

# BELLE PLAINE

## LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

### ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS: LEVERAGING THE STRENGTHS OF A SMALL, RURAL CENTER COMMUNITY

Regardless of the size of a community, evaluating and strengthening its role in the local, national, and global economy is essential to establishing and maintaining prosperity. Despite differences in scale, all communities can assess the state of its economy and in doing so, hold itself responsive to the needs of its residents. A community's capacity to compete effectively is not solely defined by broad-spectrum development and booming industry, rather by its ability to leverage its strengths to promote a robust, local economy. It prioritizes the wellbeing of the community and achieves economic prosperity without compromising its authenticity.

Over the past several years, the City of Belle Plaine implemented these ideals in its efforts to promote the economic competitiveness of the community. In its [2040 Comprehensive Plan](#), the City committed to growing and sustaining long-term economic prosperity using a comprehensive economic competitiveness strategy. It plans to achieve this goal by creating a foundation for future growth based on abundant available jobs, solid infrastructure, and diverse and accessible housing. The community's assets of entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation also play a large role in the City's approach to bolstering the local economy. It believes these are essential to promoting growth that preserves the unique culture of the community, and should therefore be at the forefront of its economic strategy.

### WHAT MAY HELP OTHER COMMUNITIES?

#### Evaluate the Current State of the Community

The City's first step to develop its economic competitiveness strategy was evaluating the current state of the local economy in order to identify needs, challenges, and assets. To create a successful strategy, it was essential to keep the context of the community in mind. In its analysis, the City examined local demographic and workforce data, a majority of which it obtained from a [market study](#) contracted by the [Scott County Community Development Agency \(CDA\)](#). This study included data ranging from household income to consumer expenditures to employment trends. The City also used mapping tools and demographic data from the Metropolitan Council's [Local Planning Handbook](#). In response to these findings, the City developed [six economic competitiveness goals](#) that demonstrate its commitment to business retention and expansion, workforce development, infrastructure investments and maintenance, and Downtown revitalization.

## COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT

**COUNTY:** Scott  
**POPULATION:** 7,408

#### Belle Plaine:

- is a growing rural center with a "small town" feel.
- has a pedestrian-friendly downtown that preserves its heritage as a gathering space for residents.
- is located near the Minnesota River, miles of trails, and plentiful park and recreation areas that facilitate residents' active lifestyles and love of the outdoors.
- leverages its entrepreneurial, creative, and innovative culture to foster economic competitiveness.

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#### OTHER RESOURCES:

- [Urban Land Institute: Navigating Your Competitive Future](#)



Downtown Belle Plaine is home to many local businesses that contribute to the unique culture of the City.



The Belle Plaine's Chamber of Commerce helps advance the City's economic competitiveness goals by providing technical assistance to local businesses.



The KingsPath Senior Living Facility is part of the Ridgeview Health Campus, a new mixed-use, health and wellness development in Belle Plaine.

It is also important to note that despite the success of the City's comprehensive assessment, obtaining relevant data continues to be an uphill battle. For communities across the region, especially small cities like Belle Plaine, obtaining and analyzing current, local data continues to be a barrier to promoting greater economic prosperity.

### Leverage Community Strengths and Assets

Leveraging the strengths of the community is central to the City's economic competitiveness strategy. The City values the entrepreneurial, creative, and innovative culture that distinguishes Belle Plaine, and it believes this drives the economic prosperity of the community. In an effort to cultivate creativity among residents, the City organized Downtown art fairs where people could express themselves and share their crafts with other community members. The City also partnered with local elementary schools to have students create window displays for vacant buildings in Downtown. This collaboration not only sparked creativity in Belle Plaine's youngest generation, but also brought life back to an area of the City still grappling with the effects of the 2008 recession.



The City of Belle Plaine commissioned local muralist, Lana Beck, to paint a mural at its Downtown Plaza. The mural, titled "Kindness Rewards", demonstrates the City's commitment to leveraging its creative, entrepreneurial culture to foster economic prosperity and community wellbeing.

Through a collaboration with the [Urban Land Institute \(ULI\)](#), the City identified two untapped assets within the community: its Downtown and its proximity to the Minnesota River. In response to this discovery, the City decided to focus its efforts on revitalizing the Downtown and reconnecting the community to the River. Downtown Belle Plaine is a hub for the City's core businesses that offers opportunities for innovative and emerging businesses to expand or locate. It is also an ideal destination for recreational activities, and has the capacity to be a place that brings people together and fosters community. In order to redirect attention to the Downtown, the City plans to increase residential density in the surrounding areas. This approach will also provide more opportunities for the local workforce to both live and work in the City.

Historically, the City had strong ties to the Minnesota River due to reliance on the river for transporting goods, but over the years this gradually disappeared. The City is now working to restore this connection by expanding its pedestrian network. In the past several years, promoting the walkability and bikability of the community has become a top priority. The City hopes this will reconnect the community to its natural amenities and enhance local economic outcomes.

### Build Relationships Within the Community

Relationship-building is a fundamental part of the City's planning process, especially in regard to economic competitiveness. It not only prompts greater community involvement, but builds trust between the City and its residents. Strong relationships also help the City stay current on and responsive to the needs of the community. Over the years, City staff found that the most successful method for building relationships is going out into the community and meeting people where they are. Even routine activities like requesting a building permit became an opportunity for further engagement with residents. The City believes that important lessons are learned through organic, everyday conversations, and as a result of this approach, the City is able to understand the daily struggles people face and determine how to better serve its community.

### Collaboration and Partnerships

The City relied heavily on in-house support to develop its economic competitiveness strategy. It collaborated with the Chamber of Commerce, elected and appointed officials, and various city commissions.

The City's efforts were also supported by several external partners. As previously mentioned, it used data from a market study contracted by the Scott County CDA to inform the policies in its [economic competitiveness chapter](#) of the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The City also received assistance from the [Scott County Association for Leadership and Efficiency \(SCALE\)](#) throughout the comprehensive plan development process. In 2017, City officials participated in a "Navigating Your Competitive Future" workshop facilitated by ULI, which led to the identification of the City's two primary untapped assets.

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