



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
220 NORTH MAIN STREET, P.O. BOX 8645
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48107-8645
(734) 222-6850
FAX (734) 222-6715

TO: Conan Smith, Chair
Board of Commissioners

THROUGH: Verna J. McDaniel
County Administrator

FROM: Mary Jo Callan, Director
Office of Community & Economic Development

DATE: November 2, 2011

SUBJECT: Authorizing the creation of a Task Force to Provide Leadership
for *Seeds for Change: Growing Prosperity in Ypsilanti* – An Agri-
business Job Training & Entrepreneurial Program

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

It is requested that the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners authorize the creation of a task force to provide leadership for the creation of a job training pilot program in Ypsilanti. This project, *Seeds for Change: Growing Prosperity in Ypsilanti*, will provide job training and placement to unemployed workers interested in the broad range of agricultural employment, while offering shared commercial kitchen space and business support to local agri-business entrepreneurs.

BACKGROUND:

Poverty and unemployment are on the rise in Washtenaw County and throughout the state. The state legislature's recent action to limit cash assistance will create even more need in the community. A new approach is needed to engage longtime impoverished residents who have not been successful in traditional workforce development and human service efforts to transition them out of poverty and into full employment. We have many tools and assets locally, but need additional coordination, support and a shift in paradigm to more fully enlist community resources to help in this effort.

With this in mind, the newly created Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED) and Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MECD) representatives met to explore how the state might support a different strategic approach. The timing was perfect, as the Governor is looking for innovative strategies to address the income/employment needs of this population, and the Office of Community and

Economic Development of Washtenaw County was asked to fully develop and implement a pilot program in Ypsilanti.

DISCUSSION:

Washtenaw County, specifically its eastside communities, has an opportunity to launch a job development, training, support and placement project to move lower-skilled residents into the workforce, with the support of the Governor's office and the state. This initiative will be based in Ypsilanti, and will be easily accessible to population centers with proportionally high poverty rates.

Its primary aim is to provide a space for low-skilled, chronically unemployed or never employed residents to experience success in a low-skill, meaningful job in the growing agribusiness and food service sector, with opportunities to advance into other full-time employment opportunities within the industry. All participants will have access to on-site childcare, skills training, coaching & case management, and volunteer job navigators to help them stay engaged in employment and transition out of poverty. Additionally, any interested participants will be paired with an entrepreneur to assist in planning and launching a related business venture.

Other aims include capitalizing on and enriching local sustainability efforts, including the burgeoning small-scale agribusiness industry in and around Ypsilanti and throughout Washtenaw County; and improving health and nutrition outcomes for local low-income residents.

In addition to creating employment, expanding the local food system and markets yields key dividends for Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County, including:

- Keeping more money in the local economy – for every dollar spent on locally-produced food, up to 80% stays within the local community through the multiplier effect
 - Residents of eastern Washtenaw County spent an estimated \$346 million on food in 2010. Redirecting 10% of that spending toward locally-produced food would put nearly \$35 million into the local economy
- Preserving the environment by reducing the carbon footprint of local food consumption
- Expanding hunger relief efforts and improved health outcomes for local residents through the increased distribution of free or low-cost food
- Further improving health outcomes for local residents through the increased nutritional value of locally grown food
- Increasing civic engagement and community cohesion

This initiative will create a shared kitchen incubator, giving entrepreneurs a low-risk opportunity to expand production and take products to market with free or low-cost workers and/or space, advice on product development, food safety regulations, and product packaging and marketing.

The initiative will also encourage local governments, universities, hospitals, and other partners to purchase products created as a part of existing food purchasing they do. Products will be available for purchase with food stamps, which will address the nutritional needs of low-income residents and expand the market for locally-produced products. Additionally, a community-wide employer engagement initiative focusing on food-related businesses will be undertaken. Participating (or “Promise”) employers will have a competitive advantage through access to:

- Significant workforce development subsidies that come with training or hiring program participants
- Ongoing support from project staff, to troubleshoot challenges that arise with employees placed
- Preferred vendor status
- A trained and supported pool of potential employees, available through a “first source” referral process
- Recognition in marketing materials as a community-minded corporate citizen

Participants will gain job readiness skills while at the shared kitchen incubator and some will be hired by on-site food businesses. Project graduates will move to community employers in food production, processing, distribution, retail, and even farming. Key community partners will be recruited to participate in various aspects of planning and programming. Retention is expected be higher than in other job-training programs because traditional retention barriers such as childcare and transportation will be addressed.

Food Gatherers, the county’s primary food rescue and food bank program and the designated planning and coordination body for hunger relief, is exploring mechanism to improve public health outcomes and hunger relief in the Ypsilanti area. This project is well-aligned with that strategy.

A Board authorized task force will provide leadership on the creation of this project. This task force will be supported by a technical committee of county and other staff and volunteers who have specific expertise to lend to the development of this project. The leadership task force will represent systems and institutions key to ensuring the launch and success of this innovative economic and workforce development pilot program, including:

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
1.	TBD	Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners
2.	TBD	Michigan Economic Development Corporation
3.	TBD	Washtenaw County Workforce Development Board
4.	TBD	Food Gatherers
5.	TBD	Zingerman’s Community of Businesses
6.	TBD	SPARK
7.	TBD	City of Ypsilanti
8.	TBD	Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce
9.	TBD	Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation

- | | | |
|-----|-----|---|
| 10. | TBD | United Way of Washtenaw County |
| 11. | TBD | Washtenaw Community College |
| 12. | TBD | Eastern Michigan University Business School |
| 13. | TBD | University of Michigan |
| 14. | TBD | Private sector representative |
| 15. | TBD | Private sector representative |
| 16. | TBD | At-large representative |
| 17. | TBD | At-large representative |

The Office of Community & Economic Development will be accountable for developing the work plan, recruiting Task Force members, organizing the logistics, and actively supporting the work of the Task Force.

IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCES:

None

IMPACT ON BUDGET:

Existing Washtenaw County workforce development, local Department of Human Services, and potentially other locally-controlled public funds will be utilized for this pilot. Public funds from the state and federal governments will be needed, especially for start-up. Additionally, private grants and philanthropic funds will be sought. The project will also rely on significant in-kind and volunteer support.

IMPACT ON INDIRECT COSTS:

None

IMPACT ON OTHER COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OR OUTSIDE AGENCIES:

To be most successful and sustainable, this project must build on existing assets. Washtenaw County is home to numerous private and public efforts that will directly support or complement this initiative, such as: Zingerman’s Community of Businesses, established nonprofits, Food Gatherers, Food Systems Economic Partnership, Growing Hope, Think Local First, two local Food Co-ops, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital and University of Michigan Hospital, local school systems, University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, Washtenaw Community College, more than one thousand working farms, numerous farmers’ markets, and multiple nonprofit service providers.

CONFORMITY TO COUNTY POLICIES:

The requested Board action conforms to all applicable county policies.

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE CREATION OF A TASK FORCE TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP FOR *SEEDS FOR CHANGE: GROWING PROSPERITY IN YPSILANTI* – AN AGRI-BUSINESS JOB TRAINING & ENTREPRENEURIAL PROGRAM

WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

NOVEMBER 2, 2011

WHEREAS, poverty and unemployment are on the rise in Washtenaw County and throughout the state, and a new approach is needed to engage longtime impoverished residents who have not been successful in traditional workforce development and human service efforts to transition them out of poverty and into full employment; and

WHEREAS, this pilot project's primary aim will be to provide a space for low-skilled, chronically unemployed or never employed residents to experience success in a low-skill, meaningful job in the growing agribusiness and food service sector, with opportunities to advance into other full-time employment opportunities within the industry; and

WHEREAS, all participants will have access to on-site childcare, skills training, coaching & case management, and volunteer job navigators to help them stay engaged in employment and transition out of poverty. Additionally, any interested participants will be paired with an entrepreneur to assist in planning and launching a related business venture; and

WHEREAS, this initiative will create a shared kitchen incubator, giving entrepreneurs a low-risk opportunity to expand production and take products to market with free or low-cost workers and/or space, advice on product development, food safety regulations, and product packaging and marketing; and

WHEREAS, participants will gain job readiness skills while at the shared kitchen incubator and some will be hired by on-site food businesses, or will move to community employers in related fields; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners hereby authorizes the creation of a task force representing systems and institutions key to ensuring the launch and success of this innovative economic and workforce development pilot program, including:

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Representing</i>
1.	TBD	Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners
2.	TBD	Michigan Economic Development Corporation
3.	TBD	Washtenaw County Workforce Development Board
4.	TBD	Food Gatherers
5.	TBD	Zingerman's Community of Businesses
6.	TBD	SPARK

7. TBD City of Ypsilanti
8. TBD Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce
9. TBD Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation
10. TBD United Way of Washtenaw County
11. TBD Washtenaw Community College
12. TBD Eastern Michigan University Business School
13. TBD University of Michigan
14. TBD Private sector representative
15. TBD Private sector representative
16. TBD At-large representative
17. TBD At-large representative

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the task force will be supported by a technical committee of County and other staff and volunteers who have specific expertise to lend to the development of this project.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Task Force shall complete their work and report back to the County Board of Commissioners by August 31, 2011.