

# Introduction & Overview

## 1.1 Introduction

At this juncture in its history, the City of Milwaukee finds itself at a critical decision point. While it is graced with tremendous natural, business and human assets, the city must find a way to position itself to capitalize on these assets, compete in a global economy, and capture its share of growing markets at home and abroad. As the U.S. economy recovers from the Great Recession and manufacturing returns to American shores, Milwaukee residents and their elected leaders, businesses and institutions have the chance to define a bold economic path forward, one that advances the Milwaukee 7 economic goals for the Southeast Wisconsin region, supports key industry asset clusters, closes racial and socioeconomic gaps, builds on existing strengths, and creates opportunity for all who call Milwaukee home.

The economies of the City of Milwaukee and the greater Milwaukee region are interdependent and fundamentally intertwined. A robust regional economy supports a healthy city economy and vice versa; but the benefits of economic growth are not always distributed equally among citizens or evenly among municipalities, districts and neighborhoods. In short, even though Milwaukee is a key part of the region and contributes substantially to the powerhouse it has become, that in itself does not guarantee that the city will thrive. Economic growth in the region does not guarantee similar prosperity in the central city. For residents without access—transit to get to a job, skills training, information on hiring—jobs in a neighboring suburb might as well be jobs in another state. The much needed benefits of

economic development do not trickle over, nor do they trickle down.

In our knowledge-based economy, markets and location preferences have shifted toward regions that are socially and economically integrated and supportive of creative sectors. To align with this trend and capture these markets, both city and region must move forward together. *Growing Prosperity* proposes critical actions to be taken—in alignment with regional strategies for growth—to support job creation and innovation, reduce economic disparities, and set the city on a path toward prosperity in an increasingly global economy.

In 2013, Milwaukee 7, the regional economic development organization for the City of Milwaukee and seven surrounding counties, completed a framework for regional economic growth based on the metropolitan business plan model developed by the Brookings Institution and RW Ventures.<sup>1</sup> The City's economic development action agenda complements and nests within this regional framework, while focusing on the outstanding opportunities for growth and particular priorities for development within the city limits.

Milwaukee has much on which to build. In contrast to many traditional industrial U.S. cities, Milwaukee's population has remained stable and has even grown slightly from 2010 to 2012.<sup>2</sup> The housing market is strong in many city neighborhoods, particularly near the city's core;

the Menomonee Valley has been reinvigorated with new manufacturing firms; the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee has a major research emphasis in business and emerging markets; the commercial real estate market was up at the end of 2012; and residential property values are finally stabilizing.<sup>3</sup>

Milwaukee also has a high livability index with significant cultural and recreational assets: national sports teams; entertainment options in professional theater, live music, comedy, performance arts and dance; iconic museums; a delightful range of tourist events (brewery tours to Harley-Davidson reunions); an unrivaled festival season; a renowned park and trail system; world-class museums, major universities, liberal arts and technical colleges; engaged clubs and civic organizations; long-standing ethnic and religious communities; and a well-trained, well-educated workforce. For one of the “10 coolest cities” in the Midwest, Milwaukee has a surprisingly low cost of living.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, Milwaukee offers a lot of bang for the buck. We are brewing more than just beer in the Brew City. We are brewing innovation and creativity; manufacturing; freshwater science; and tech-ready research and engineering, and the world needs to know.

Milwaukee is one of the 30 largest cities in the U.S. and like many of its counterparts has serious

challenges—pockets of poverty, underfunded infrastructure, deferred investment in former “red lined” areas, and disinvestment in areas that have been “left behind.” Some of these challenges are more intractable than others. Yet, the best cure for disinvestment is the return of activity, population and the invigorating re-investment that occurs as a result.

## 1.2 Creating an Action Agenda

In spring of 2013, Mayor Tom Barrett convened a group of community leaders and stakeholders to begin the process of developing an action agenda for economic development in the city. The group included diverse, engaged, civic-minded individuals representative of different economic sectors and points of view: philanthropic, business and neighborhood leaders, workforce developers, city staff, young professionals, successful entrepreneurs and others—in total more than 100 participants. This group was engaged to strategize development priorities and to help identify ways to support the 10 Principles to Guide Actions set forth in Chapter 3.

As a key part of the process, these stakeholders were asked to participate in smaller, focused working groups to share their knowledge and experience and to use their insights to help inform *Growing Prosperity*. Individuals were

broken into groups based on their expertise and discussed topics such as location-based opportunities, human capital development, entrepreneurship and small business support, and quality of life and place—all elements essential to a vibrant and thriving economy.

The groups were also asked to identify some of the challenges facing residents of Milwaukee's inner city, such as: how to find and afford job-specific training; how disadvantaged workers can compete in an increasingly competitive labor market; what barriers exist to network and apply for a job; and how



The downtown Milwaukee lakefront, including the world-class Milwaukee Art Museum, Discovery World, and the Henry W. Maier Festival Park. (Source: Department of City Development)



Mayor Tom Barrett and stakeholders discuss principles to guide actions at a March 15, 2013 plenary session held at the Milwaukee Public Library's central branch. (Source: Department of City Development / Planning)

job training coupled with economic growth can be less fragmented, more streamlined and better coordinated. Many of the strategies and recommendations presented in *Growing Prosperity* are a direct result of these group discussions.

The strategies and actions outlined in the following chapters are ambitious, but through a focused effort and collaborative approach among the various organizations and stakeholders identified, these sets of actions can advance the City of Milwaukee's position within the larger region, the U.S. and the world, and place it on a path to continued growth and prosperity for a broader range of its residents, institutions, manufacturers and businesses.

#### Endnotes for Chapter 1

1. Muro, Mark and Robert Weissbourd. "Metropolitan Business Plans: A New Approach to Economic Growth." Brookings Institution, April 2011.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Summary File 1: 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.
3. City of Milwaukee Assessor's Office, 2013.
4. Lin, Chelsea. "10 Coolest Cities in the Midwest." MSN, January 2013 <<http://local.msn.com/travel/escape-and-inspire/slideshow.aspx?cp-documentid=255893633>> Accessed on 10 December 2013.

## 1.3 Action Agenda Overview

This document is divided into eight chapters:

-  **Chapter 1** introduces the Action Agenda's context and process, and provides a chapter overview.
-  **Chapter 2** summarizes the current national and local economic trends and conditions that affect the city today and will affect its actions moving forward.
-  **Chapter 3** describes the city's unique role within the regional economy, and outlines the vision, goals and principles that guide the actions outlined in this document.
-  **Chapter 4** explores the many location-based opportunities the city has, its current infrastructure assets and needs, and sets forth a strategy to leverage available development sites in concert with the asset industry clusters for which they are most suited.
-  **Chapter 5** identifies the human capital challenges and opportunities in the city, and outlines strategies to support the city's workforce, address employment challenges, and position workers for future prosperity.
-  **Chapter 6** defines strategies to encourage and support the city's existing small businesses and budding entrepreneurial culture.
-  **Chapter 7** looks at the city's quality of place and quality of life, and identifies ways to build upon existing amenities and market Milwaukee as an exciting and desirable place in which to live.
-  **Chapter 8** identifies partners, ways to measure success, and sets a path for implementation.