Partners)					
Business Directory					Directory Features
RDA- SBDC Partnership (Start-up, Bplan, Mktg)		Start-up Assistance, Business Planning, Market Analysis, Financial Projections Referrals Year-round			
Business Resources					
Loan Programs		Loan Applications Accepted Year-round			
MIF One Time Exception		Get Resolution & Make Request			
Starting & Growing Guide Updates		Update			
Incentives		Revise & Feature on web			
Web-based Updates		Golden Shovel Update			
Local Events & Training					
Local Events & Training		State of the Cities			
Buy Local – Eat Fresh					
Content, Photos #SavorSwift		Develop Content	Create Itinerary		
Local Food Map (Eating establishments, Events, Farmers Mkts, etc.)			Create Map		
Buy Local model					
Employment Resources					
			HR Network Survey		
Networks					
Listing and Communication Plan		Survey	Inventory	Promote	
County Champions Program	Secure ipads	Recruit Members	Precedent for Expanded Web Development		

Swift County RDA 2020

Local Association Memberships		Consider Policy		
Program Development	Ongoing throughout Year HR Network, Housing Network			
Housing Institute	Placeholder for expected invitation			
BCLP		Kerkhoven/Benson Blandin CLP		
People and Places				
Living and Working				
Content, Photos, Statistics	Revision Content, Photos, Statistics			
Advertisement Sales				TBD/HR Network
Print Publication				TBD/HR Network
Quality of Life				
Create Stories	New Stories, Photos, Video		Drone 4-H	New Stories, Photos, Video
Outreach (Media & PR)			Media List & Plan	
Social Media & SEO	Revise existing strategy to prepare for...		New Strategy and Begin with expanded web	
Swift County Fair				Booth/Promo??
Public Places & Tourism				
Highway Sign				
Hotel/Local SalesTax Options	Evaluate impact			
Tell our Story PROJECTS THAT SUPPORT ALL PROGRAMS				
Year in Review				Produce/Distribute
Newsletters		Produce/Distribute		Produce/Distribute
Website DNS				Renew Appleton Option ?
Website Review & Update	Ongoing for 2018 to Incorporate Expanded Local Options			
Branded Merchandise				Re-Order
Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing
Memberships (MAPCED, NREDA)	Renew Membership			
Advertising - Print				
Advertising - Radio				
Awards Submissions				
Grant Writing	SCDP/FRS/MHP	SCDP		

2019				2020			
19-Q1	19-Q2	19-Q3	19-Q4	20-Q1	20-Q2	20-Q3	20-Q4

Land and Space							
Land and Space Inventory							
Inventory Data Upkeep				Data Updates			Data Updates
Sector Space Matching	City SWOT & Housing Priorities						
Web-based Inventory updates				Data Updates			Data Updates
Land and Space Promotion							
Tradeshows and Conferences		Biomass				Biomass	
Partnerships DEED/Chambers FAM							
Advertising							
Community/City Profile Updates				Updates			
Content/Photos/News/Press Releases	Content/Photos/News/Press Releases			Content/Photos/News/Press Releases			
Developer/Realtor promo & Social media	Developer/Realtor Promo & Social Media			Developer/Realtor Promo & Social Media			
Search Engine Optimization – Key Props			SEO				SEO

Housing Inventory	Strategy Development – Housing Institute		Updates				Updates
SCDP							
Economic Gardening							
Business Retention & Expansion Program							
BR&E Plan	Plan and Recruit	Survey		Report			
Communication (Web, Social Media, email)	Web, Social Media, email			Web, Social Media, Email			
Business & Community Survey			Surveys				Surveys
Expanded Web Development	Updates as Needed			Updates	Updates	Contract Renewal	Updates
Conference Series Training (Partners)	Farm Bill			BR&E informed offerings			
Business Directory			Self-Update				Self-Update
RDA- SBDC Partnership (Start-up, Bplan, Mktg)	Start-up Assistance, Business Planning, Market Analysis, Financial Projections			Start-up Assistance, Business Planning, Market Analysis, Financial Projections			
Business Resources							
Loan Programs	Loan Applications Accepted Year-round			Loan Applications Accepted Year-round			
Starting & Growing Guide Updates							
Loan Database Development							
Web-based Updates				Golden Shovel Update			
Local Events & Training							
Local Food Program							
Local Food Event			Iron Chef??				Iron Chef??
Local Food Map (Events, Farmers Mkts, etc.)					Update Map		
Membership “Buy Fresh, Buy Local”		Renew					
Employment Resources							
Networks							
Listing and Communication Plan							
Ambassador Program	Program Administration Through GROW			Program Administration			
Local Association Memberships			Member Renewals				Member Renewals
Program Development			Program Development				Program Development
People and Places							
Living and Working Guide							
Content, Photos, Statistics			Update				Update
Advertisement Sales						TBD	
Print Publication						TBD	
Quality of Life							
Create Stories		New Stories, Photos, Video			New Stories, Photos, Video		
Outreach (Media & PR)		Media and PR Submissions			Media and PR Submissions		
Social Media & SEO	Social media			Social Media			

Swift County RDA 2020

Swift County Fair			Booth & Promo				Booth & Promo	
Public Places & Tourism								
Highway Sign			Swift County Enterprising by Nature Highway signs on 12					
Tell our Story PROJECTS THAT SUPPORT ALL PROGRAMS								
Year in Review			Produce Distribute				Produce Distribute	
Newsletters	Produce Distribute			Produce Distribute	Produce/Distribute			Produce Distribute
Website DNS				Renew				Renew
Website Review & Update	Backstreet				Backstreet			
Branded Merchandise				Re-Order			Re-Order	
Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing	Printing
Memberships (MAPCED, NREDA, IEDC)				Renew Membership				Renew Memberships
Advertising - Print				Ads				Ads
Advertising - Radio								
Awards Submissions								
Grant Writing								

Key Performance Measures

Key performance measures are indicators of success of programs and initiatives. Increases in these numbers will indicate that the new and existing programs are implemented successfully and are having a positive impact on Swift County.

KPM	2017	2018	2019	2020
Land and Space and Homes				
# of realtors on emailing list				
# of communications with realtors				
# of building permits				
# inquiries				
# of new business locations				
# of new jobs created utilizing RDA funds				
# of unique website visitors				
# of new residents				
% vacancy				
Economic Gardening				
# of businesses operating in Swift County				
# of new business start-ups through RDA				
# of businesses on emailing list				
# of business visitations completed				
# of business surveys received				
% change in employment rate				
# full time jobs				
# of network program				
# of visits to "Business Resources"				
# of partnerships				
# of attendees at State of the Cities				
People and Places				
# of stories developed				
# of media on email list				
# of articles in newspapers, magazines, web				
# followers on social media				
# of web sites enhanced				
# of participants at events				
County Population				
Tell Our Story				

Social Media Stats improving				
Web Stats improving				

Conclusion

Swift County RDA's economic development strategy has been organized into three programs that represent an implementable approach to achieving the strategy objectives.

Land and Space Program lays out a plan for Swift County to proactively promote available space, land and homes by first assembling an inventory of properties, and then implementing a targeted promotional program.

Economic Gardening Program focuses on supporting and stimulating local businesses, entrepreneurs, and developing workforce. It includes business retention and expansion activities, start-up and business consulting, business resource promotion, workforce development through partnership programming, promotion of the local economy and development of networking opportunities.

People and Places Program focuses on building and promoting Swift County's 'quality of place' and its attractiveness to prospective residents. Through this program, Swift County will highlight its excellent quality of life, and advocate and support enhancing Swift County's tourism products and public places, and enhance our local community identities.

This plan provides a guide for Swift County RDA and Swift County to proactively take advantage of the opportunity to focus its economic development efforts on these programs in order to further develop Swift's 'enterprising' rural economy.