



MOMENTUM 2027 STRATEGY



Momentum 2027

Topeka-Shawnee County, KS | March, 2022



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INTRODUCTION

As the five-year Momentum 2022 cycle winds down, it is instructive to look back at where the initiative began and how far it has come. Faced with a population that had soured on Topeka-Shawnee County's future prospects and multiple growth-driven organizations looking for ways to work better together, a visionary plan was developed, and a new organization was created to lead its implementation. Allowing there is always work to be done, local leaders feel it is important to acknowledge the many positives that have emerged from Momentum 2022 and the transformative role played by the Greater Topeka Partnership (GTP).

The new five-year plan, Momentum 2027, provides the opportunity to think bigger and aim higher, to double-down on ensuring that diverse voices are heard, acknowledged, and supported. Topeka-Shawnee County stakeholders are more bullish on their community than they have been for years and eager to move Momentum 2027 forward aggressively. This process will establish priorities and confirm the most effective ways to advance them. Success will require greater levels of collaboration and coordination to ensure the gains of the past five years are a springboard to even greater heights to come.

About Broad Ripple Strategies

Broad Ripple Strategies has been selected as Topeka-Shawnee County's partner to develop Momentum 2027. BRS represents nearly 30 years of experience crafting community, workforce, and economic development strategies that build consensus, drive investment, and get results. Our team worked with Topeka-Shawnee County on the creation of Momentum 2022 and is excited to be back in the community to plan the next five-year cycle of this transformative initiative.

About Arrowhead Consulting

Joining BRS on the Momentum 2027 consultant team, Arrowhead is a management consulting firm based in Oklahoma with a mission to guide companies through the process of strategic change. Arrowhead leverages the business case for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to enhance the competitive advantage of organizations and communities. Arrowhead has developed a framework for assessing DEI organization health, professional development along with a training suite of presentations, executive coaching, and consulting on creating a robust strategic plan utilizing the DEI lens.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Momentum 2027 was developed through a four-phase process that began in August 2021 and concluded in March 2022. It was led by a dynamic Steering Committee of key community leaders. This group was tasked with sharing their perspectives and insights, reviewing research and input findings, considering the guidance the BRS team provides, and making key decisions about the priorities and strategies that will define the new strategy. The leaders selected for the Steering Committee reflected the diverse opinions, perspectives, and backgrounds of the Topeka-Shawnee County community and its residents.

Working with BRS and GTP, Arrowhead Consulting developed internal recommendations for how DEI should be incorporated into the Momentum 2027 process. These included a definition of terms to establish “shared language” for equity, ensuring that the stakeholder engagement process was inclusive and diverse, and a brief discussion of the “business case” for equity at the community level.

Phase 1: Stakeholder Engagement

Input from the people who live and work in a community is an essential component of a strategic planning process. The BRS team worked with the Greater Topeka Partnership to develop a robust, equitable engagement process consisting of interviews, focus groups, and an online survey available in English and Spanish that garnered 2,112 responses.

Phase 2: Competitive Assessment and Implementation Evaluation

Phase 2 offered key insights into Topeka-Shawnee County’s competitive position and helped the Steering Committee make informed decisions on key issues and opportunities that will shape Momentum 2027. The Competitive Assessment synthesized existing research, quantitative data, and qualitative input to evaluate Topeka-Shawnee County as a place to live, work, and do business. It was complemented by an Implementation Evaluation that identified key “lessons learned” from Momentum 2022.

Phase 3: Momentum 2027

Phase III resulted in the development of a next-level strategic plan for Topeka-Shawnee County that blended ongoing initiatives that warrant continuation with new programs and investment to establish the community’s strategic priorities for the next five years. Creation of the plan occurred in three phases: 1) a high-level outline or framework of goals and objectives; 2) a draft strategy; and 3) a final plan. Each phase incorporated review and comment from the Steering Committee, whose work was completed with the final approval of the Momentum 2027 strategy.

Phase 4: Implementation Guidelines

While the community of Momentum 2027 will determine “what” Topeka-Shawnee County will do strategically for the next five years, the Implementation Guidelines prescribed “how” that will be accomplished. It analyzed and established implementation costs and resources, lead and support entities for priority strategies, launch dates and project phasing, and performance measures to track progress towards goal attainment. The Guidelines were developed in consultation with the Greater Topeka Partnership and other partners who will play a direct role in activating the strategy.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee was critical to the success of Momentum 2027, shaping the strategy through multiple feedback channels. Representing a broad group of leaders from the public and private sectors, the Committee was responsible for reviewing and approving project deliverables, participating in discussions about the future direction of Topeka-Shawnee County, and responding to follow-up surveys.

Tri-Chairs

Commissioner Kevin Cook, Shawnee County Commission

Mayor Mike Padilla, City of Topeka

Keith Warta, Bartlett & West

Committee Members

Matt All, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas

Ron Brown, Veteran

Col. Brian Budden, 190th Air National Guard

Todd Blackinton, University of Kansas, St. Francis Campus

Capt. Breny E. Clain, 190th Air National Guard

Mayor Michelle De La Isla, City of Topeka

Tara Dimick, TK Magazine/Envista

Renee Franklin, Strategic Leadership Academy

Aarion Gray, Topeka Public Schools USD 501

Leilani Grey, Topeka Collegiate School

Billie Hall, Sunflower Foundation

Caitlyn Halsey, Dialogue Coffee

Thad Halstead, Advisors Excel

Tobias Harvey, Create Uplift

Glaucia Helena Cruz Pellegrini, Hills Pet Nutrition Colgate-Palmolive

DeAndre Hicks, Student

Amanda Kiefer, FHLBank Topeka

Dr. Robert Kenagy, Stormont-Vail Health

Kurt Kuta, CoreFirst Bank & Trust

Lindsay Lebahn, Plug and Play

Chen Liang, Keller Williams, One Legacy Partners, LLC

Brynne Liedtke, Student

Jeff Martin, Evergy

Juliann Mazachek, Washburn University

Dené Mosier, Kansas Children's Discovery Center

Travis Morris, HAMM Companies

Lalo Munoz, El Centro de Topeka

Michael Odupitan, Omni Circle Group

Staci Ogle, NOTO Arts & Entertainment

Dean Patel, Econo Lodge Topeka

Marsha Pope, Topeka Community Foundation

Nikki Ramirez-Jennings, SENT Topeka

Cassidy Roberson, Schendel Lawn & Landscape

Rotating Council Membership, City of Topeka

Mark Ruelle, Evergy

Megan Schwerdt-Williams, Schwerdt Contract Interiors

Ken Scott, Capitol Federal Savings Bank

Jennifer Sourk, Midwest Health, Inc.

Carlos Vasquez, Hills Pet Nutrition Colgate-Palmolive

Keisheona Wilkins, Washburn Institute of Technology Student

Doug Wolff, Security Benefit

Nick Xidis, Hazel Hill Chocolate

MOMENTUM 2027

Research findings directly informed the Momentum 2027 strategic framework and key initiatives, which include aspirational new efforts but also seek to capture priority ongoing and planned strategic initiatives led by GTP and partners across Greater Topeka. It is critical that a holistic community and economic development vision plan serves to integrate and align key efforts working towards the same goal: Making Topeka-Shawnee County a first-choice destination for companies and talent.

Similar to Momentum 2022, Topeka-Shawnee County's new five-year strategy is oriented around a set of **top-line goals** and **underlying objectives** containing Key Initiatives designed to achieve desired outcomes represented by a holistic set of performance and activity benchmarks. Based on stakeholder feedback that Momentum 2022 contained an unsustainable number of tactical components, **Momentum 2027 has been streamlined** from five goals to four, from 14 objectives to 11, and from 57 strategic initiatives to 21.



EQUITY is central to our goals and objectives. It is the lens through which we will view everything we do and all we achieve.

Topeka-Shawnee County's competitiveness as a place to work is not singled out in the naming of the Momentum 2027 goal areas but is integrated into multiple categories. A Place to Prosper focuses on the creation of quality, well-paying jobs to support current and future talent as well as a Career Connections Program fostering experiential learning opportunities for students with local employers. A Place to Learn targets education and workforce systems and supports to ensure that students and adults are provided the training and skills necessary to obtain good jobs at Topeka-Shawnee County companies. A Place to Belong strategies seek to retain, attract, and embed talent in Greater Topeka to enable them to comfortably live and work in the region as valued, respected, and engaged citizens.

Centering equity in Momentum 2027 will inform all aspects of how the initiative is advanced. Partners must always consider the **following questions** when pursuing strategic actions supporting Momentum 2027 implementation:

1. Who is being impacted by this goal, initiative, or objective? How could more diverse stakeholders be intentionally invited and empowered to participate/engage in this goal, objective, or initiative?
2. How does this goal, objective, and Key Initiative increase access, equity, and inclusion? Could it produce or worsen any disparities?
3. What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes around this goal, objective, or initiative?

These questions will directly inform implementation of all Momentum 2027 components. The interconnectivity of the four goal areas will not only address equity concerns but also seek to move the needle on poverty reduction through improved educational outcomes, better linkages to career opportunities, enhanced diversity of job creation, and expanded access to training and worksites via child care support.

For certain Key Initiatives or their sub-components, **comparative examples** of similar programs from across the U.S. are included in Appendix B of this strategy. The number of the corresponding comparative example is shown parenthetically next to the Key Initiative title.

The following section further details the plan's goals and objectives and lists the Key Initiatives associated with each.

Much has been accomplished in recent years to stimulate activity and investment in Downtown Topeka and NOTO and neighborhoods across Topeka-Shawnee County, but the community is still just scratching the surface of its potential. Enhanced efforts to revitalize key activity centers and corridors must be matched by coordinated strategies to develop new residential, arts, and recreation product and improve the condition and aesthetics of the built environment.

A Place to Live

- **HOUSING FOR ALL**

- Topeka-Shawnee County Housing Strategies
- Housing Advocacy Task Force

- **ACTIVE CORE & NEIGHBORHOODS**

- Downtown and NOTO Master Plan
- 21st Century Riverfront
- Gateways and Corridors

- **ARTS & RECREATION**

- Topeka Arts & Culture Master Plan
- Active Recreation Initiatives

Goal: *Topeka-Shawnee County will continue to enhance its quality of life and place to become a top destination for talent and visitors.*

Objectives:

Housing for All:

Support for development of new and rehabilitated for-sale and rental housing across all styles and price points to make Greater Topeka a more competitive location for talent

Active Core and Neighborhoods:

Continuing the community's renaissance through ongoing downtown revitalization and renewed support for diverse, well-maintained, thriving, safe, and sustainable neighborhoods

Arts and Recreation:

Making Greater Topeka a more dynamic community of choice by enhancing local arts facilities and programs and developing new active recreation amenities

A Place to Prosper

- **RETAIN & EXPAND**

- Existing Business Services
- Career Connections Program

- **LAUNCH & DEVELOP**

- ASTRA Innovation Center & District
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building

- **PROMOTE & ATTRACT**

- Targeted Corporate Attraction
- Developer Outreach and Engagement

While quality of life and quality of place have become key determinants of competitiveness for talent, a good job is ultimately the most important means for individuals to build wealth and plant roots in a community. Because most local jobs are created by existing businesses, their capacity to grow is critical to any economic development strategy. Increasingly, this involves securing the talent necessary to maintain and expand operations. Cluster-

building in targeted sectors must also focus on supporting entrepreneurial opportunities and attracting new employers to build towards a critical mass of assets and expertise.

Goal: *Topeka-Shawnee County will create opportunities for workers to flourish by targeting high-value corporate relocation prospects and supporting startup and existing businesses as they build market share and attract and retain diverse, educated, and highly skilled employees.*

Objectives:

Retain and Expand:

Provision of customized, high-value existing business retention and expansion programming and services to advance growth and talent acquisition needs

Launch and Develop:

Support for entrepreneurship, innovation, and small business development through new facilities, programs, and ecosystem-building activities

Promote and Attract:

Implementation of marketing and business recruitment programming and developer-engagement activities to successfully attract employers in targeted, well-paying sectors

Talent is the most important factor determining how communities compete for jobs and investment. While it is important and necessary to promote Topeka-Shawnee County's advantages and opportunities to talent prospects outside the region, optimizing the potential of local education and training systems and institutions to deliver work-ready graduates for area companies remains the most sustainable solution to labor force

availability constraints. Expanding the pool of adults fully engaged in the workforce and earning competitive wages creates additional benefits for public health, public safety, retail development, housing, and other quality of life components. Education is also a proven tool to reduce local inequities and improve access to high paying careers.

Goal: *Topeka-Shawnee County will foster a culture that addresses performance inequities across the education system and provides students and adults with access to programs, services, and support necessary for success in life and the workplace.*

Objectives:

Cradle through Career:

Coordination of support services and programming from birth through career to guarantee that students graduate ready for post-secondary education or the workplace

Access to Opportunity:

Ensuring that adults seeking to access training for new or improved employment opportunities have the support and guidance necessary to succeed

A Place to Learn

- **CRADLE THROUGH CAREER**

- C2C Collaborative & Data Exchange
- Washburn Next

- **ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY**

- Career Navigation Center
- Childcare Task Force

A Place to Belong

- **ENGAGED & EMPOWERED**

- Diversity & Inclusion Strategy

- **PROUD & AWARE**

- “My Topeka” Campaign

- **RECRUIT & RETAIN TALENT**

- Choose Topeka 2.0
- Talent Immersion Efforts

Momentum 2027 public input revealed that some stakeholders continue to feel disengaged from local networks of influence and frustrated by a perceived slower pace of progress in their neighborhoods. Topeka-Shawnee County residents will become committed agents for community change through purposeful efforts to acknowledge, engage, and empower them to make a difference and be proud advocates for the community.

Talent that is new to the region or in the community for years will value what Greater Topeka offers as a place to live, work, visit, and thrive.

Goal: *Topeka-Shawnee County will ensure that long-time, new, and future residents are proud of their community and engaged and empowered to effect positive change.*

Objectives:

Engaged and Empowered:

Building a culture of equity and inclusion to enable all residents to live fulfilling lives through access to quality education, wealth-creating employment, and positions of influence and leadership

Proud and Aware:

Improving levels of pride by equipping stakeholders with the knowledge, information, and perspective to tell positive stories about local assets and opportunities

Recruit and Retain Talent:

Enhancing workforce competitiveness by attracting skilled workers and retaining local talent through engagement in personal, professional, and community networks

KEY INITIATIVES

Momentum 2027's four goals and 11 objectives can be advanced by activating a focused set of Key Initiatives that correspond to specific programs, projects, processes, and investments. Consistent with the desire among stakeholders for a more streamlined vision plan, the draft Momentum 2027 strategy includes 21 Key Initiatives versus the 57 principal action steps included in Momentum 2022.

The Key initiatives incorporate a range of ongoing and planned activities along with new concepts that can help move Topeka-Shawnee County forward. It is BRS' belief that strategic plans should target a limited number of high-impact initiatives rather than a "kitchen sink" approach reflecting all ongoing strategic activity in the community; our philosophy is that "big rocks cause the broadest ripples." This principle was also derived from our nearly three decades of experience observing how strategic plans are implemented in practice.

The fact that the Momentum 2027 as proposed recommends 21 Key Initiatives opposed to 57 does not mean that the multitude of additional actions that could have been included are not important, nor that they should be ignored in the coming five years. Momentum 2027 simply reflects the top priorities that emerged from the full breadth of research and feedback into the competitive issues, challenges, and opportunities Greater Topeka faces as it strives to become a community of choice for talent and companies.

Plans and processes addressing innumerable other Topeka-Shawnee County issues and competitive realities will continue to be advanced by organizations, institutions, governments, non-profit entities, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders working to make the community better.

The remainder of this document describes each of the 21 Key Initiatives in detail. The arrangement of Key Initiatives in the document **does not imply hierarchy or priority**.

It is also important to understand that the Key Initiatives are recommendations for Topeka-Shawnee County to consider but are not strategic mandates that the community is forced to implement. As with Momentum 2022, the approved Momentum 2027 plan will comprise priority opportunities to move the region forward, but the dynamics of these opportunities might change based on local conditions, external trends, leadership preferences, new funding resources, and other factors.

Momentum 2027 is a living plan and must be flexible enough to reflect shifting priorities.

Topeka-Shawnee County Housing Strategies

WHAT

The Shawnee County 2038 Comprehensive Plan adopted in November 2018 included a chapter on Housing and Neighborhoods assessing demand and recommending tactical priorities for the county's future housing sector. The plan found that Shawnee County must produce additional housing options across all price points to enable movement in the market, including offering amenities commensurate with asking prices to entice residents to move up to higher cost housing, freeing up lower priced units for new buyers. Developing additional housing variety across all price points would also allow residents to transition through desirable housing options as they age.

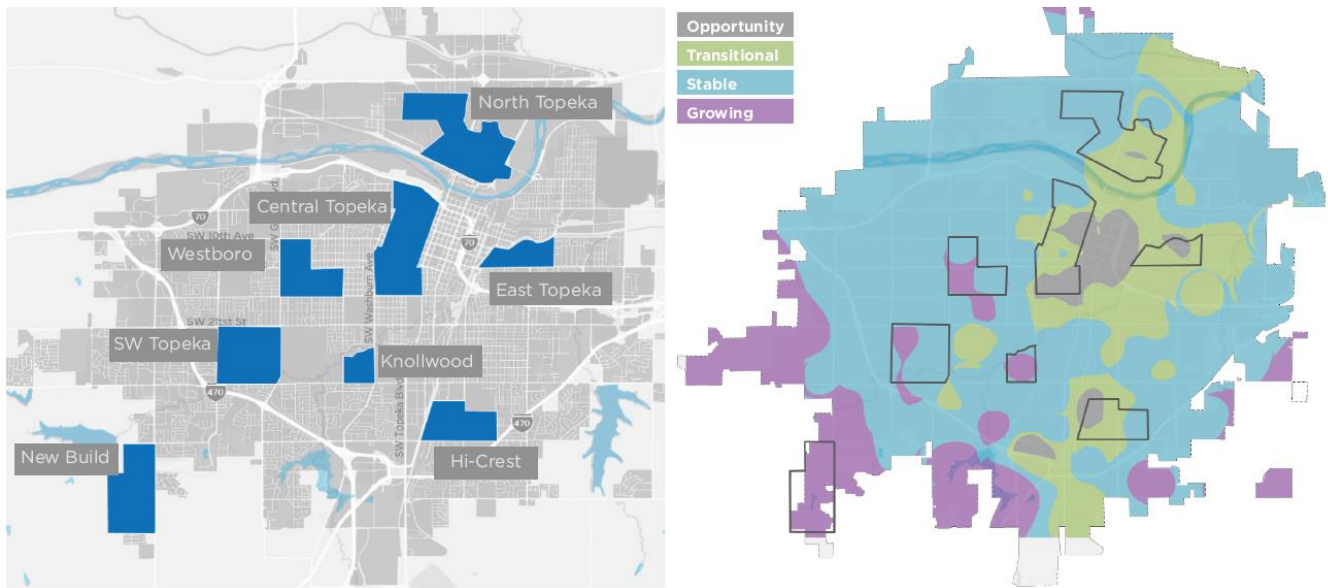
The Comprehensive Plan advised county officials to focus on fostering the construction of affordable housing options while letting the market produce higher-end homes. The housing chapter prescribed four recommendations and associated tactics to achieve the county's housing goals for 2038. Recommendations included:

- Encourage adequate development to allow for the growth of Shawnee County.
- Develop a range of housing options, especially those that are affordable for low income and those that cater to higher income households.
- Create quality neighborhoods to facilitate a high standard of living for homes in urban, suburban, exurban, and rural areas, including unincorporated towns.
- Identify and preserve areas for development of parks and open space.

To complement countywide goals in the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Topeka commissioned a Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy to assess the city's housing needs at all income levels and establish actionable strategies to improve existing housing stock and effectively plan to meet future demand. The plan was delivered in July 2020.

Six strategies and 27 tactics were proposed to address Topeka's housing needs across the following community priorities: 1) Improve the quality of existing housing; 2) Address abandoned and vacant properties; 3) Expand resources to encourage housing stability and homeownership; 4) Encourage development of a diverse mix of housing types; 5) Expand production of affordable housing to enhance economic mobility; and 6) Expand financial and organizational capacity.

FOCUS AREA MAP / NEIGHBORHOOD CYCLES MAP



Source: Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy

The plan was accepted by the Topeka City Council but not adopted as some councilmembers questioned certain recommendations and assumptions of the consultant.

However, the council did adopt an Implementation Plan for the Housing Strategy in December 2020. The Implementation Plan sought to answer the question, “Where do we start?” and separated tactics that were ready to be activated immediately (Tier A) from those that required more planning (Tier B).

Tier A tactics included: Affordable Housing Trust Fund; Weatherization; “Take 2” Tenancy; Aging In Place; and Rehab Assistance (Self Help). Tier B was comprised by: Land Bank; and Downtown Area Housing. These tactics were further developed into one year action plans detailing what, who, when, and how they will be accomplished. The 2021 Topeka Downtown Master Plan will inform and complement the Citywide Housing Strategy. It provides tactical specificity related to housing opportunities and priorities in the nine District Plans included in the downtown strategy.

WHY

Shawnee County is expected to reach a population of more than 192,500 by 2040, an increase of 14,599 residents. This will require about 5,700 new units – roughly 240 units per year – to accommodate this growth, slightly above the current rate of construction. Outside of Topeka, the county has enough housing for households making \$50,000 to \$100,000 but is lacking homes at income ranges above and below those figures.

At the city level, staff feel the Topeka Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan represents a defensible blueprint to cultivate a more dynamic local housing market. They are working to implement priorities under their purview in government but stress that the city alone cannot effectively advance the goals of the plan without support from partners across the community. It will truly “take a village” to overcome the challenges of residential development in today’s market.

Consultants and volunteer leadership also understood that the Housing Strategy must be seen in this broader community-wide context. As the plan states in its Executive Summary, “This effort was also seen as providing an important resource to fulfill some of the community development goals in the city’s holistic community plan, Momentum 2022.”

Because of the time and effort that went into development of the Housing Strategy Implementation Plan, its adoption by City Council, and subsequent efforts to implement the plan, it behooves Momentum 2027 to incorporate the Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy into the community’s five-year economic development vision plan. So too should Momentum 2027 reflect the priority recommendations of the Shawnee County 2038 Comprehensive Plan’s housing component.

However, it will also be important to determine what may have impeded both strategies from having greater initial impacts. This is especially true as the region’s housing market continues to be ranked among the most active in the nation by outlets such as Realtor.com. The website recently named Topeka the third hottest housing market in the U.S., the only Midwest city in the top ten, and the most affordable city in the top 20.

The Covid-19 pandemic understandably diverted resources and attention to more pressing local concerns, but housing capacity remains a critical challenge for Greater Topeka to address. The Housing Advocacy Task Force proposed in the next Key Initiative could serve a valuable role advising the city and county on implementation of their housing plans and suggesting tactical adjustments when appropriate.

HOW

Implementation of Shawnee County 2038 Comprehensive Plan housing recommendations

- The four priority housing development goals and underlying tactics in the Comprehensive Plan will inform the county’s housing policies and support practices through the final years of the next decade. Partners across the public and private spheres should ensure that housing-related actions are informed by these recommendations and serve the county’s broader housing goals.
- Whenever possible, alignment between the housing strategies of Shawnee County and the City of Topeka should be pursued and leveraged through implementation.

Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy implementation

- Working from the December 2020 Implementation Plan, the City of Topeka has begun implementing the short-term priorities under their purview prescribed in the strategy and action matrix. Partners in economic development, regional planning, finance, development, and neighborhood revitalization should support the city and county as necessary to effectively fulfill the goals of the housing strategy. This includes capitalizing the Housing Trust Fund, which was the highest priority strategy of the study.
- To assist neighborhoods with improving/increasing their housing stock, the City of Topeka could better advise residents and investors on housing development and redevelopment opportunities and requirements. This could capitalize on potential synergies between existing divisions of Community Engagement, Housing Services, and Planning.

Housing Advocacy Task Force advisement

- The Housing Advocacy Task Force proposed in the following key initiative could serve as a valuable resource for city and county public officials and partners as they implement their housing strategies. Meetings could enable public staff to inform leadership of policy and regulatory opportunities and challenges to incorporate into their advisement.
- An initial Task Force meeting would be a good opportunity to assess the initial years of city and county housing strategy implementation to determine which efforts have been successful and which have struggled. Gaining a better understanding of how the strategies can be advanced more effectively could help create renewed momentum for implementation.

Tactical adjustment

- As a living plan, the county and city housing strategies must be responsive to changing market conditions and trends. Tactical adjustments will likely be necessary as implementation progresses.
-

Housing Advocacy Task Force (CE1)

WHAT

Residential development is largely demand driven. Topeka-Shawnee County's slow population growth of the past two decades likely creates the perception among the development community that demand for new residential product is low. If there was more return on investment to be made in new Topeka housing versus competitor markets, there would likely be more production.

Stimulating new housing in some parts of Greater Topeka is therefore a "math problem:" What are the real gaps between the cost to develop new product and developers' expected return and how can those gaps be bridged? In neighborhoods where construction of new market-rate product is more viable, developers should be made to understand what opportunities exist and how to bring projects to fruition.

Shawnee County's 2038 Comprehensive Plan and Topeka's Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy laid out roadmaps for how new and rehabilitated housing can be built in the city and county. The city's study further prescribed enhancements like the Housing Trust Fund to achieve these goals. Without a reliable, renewable funding source, the Housing Trust Fund will not fully serve its intended function of closing the gap for quality affordable housing units over the next five years.

Elected officials, residents, and businesses must understand the realities of Topeka-Shawnee County's housing market and exactly what is needed to stimulate new residential development. Reviewing and understanding the dynamics behind completed projects like RockFire, Lauren's Bay, and others would also provide useful ideas and scenarios for future housing opportunities.

Therefore, to proactively influence policy makers and voters and identify strategies to further advance market-rate residential development in viable neighborhoods, **Topeka-Shawnee County should assemble a Housing Advocacy Task Force of key leaders and experts to guide local efforts to resource and build for-purchase and rental housing of all types.**

Its membership could be comprised by public officials, agency staff, private and non-profit housing developers, economic development professionals, neighborhood representatives, funding entities, architects, planners, realtors, and other experts with keen perspectives on the local housing market and residential development sector. Facilitated Task Force meetings would customize narratives to establish policy priorities, build consensus around enhancing and better utilizing existing incentives, and promote new housing opportunities in proven sub-markets.

If necessary, the Task Force's efforts could be augmented by research demonstrating countywide housing demand, priority opportunity sub-markets and parcels, and return on investment from incentivized projects.

The Task Force would have no formal authority or governance over any public or private entity but rather serve as an influential voice for taking the necessary steps to stimulate new housing development in greater Topeka.

WHY

Lack of quality rental and for-sale housing at multiple price points in a variety of styles is a national crisis. Momentum 2027 public input and prior reports and studies confirmed that Topeka-Shawnee County is also facing significant challenges to provide sufficient housing to meet current and future demand. This compromises the community's ability to attract and retain talent and reportedly leads many buyers to explore markets east of the county.

Housing scarcity is also a serious economic development problem and should be treated as such. More than just a housing choice problem, it is a school district problem and a downtown and core area problem where thousands of people and units have been lost over the past four decades. It is a problem of quality at both the affordable and highest ends of the market. And it is a problem of lack of local builders and developers to make projects happen.

Simply put, there are no easy solutions to the current housing crisis; it has stymied policy makers, housing advocates, and development experts at all levels of government. Years of sub-optimal levels of residential development have left Topeka-Shawnee County with little available housing and few projects in the pipeline just as price escalations have further limited the options of home and apartment seekers.

Greater Topeka needs a compelling voice to champion bold measures to better incentivize affordable housing and stimulate the development of market-rate units. The Housing Advocacy Task Force could serve this important role by bringing public and private partners together around an action-oriented agenda for quality housing growth.

HOW

A mission and framework

- Before individuals are approached to serve on the panel, a mission statement, membership parameters, and operational framework for the Housing Advocacy Task Force should be established. Creation of this content would be facilitated by an entity designated as the appropriate administrator of this process.

- The ultimate goal of the Task Force should be advocate for necessary action to stimulate the development of new affordable and market-rate housing. This would include a review and understanding of past housing development to inform support tactics for new development.

Building the roster and hosting meetings

- The Task Force should be comprised of members with specific expertise across multiple housing related issues and perspective on the Greater Topeka market. They should not consider membership as a profit-making opportunity but rather a chance to support economic growth and talent enhancement in their community.
- Meeting frequencies and durations would be determined by administrative staff and Task Force members. After initial sessions to develop a baseline understanding of the market, its issues, and the Task Force's advocacy priorities, it is possible that meetings would only be called when a specific challenge or opportunity arises requiring the Task Force's feedback.

Acting on tactical priorities

- Positions taken by the Task Force will compel action from public sector partners and private sector actors. These would impact not only regulatory and incentives policies but also outreach to potential housing developers and investors.
-

Downtown and NOTO Master Plan

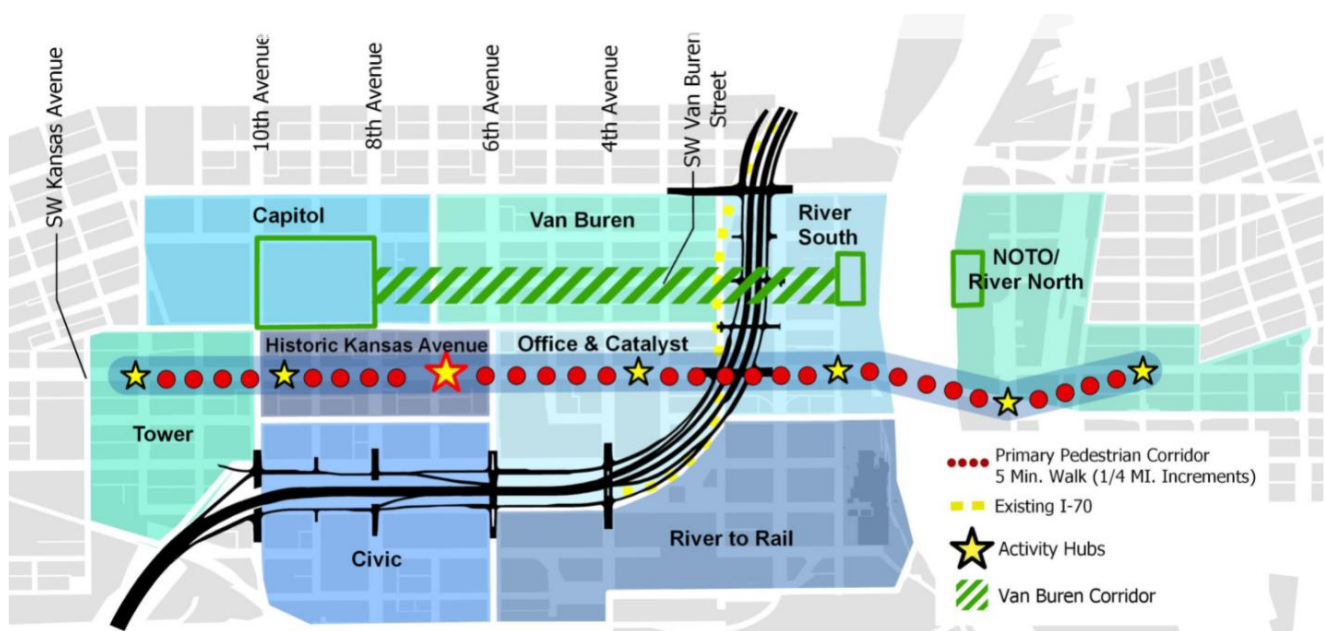
WHAT

Downtown Topeka, Inc. (DTI) commissioned a Downtown Market Strategy delivered in April 2019 to better understand market possibilities in Downtown Topeka and formalize a strategic framework to support and guide future development. The Strategy focused on priority areas for development, branding of key downtown districts, and alignment of resources and implementation partners to achieve success.

To plan for the next generation of downtown development, the Topeka Planning and Development Department subsequently produced an updated Downtown Master Plan (DMP) which was approved by the Topeka Governing Body on May 4, 2021. Setting the stage for the next ten years of downtown development, it built on the efforts of the 2019 Downtown Market Study by creating a series of **District Plans** based on the market study recommendations. Each District Plan included prescribed land use, zoning, and streetscape improvements and allocated shares of the Market Study's ten-year recommendations for housing units, office uses, retail, and hotel beds.

The foundation of the DMP included a Physical Development/Land Use Guide, Market-Based Vision, Aspirational Vision, and "Plans Within a Plan" to properly align the nine District Plans to complement rather than compete against each other. **NOTO/River North is included as one of the District Plans.**

DOWNTOWN TOPEKA DISTRICTS AND HUBS



Source: City of Topeka Downtown Master Plan

The DMP was organized into three parts:

- Part 1/Downtown Context – This section detailed the downtown's context, including purpose, boundaries, overarching goals, district framework, market demand, street network/circulation, incentives, land use, zoning, and design emphasis.
- Part 2/District Plans – This section translated the demand identified in the market study towards viable development projects.
- Part 3/Implementation – This section included a framework for priorities and actions to help implement the District Plans, including infrastructure projects, catalytic development, zoning changes, and building design standards.

A key component of Downtown Topeka revitalization will be the I-70 Polk-Quincy Viaduct Project, the reconstruction of a deteriorating span of interstate from MacVicar Avenue to 6th Street. A formal agreement to work cooperatively towards implementation of the I-70 Polk-Quincy Viaduct Project was signed in Fall 2021 by the Kansas Department of Transportation, City of Topeka, Shawnee County, Metropolitan Topeka Planning Organization, Topeka-Shawnee County Riverfront Authority, Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority, and the Greater Topeka Partnership.

Work to bring the viaduct project to fruition should be an area of focus for all Downtown Master Plan partners.

WHY

In today's world of economic development, jobs follow talent. The end game for the DMP is not just to plan for future land uses and infrastructure investment, but to elevate quality of life in Downtown Topeka as a premier economic development asset for the region and state. A vibrant and attractive mixed-use regional center will help Greater Topeka compete with other metros for talent retention and attraction, particularly of young professionals. Investment in place-based strategies aligned with an achievable vision for downtown as "everybody's neighborhood" would position the DMP as a talent attraction plan in addition to a land use plan.

City officials, DTI, and other key partners are utilizing the Downtown Master Plan to guide and inform plans to drive reinvestment to Downtown Topeka, optimize development regulations and incentives, and create and leverage partnerships to achieve targeted goals. Like the Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy, the Downtown Master Plan is a recently completed blueprint to assist public and private efforts to continue the revitalization of Downtown Topeka.

Momentum 2027 seeks to leverage existing plans and strategies whenever possible and should incorporate the DMP as its blueprint for continued Downtown Topeka revitalization.

HOW

Progress assessment and tactical prioritization

- Nearly a year into strategic implementation of the DMP, city officials and DTI should take stock of efforts to date to determine ongoing priorities for activating the plan's key recommendations.
- This assessment should also take into account how Momentum 2027's key initiatives affect and complement the DMP to identify potential adjustments or improved coordination between Downtown Topeka activities and priorities for riverfront development, active recreation, gateways and corridors, and other Momentum 2027 initiatives.

Coordinated implementation

- Near term and later stage tactical priorities identified through the Downtown Master Plan should highlight opportunities for key stakeholder entities to work more closely to advance key strategic components. These should be approached in coordination with ongoing and proposed efforts in housing, riverfront development, neighborhood revitalization, the ASTRA Innovation Center, the I-70 Polk-Quincy Viaduct Project, and other initiatives.
-

21st Century Riverfront (CE2)

WHAT

Leveraging years of planning and proposed development scenarios along the Kansas River in Downtown Topeka, a task force and advisory board of local leaders have determined that current opportunities warrant a major push to transform the city's riverfront.

Recent momentum to develop downtown's Kansas Riverfront was fueled by discussions from a Visit Topeka Destination Development Task Force, which identified riverfront revitalization as one of two¹ priority efforts to enhance the community's destination appeal. A volunteer Riverfront Advisory Council (RAC), a subset of the Topeka Shawnee County Riverfront Authority Board, can help inform key opportunities for the task force, including spurring recreational activity on and around the river and working with other entities to connect future riverfront projects to the Kansas Avenue corridor and other nearby developments.

The Council recently travelled to Memphis and Des Moines to see these cities' riverfront revitalization efforts in person. An issue that had previously held up Kansas River efforts is close to being resolved as a new weir, recently completed, should make future activity on the river much safer.

Current RAC plans call for the development of a “vision book” for the Kansas Riverfront, informed by extensive community input. The final vision book would catalyze efforts to raise funds for preferred projects and initiatives and serve as a prospectus to attract development.

The Riverfront Advisory Council can capitalize on implementation of key District Plans in the recently approved Topeka Downtown Master Plan. Three District Plans have direct applicability to the 21st Century Riverfront Key Initiative: 1) Noto/River North, 2) River to Rail, and 3) River South.

- **NOTO/River North** has successfully positioned itself as Topeka's arts district and features assets such as a mural program and Great Overland Station that can be further enhanced and leveraged. Future strategies to increase public art displays and develop a planned Topeka Riverfront Park could support retail and restaurant spaces and advance active recreation amenities. These improvements should include opportunities to meaningfully connect with the Kansas River through walking, biking, boating, and perhaps even zip lines over the water.
- **River South** features a mix of existing industrial, repurposed buildings, and new buildings along the river that could anchor an amenity-rich innovation district. This opportunity would take advantage of views to the river, natural landscapes, the Great Overland Station, and

¹ The other priority, youth sports, will be addressed later in this report.

Capitol building in a walkable setting with an urban feel to accommodate entrepreneurs and growth in animal health sciences or other sectors. Shared green space, a river trail, and bike amenities would highlight an important part of Topeka's history while complimenting the downtown core and NOTO.

- Influenced by major industrial footprints such as Hills Pet Nutrition, the former Hallmark building, and BNSF, the **River to Rail** district is well positioned on downtown's levee-protected eastern edge to attract more intermediate manufacturing, warehousing, innovation, and heavy service industries between the riverfront and railyards. The district also includes industrial heritage buildings with adaptive re-use potential for creative entrepreneurs.

WHY

The revitalization of the Kansas River's Downtown Topeka segment has long been considered a priority opportunity to attract investment to the region and transform its destination appeal. This sentiment, with select exceptions, was echoed loudly in the Momentum 2027 input process.

It is possible that Topeka-Shawnee County leaders return to the Kansas Riverfront as a development catalyst due to the prevalence of successful river revitalization efforts in downtowns across America. Examples abound from Greenville, SC, Columbus, OH, Grand Rapids, MI, Cincinnati, OH, Columbus, GA, Des Moines, IA, Memphis, TN, and many other cities of focused initiatives to spur riverfront development leading to outsized returns.

Though challenging and cost-intensive, it still behooves Topeka-Shawnee County to capture the potential of Kansas River development. An urban riverfront with ample developable land owned by local governments and other public entities is truly a unique opportunity to activate projects that can greatly accelerate Downtown Topeka's progress and momentum.

HOW

Activating the riverfront vision

- When approved, the Kansas Riverfront "vision book" spearheaded by the Riverfront Advisory Council and reflecting the feedback and preferences of local stakeholders will represent the first step of a long-term effort to resource and develop riverfront projects and amenities.
- Key project opportunities that emerge from the vision book will require resources to come to fruition. Public, private, and philanthropic sources will be called on to make transformative investments in the planning and implementation of this vision.

Leveraging past plans and ongoing efforts

- The Destination Development Task Force, Riverfront Authority Board, Riverfront Advisory Council, Downtown Topeka, Inc., Visit Topeka, and other partners should acknowledge, leverage, and incorporate the multiple local efforts taking place in Topeka that influence riverfront development. The Citywide Housing Study, Downtown Master Plan, Topeka Fast-Track Bike Plan, and other initiatives have a direct bearing on preferred land uses and projects in riverfront adjacent districts.
-

Gateways and Corridors (CE3)

WHAT

To enhance perceptions of Topeka-Shawnee County among residents, visitors, and investment prospects, the community should focus on aesthetic improvements at priority gateways and roadway corridor segments through multi-pronged, coordinated efforts.

The gateway component would initially focus on the transformation of one or more principal entry points to Downtown Topeka into signature gateways for the city. A public-private leadership panel could be assembled to inform the decision-making process on the selection of the location(s) of the downtown gateway. Analysis of comparison models from cities across the country could inform options for design and construction of Topeka's effort.

Once developed, additional signature gateway opportunities across the city and county could be explored based on an established model. Utilizing consistent design and visual schemes could create a unified network of compelling gateways across the region.

Complementing the gateway initiative would be expanded efforts to upgrade the look, quality, and vitality of key corridor segments across Topeka-Shawnee County. Multiple strategies would converge around the enhancement of these segments to knit together a collection of dynamic nodes to improve overall perceptions of the city and county. Activities could focus on:

- **Street maintenance and improvements:** Ongoing efforts to upgrade the condition of Topeka-Shawnee County's streets through Capital Improvement Plan implementation would continue, with renewed focus on engaging community leaders and stakeholders to communicate current and planned projects and establish/confirm priority segments for attention.
- **Beautification:** Citywide programs to address structural and/or visual deficiencies with property owners' lots and buildings would be complemented by community-driven projects like "Bring Back the Boulevard," a citizen-led initiative where residents mowed vacant lots, removed trash and debris, and sandblasted train-bridge walls along S.W. Topeka Boulevard. City officials and local organizations could partner with neighborhood liaisons to determine priority segments to include in new beautification projects.
- **Development support:** To improve the likelihood that Topeka's Neighborhood Improvement Associations (NIAs) and partners can effectively utilize existing redevelopment tools and attract new investment to key corridors, **staff capacity should be**

created to work directly with neighborhoods to connect them to prospective developers, existing businesses, and entrepreneurs to rehabilitate buildings and fill vacant storefronts.

Topeka-Shawnee County officials, economic development professionals, neighborhood representatives, and other key leaders could partner to determine priority corridors to target through coordinated beautification and revitalization efforts.

Multiple [existing Topeka-Shawnee County incentives programs](#) can advance gateway and corridor improvement efforts. One of the most recent is the Downtown Topeka Redevelopment Incentive Grant Program administered by DTI.

Another key tool is the City of Topeka's Neighborhood Revitalization Program which offers property tax rebates to stimulate investment in "Intensive Care" and "At Risk" neighborhoods. After the current program expired at the end of 2021, the city renewed it for 2022 through 2024. From 1995 to 2016 the city rebated approximately \$43.3 million dollars which stimulated over \$432 million in private investment.

WHY

The poor condition of Topeka-Shawnee County's roadways and built environment consistently top citizen surveys of the community's priority competitive issues. These sentiments were strongly echoed in Momentum 2027 public input and interactive voting exercises by the Momentum 2027 Steering Committee.

First impressions are critical to a community's competitive position. Existing residents and business owners can become frustrated and choose to move somewhere that – at least on the surface – appears to care more about its look and feel. Potential residents, investors, and business owners could leave Topeka with the impression that this is a community in decline not worthy of long-term commitment.

It is critical that Topeka-Shawnee County's aesthetics and vitality match the passion that stakeholders feel for the community and its future potential. At the neighborhood level, it is also important that residents are empowered and supported to drive positive change.

Stimulating enhanced revitalization of key corridors to create dynamic commercial and residential activity nodes will provide the additional benefit of creating new entrepreneurship and job creation opportunities as well as supporting improved walkability and community interactions.

HOW

Signature gateway development

- The project champion – either the City of Topeka, a private entity, or a public-private partnership – should empanel a leadership committee to determine the viability of a gateway development and the preferred location(s).
- A public planning process would vet the preferred location(s) through property ownership assessment, stakeholder feedback, and other factors. Once confirmed, a follow-up phase would seek public comment and formalize the design of the signature gateway(s).
- Based on the development cost assessment, funds would be identified and raised – if necessary – to construct the gateway(s).
- The potential for additional signature gateways in the City of Topeka or Shawnee County would be determined by leaders engaged in the initial process.

Corridor segment revitalization

- City officials would inventory existing roadway improvement efforts and work with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to determine if priority corridor segments are included in current or future transportation plans. Outreach would include discussions on how to optimize the communications flow and information sharing on the city's road improvement process.
- Concurrent efforts would target confirmed priority corridor segments to initiate partnerships with neighborhood leaders to plan and launch beautification projects based on the Bring Back the Boulevard model. Government staff should also continue working with property owners to upgrade lots and buildings with reported code violations, including through efforts to change the local culture of property and home ownership.
- A **Redevelopment Manager position** could be created at GO Topeka or another organization to support corridor revitalization by assisting neighborhoods with the utilization of existing incentive tools, cultivating relationships with developers, companies, and small businesspersons, and connecting them with NIAs, partner organizations, and property owners.

Topeka Arts and Culture Master Plan

WHAT

Topeka-Shawnee County's most prominent arts engagement organization, ArtsConnect, is coordinating the development of an Arts and Culture Master Plan to answer the questions, "What does this community need?" and "How can the arts provide a springboard for this?"

Based on these findings, **the Topeka Arts and Culture Master Plan will guide the work of arts organizations and artists in alignment with established community priorities and work plans, offering a pathway forward for the arts and culture sector in Topeka.**

The master plan will seek to align with community planning efforts such as the Downtown Master Plan, Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Momentum 2027, and many others.

The main goals of the Arts and Culture Master Plan process are:

- Strategic advancement of arts and culture in Topeka;
- Concrete plan for the coordination and sharing of resources across the creative sector to increase public benefit;
- Increased community engagement, resiliency and responsiveness; and
- Building a common vision for community recovery through the arts.

The Topeka Arts and Culture Master Plan is expected to be approved in Spring 2022. Momentum 2027 will incorporate the final plan as its blueprint for enhancing arts and culture in the region.

WHY

ArtsConnect believes cities that consider art, design, and culture opportunities when investing in infrastructure and amenities gain the distinction and competitive advantage required for recruitment and retention of talent and companies. Providing resources for the arts to work organically also supports the creation of a unique sense of place that can truly differentiate communities.

Cultural plans guide investment to maximize impact, reduce risk, and align cultural production with bigger civic goals. Topeka's Arts and Culture Master Plan will serve as an actionable tool for city commissions, departments, and organizational and individual stakeholders to maximize public art in supporting the goals, needs, and future of the community.

By aligning with – and contributing to – existing strategic efforts, the Arts and Culture Master Plan will ensure that ongoing work to improve Topeka-Shawnee County is advanced in a coordinated way.

HOW

Partnering to implement Topeka's Arts and Culture Master Plan

- The master plan process will include a phase aligning the arts with the broader context of the Topeka community. Strategies and tactics will be recommended to implement the plan's vision through short-and-longer-term actions to achieve early wins and expand the roles of the arts and artists in greater Topeka.

Promotion of new and existing amenities

- Economic development, tourism, and talent marketing programs should incorporate existing assets and new capacity developed through the Arts and Culture Master Plan into internal and external communications and promotions efforts.
-

Active Recreation Initiatives (CE4)

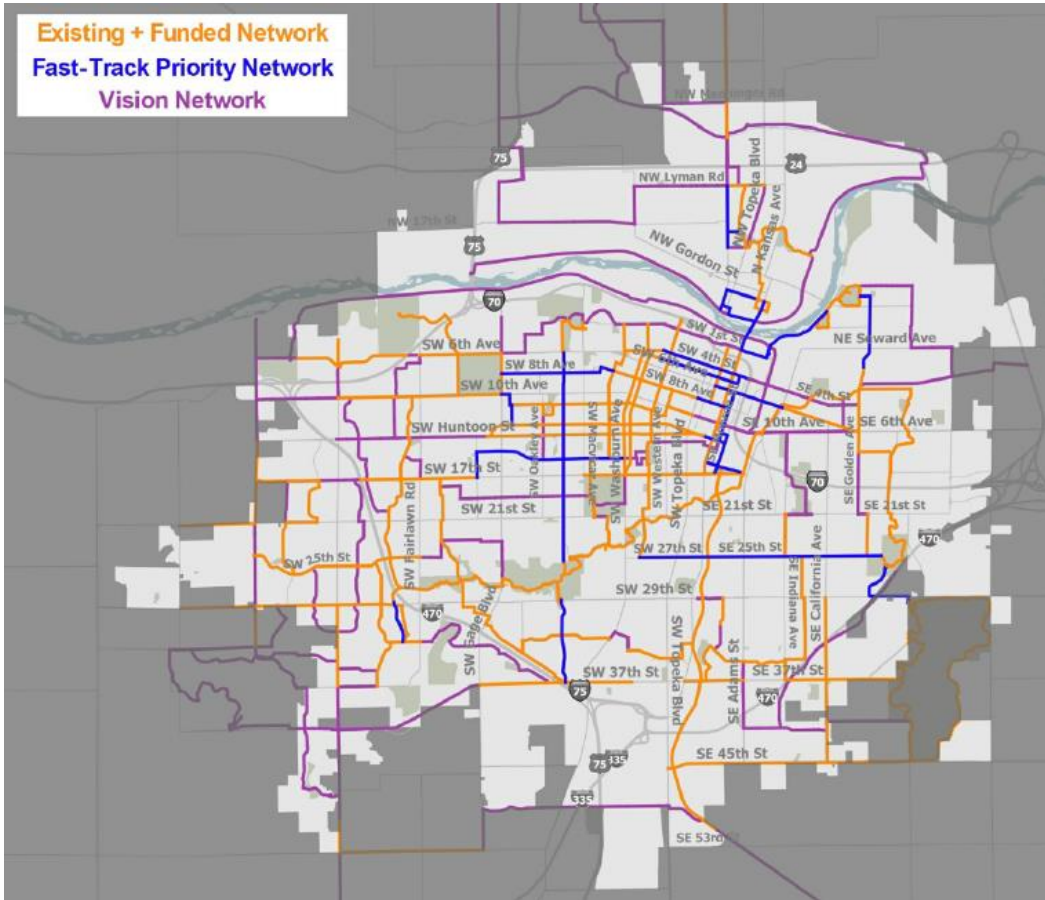
WHAT

To improve public health, expand talent-and-family-friendly assets, and create new opportunities for sports tourism, Topeka-Shawnee County should prioritize the following active recreation initiatives.

- In April 2021, Shawnee County commissioners approved a **master plan for a new destination family park** near the Southwest Topeka Aquatics Park at SW 21st and Urish. Proposed amenities include a destination/fitness playground, a dog park, sledding hill, pickleball courts, an indoor activity center, driving range, and clubhouse/pro shop. If fully implemented, the master plan would cost \$30 million to develop.
- To enhance an existing destination amenity, the Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan includes a recommendation to develop a **Master Plan for Gage Park** that would include the zoo and Discovery Center. The county's parks and recreation plan also calls for connecting trail systems to community and regional parks whenever possible to support a county-wide trail network.
- The vision the City of Topeka's bike trail system was refreshed in August 2020 with the approval of the **Topeka Fast-Track Bike Plan**, a supplement to the 2012 Topeka Bikeways Master Plan based on evolving community priorities and current best practices that places a greater emphasis on high-quality bicycle facilities that provide more separation from traffic to attract more riders of all ages and abilities. The fast-track plan prioritizes a network of high-quality, low-stress bike projects and renews the city's commitment to bicycling as a means to achieve broader community goals of health, sustainability, equity, economic development, and high quality of life.

The following map displays Topeka's existing, funded, fast-tracked, and envisioned bike trail network.

CITY OF TOPEKA VISION BIKE NETWORK



Source: Topeka Fast-Track Bike Plan

- The final active recreation initiative involves **maximizing the capacity, usage, and impact of youth sports facilities** in Topeka-Shawnee County. Along with riverfront development, youth sports was the second priority opportunity recommended by the Destination Development Task Force.

Beyond their contribution to positive public health outcomes and family-friendly quality of life capacity, youth sports facilities can attract lucrative tournaments and multi-day stays from participating families that drive strong economic impact for host communities.

WHY

Quality of life and place are increasingly serving as *de facto* priorities determining where talent and companies choose to locate. Active recreation resources appeal to nearly all talent cohorts, with destination parks and bike/pedestrian trail systems frequently topping lists of most desired amenities in “best places to live” surveys. Their across-the-board appeal to single and married adults of all ages,

families, and active retirees generates true value-added benefit from public and private investment in new and enhanced facilities.

Gage Park provides Topeka-Shawnee County with a jewel of an asset to build from as it seeks to enhance its overall capacity of park facilities for the next generation of residents. But, as the Fast-Track Bike Plan found, Topeka is at an important crossroads where it must ensure that the next phase of active recreation infrastructure spending takes bicycling to a higher level in both quality and appeal to potential riders.

The bike plan update's extensive public outreach found that residents resoundingly support an expanded trail network, especially along greenways and waterways. Creating more connections between neighborhoods and trails and separating motorists from bike facilities were also high priorities.

During Momentum 2027 input, one leader called improved youth sports infrastructure a "no-brainer" for the community to pursue. Stakeholders reported driving all over eastern Kansas and western Missouri to take their children to tournaments, with most saying they have "never" attended one in greater Topeka. An interviewee noted, "The lack of youth sports drags a ton of money away from the community. We'll spend a whole Saturday in the Kansas City suburbs."

HOW

Destination parks

- Implementation of the master plan is actively underway for the new destination family park near the Southwest Topeka Aquatics Park. Partners should ensure that resources remain committed to this project to develop it on time and on budget. Resource generation to fill any funding gaps should be explored as a public-private partnership.
- To preserve and enhance the role of Gage Park as a top resident and visitor amenity, the Master Plan proposed in the Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan should be actively pursued and developed. The business community should emphasize the key role Gage Park plays in Topeka-Shawnee County's competitiveness to retain and attract talent. Once completed, timely implementation of the Master Plan will be necessary to keep pace with new recreation capacity developed in peer regions.

Expanded bike network

- The Topeka Fast-Track Bike Plan refreshes the community's development goals and prioritization criteria to guide future project selection. It also recommends a short list of grant-ready "ultimate design" projects to complete by 2030 using committed sales tax funds.

These recommendations include both upgrades to previously implemented facilities as well as new routes and trails.

Youth sports facilities

- A public-private volunteer leadership team focused on youth sports facility enhancement will likely become part of the Destination Development Task Force. This youth sports committee will oversee efforts to expand the utilization and economic impact of existing facilities and determine where additional capacity is needed.
 - To succeed in the hyper-competitive market for youth sports tournaments, Greater Topeka will need to assess existing efforts, determine how best to position the community to develop or attract top events, and decide which sports warrant pursuit.
-

Existing Business Services

WHAT

GO Topeka will continue to support the growth of existing Topeka-Shawnee County employers through established processes to survey and address their priority competitive challenges and opportunities.

Business retention and expansion (BRE) visits will utilize customized survey instruments to record and track companies' current and projected growth trajectories, talent demands, expansion opportunities, infrastructure and technology needs, and concerns that could be assisted through legislative and regulatory advocacy.

Results of BRE surveys will inform staff efforts across Greater Topeka Partnership affiliates to ensure that Topeka-Shawnee County employers receive the support necessary to sustain and grow their operations. Regular communication with company representatives will update progress on actions initiated through BRE discussions.

Continued to be included in existing business efforts will be site selection services and identification of potential expansion incentives concurrent with services offered to external prospects.

Efforts proposed across Momentum 2027's Key Initiatives that impact workforce development and availability, quality of life enhancement, housing capacity, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and local pride and promotion will also strongly support the needs and opportunities of existing businesses.

WHY

Acknowledging that existing businesses typically comprise around 80 percent of local jobs, economic development organizations (EDOs) have long implemented programs to assist companies with retaining and expanding employment. When effective, BRE efforts have proven to be important strategies to proactively work with top local firms to ensure they remain in the community long term.

Every year, reports surface from regions across the country of large companies announcing relocations to new markets to the surprise of local governments and economic development professionals. Successful BRE efforts ensure that every possible action is taken ahead of time to keep these employers in the community.

Increasingly, BRE activities are geared around issues of talent, today's number one competitive issue in economic development. GO Topeka's existing business services efforts will be complemented by the multiple proposed Momentum 2027 initiatives that address workforce development and capacity, housing, child care, diversity and inclusion, and other inputs that affect companies' ability to retain and attract skilled talent.

HOW

Annual assessments and adjustments of BRE programming

- Program managers should continue to assess the efficacy of existing BRE efforts and determine if adjustments are necessary in the survey instrument, calling schedule, staffing of visits, or follow-up protocols.

Continued efforts to address competitive issues and opportunities

- Partners across governments, training institutions, private and non-profit organizations, and other entities should be engaged as needed to realize the expansion goals of existing employers.
 - Corporate attraction leads identified through BRE visits should be channeled to the appropriate staff in prospect marketing and recruitment.
 - Policy-related issues should continue to inform annual lists of legislative priorities and local, state, and national advocacy efforts.
-

Career Connections Program (CE5)

WHAT

Based on a need for a centralized effort to connect students with experiential learning opportunities, **the Career Connections Program (working title) would be a centralized, managed hub to connect interested students with local firms offering job shadowing, internship, and apprenticeship slots.**

The program operator would work closely with Pre-K to 12 school districts, two-and-four-year colleges, and employers to inventory existing efforts and maintain a clearinghouse of experiential learning opportunities at Topeka-Shawnee County companies. This includes initiatives like Top City Interns where more than 200 interns from major employers across Greater Topeka are introduced to the community and local business leaders.

Ongoing communications would ensure that education and training faculty and career placement officers were aware of – and utilized – Career Connections for students looking for workplace experience in their desired fields. By understanding the full capacity of local companies and their big picture needs, the program would ensure that students are exposed to the full variety of potential occupations and career paths.

The initiative could potentially offer participating employers – possibly through fee-based membership – assistance vetting applicants for available slots and recommendations on most qualified candidates for these positions.

Career Connections services would complement, not replace, existing experiential learning programs. They would ensure that community benefits were accrued from a consistent, coordinated, and regularly updated database of available opportunities for workplace-based learning. The ultimate goal of the initiative would be for companies to post all available internship and apprenticeship openings to the Career Connections hub with students and student-support personnel considering the tool a first-choice resource to pursue these opportunities.

WHY

When asked about current systems for matching students with experiential learning positions, public input participants spoke of piecemeal, siloed, and disconnected efforts. Internships and apprenticeships are offered on a company-by-company basis, with employers often leveraging relationships with individual faculty or department heads to identify interested students to pursue for these opportunities.

Employers, students, and education and training representatives believe that a more coordinated system is necessary to better leverage these experiences to benefit all parties.

Talent availability, especially at the entry level, is the principal competitive concern of Topeka-Shawnee County businesses. An enhanced process to connect firms with potential future fulltime employees would establish a more reliable talent pipeline while improving the likelihood that area students will remain in the community after graduation.

HOW

Landscape assessment and partner outreach

- A full inventory of existing experiential learning positions and programs should be compiled to direct and inform partner outreach. The goals of a centralized Career Connections resource in Greater Topeka should be communicated to training institutions, employers, and intermediaries.
- College placement and career advisement departments and corporate staff managing internship and apprenticeship programs should be advised that the proposed Career Connection initiative will not supersede but coordinate and complement their efforts.

Operational design and tool development and utilization

- Comparison experiential learning coordination efforts in other communities should be researched to inform Greater Topeka's model.
- Functional components of a Career Connections system should be detailed and formalized through a proposed operational framework and interactive online tool. Partners should be revisited to review, adjust, and approve the proposed program design.
- An online Career Connections portal would be developed and populated through ongoing input from employers and institutional representatives. Potential users would be engaged through promotion from campuses, faculty, job placement and career counseling staff, community partners, government agencies, neighborhood groups, and all other relevant actors.

ASTRA Innovation Center and District (CE6)

WHAT

In May 2021, GO Topeka announced a partnership with BioRealty, Inc. to develop an innovation campus designed to take advantage of the arrival of Plug and Play's Animal Health and Ag Tech Startup Accelerator program. **The ASTRA (Animal Science, Technology, Research, and Agriculture) Innovation Center is envisioned as a 60,000 square foot project anchoring a planned Innovation District in downtown Topeka.**

The campus will seek to leverage the estimated 20 global startups participating each year in Plug and Play and serve **as the “center of gravity” of global entrepreneurial ecosystem-building activities in Topeka-Shawnee County.** Eventually, the campus could be utilized for networking and meetup events, how-to sessions and classes, information sharing, and co-location of support services, organizations, and personnel. Mentorship and business growth counseling could also be concentrated on site.

The Innovation Center could be a draw for entrepreneurs and companies from targeted sectors looking to be immersed in an environment of innovation. GO Topeka could offer incentivized lease space to recruit startups and existing small science and technology-based businesses, especially in animal health and ag tech innovation, and encourage support resources and university and corporate partners to have a presence in the Center. Following best practices, participating companies would be assured their intellectual property was protected against theft using non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) or some other type of tool.

Economic development leaders envision the Innovation Center as the core of a future Innovation District. The district could comprise a designated multi-block area, intentionally located downtown to take advantage of State of Kansas resources, corporate innovation partners, and dining and entertainment amenities. It could highlight the committed resources, partnerships, synergies, and activities that Greater Topeka has surrounding tech and innovation, especially in animal health and ag tech innovation and industries with intersecting research and development.

WHY

Nationally, the innovation sector is a major driver of the economy, generating new jobs and wealth and attracting talent. To compete nationally and advance its position in global markets, Greater Topeka must develop and support strategies for positioning the region as a hub of innovation.

Topeka-Shawnee County's proximity to major university research institutions and corporate entities committed to innovation, its strengths in industries such as animal health and ag tech, the leadership

commitment from GO Topeka, and the strides already made to build a local innovation ecosystem give the region a strong base to successfully capture opportunities to become an innovation hub. Ultimately, a critical mass of support to generate and attract innovative companies and capital investment would put Greater Topeka on the map as a center for cutting-edge research and enterprise development.

The ASTRA Innovation Campus, therefore, represents a moonshot for Topeka-Shawnee County to become an economy bolstered by job creation in high-skill, high-paying occupations generated by effective development and retention of startup technology firms. The region has smartly leveraged its corporate capacity in animal health and agricultural technology to attract the Plug and Play accelerator program as the lynchpin of its efforts to become a recognized hub for innovation and entrepreneurship.

These efforts would be further strengthened by successfully positioning the ASTRA Innovation Campus as the hub of a broader innovation district. Examples such as CORTEX in St. Louis have demonstrated that districts of this type can transform economies and improve their external perceptions and national profiles.

HOW

Innovation Center build-out and launch

- Efforts to fund, design, construct, and populate the Innovation Center would be advanced per approved plans.
- Concurrent activities would seek commitments from institutional and corporate research entities to collocate at the Center. These could include Washburn University, University of Kansas, Kansas State University, research units of Greater Topeka companies, and employers and/or institutions across the Animal Health Corridor.
- Small business assistance service providers, agencies, and entrepreneurial support organizations would be solicited to establish a presence at the Center.
- In-house or contracted leasing agents would work to fill commercial spaces in the Innovation Center with establishments that would give rise to interesting synergies and valuable opportunities.

Innovation District Master Plan development and implementation

- As typically occurs in designated innovation districts across the country, a comprehensive process to contract with a top firm to develop a master plan for the Innovation District should be initiated. The master plan would prescribe preferred land uses, quality of life infrastructure and amenities, and residential/commercial/office development opportunities adjacent to the Innovation Center.

- The master plan would include specific tactical priorities to implement the approved vision for the Innovation District. To help create generational wealth building opportunities for people across difference, master plan and implementation efforts should include bid/bonding opportunities created specifically for BIPOC contractors, developers, and investors.
-

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building

WHAT

Assisting a formal or loosely affiliated group of entrepreneurs, technologists, small businesspeople, faculty, enterprise support personnel, and other stakeholders with **cultivating a more dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem in Topeka-Shawnee County** would create more fertile ground for home-grown startup development and retention of firms incubated through Plug and Play.

Influential books like “Startup Communities” by serial entrepreneur Brad Feld have argued ecosystem development is more effective if driven by entrepreneurs and stakeholders outside of government, institutional, and economic development contexts. But they still acknowledge that building a competitive climate for entrepreneurship requires partnerships between these entities as well as external stakeholders.

GO Topeka and other area resources and stakeholders should continue efforts in planning, development, and hosting of entrepreneurial networking events, pitch competitions, informational sessions, incubator or accelerator programs, volunteer mentors for inexperienced founders, “matchmaking” between startups and potential capital providers, and other initiatives.

Companies participating in the Plug and Play Topeka accelerator program can take advantage of opportunities to connect with the region’s entrepreneurial community through activities and events at the Innovation Center in addition to the significant benefits from engaging with the program’s founding corporate partners in the animal health and agricultural technology sector. Additional opportunities to connect Plug and Play startups with the Topeka-Shawnee County business community would help to build relationships that could improve the potential for them to remain in the region long term.

WHY

Topeka-Shawnee County’s successful attraction of Plug and Play was a game-changer for the community’s potential to build a culture of innovation that positions the area as a hub for technology startups, especially in animal health and ag technology. Successfully retaining Plug and Play startups and attracting other founders to Topeka-Shawnee County will not occur without a development of a complimentary entrepreneurial climate that offers these firms key advantages over competitor regions.

Significant current and future investments in the ASTRA Innovation Center and a potential innovation district surrounding it compel Topeka-Shawnee County to leverage this spending through the cultivation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that turns the Center into more than just a building, but ground zero for the region’s small business and startup community.

This will benefit more than just Plug and Play companies, but all potential entrepreneurs in Topeka-Shawnee County and elsewhere looking for a supportive climate to develop, launch, and grow their small businesses. It will also help attract other innovation companies, including startups, to the region. As Greater Topeka gains prominence as a world-class location for innovation and entrepreneurship, the technologies developed and companies launched here will extend their impact well beyond Kansas to communities across the nation and globe.

HOW

Mapping the landscape and engaging stakeholders

- Outside of well-known startup hubs, entrepreneurial communities tend to be informal, disconnected, and reactive. Greater Topeka ecosystem building would benefit from an intensive effort to identify existing entrepreneurs, startup businesses, established founders with interest to serve as mentors, capital providers and potential investors, etc.
- After the local entrepreneurial landscape is mapped, a stakeholder database could be maintained for utilization in ecosystem building efforts.
- When a clearer picture of the local entrepreneurial community comes into focus, more formal efforts to engage and connect stakeholders can take place.

Ecosystem building efforts

- With the ASTRA Innovation Center as the hub, leaders in the entrepreneurial community should be encouraged to explore the creation of more formalized stakeholder groups and the launch of educational and information programs, meetup and networking events, pitch competitions and startup weekends, programs like 1 Million Cups, and other cornerstones of thriving entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- Administrative assistance for ecosystem building activities could be provided by small business support personnel or economic development staff collocated at the Innovation Center.
- Plug and Play startups and onsite research institutions and corporate innovation teams could be key players in efforts to expand Greater Topeka's entrepreneurial capacity and promote the community externally as a growing hub for enterprise development.

Targeted Corporate Attraction

WHAT

GO Topeka, the economic development arm of the Greater Topeka Partnership, is charged – among other responsibilities – with marketing Topeka-Shawnee County to corporate prospects outside the region. This is accomplished through developing and updating the content on the organization’s economic development website (gotopeka.com); investing in paid media through advertising placements in key trade and business publications; securing earned media coverage via a public relations contract with a national firm; building relationships with site selection professionals and corporate relocation officers; traveling to targeted relocation markets and industry conferences; in-market hosting of influencers and prospects; and leveraging incentives tools to finalize relocation deals.

The industry sectors pursued by GO Topeka include many of the region’s core strengths like Food Processing, Professional and Financial Services, Logistics and Distribution, and Animal Health and Ag Tech, but also up-and-coming industries like Aerospace and Advances Systems Technologies. In recent years, GO Topeka has increased its emphasis on emerging sectors that offer higher-wage, higher-skill employment. Because the market is always evolving, it will be important to continuously assess industry priorities to determine if targets need to be refreshed or tactics reconsidered to reflect changing prospect requirements and competitive needs.

When traveling to out-of-market conferences, trade shows, and events, GO Topeka will typically join delegations with the Kansas Department of Commerce or Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC) to defray costs and leverage their capacity. Industry-specific niche events have been deemphasized in favor of more diverse meetings with larger pools of consultants and prospects.

Allowing for the continuous need to assess targeted priorities, BRS does not envision Topeka-Shawnee County’s external corporate marketing and attraction activities changing in Momentum 2027.

GO Topeka will continue to pursue high value prospects in targeted industries through a variety of tactical means and adjust efforts as necessary to respond to changing market conditions and local competitive dynamics.

WHY

Corporate attraction is part of the “three-legged stool” of economic development along with existing business retention and expansion and small business development. It is critical that communities maintain an online and in-person presence for key influencers such as site selectors and corporate relocation officials as well as prospect firms in targeted industries.

Though jobs created from corporate relocations comprise a small percentage of overall economic growth, attracting outside firms is an important component of cluster-building, the practice of leveraging existing strengths to build a critical mass of companies, talent, and assets to create an unassailable value proposition for firms in those sectors.

Securing earned media is a valuable tool for prospect attraction of companies but also talent and visitors. Other marketing investments have similarly beneficial impacts beyond just recruiting new firms to the community.

HOW

Multi-platform communications and marketing

- Owned media should consist of a professionally developed, visually dynamic, information-rich, and consistently updated website targeted at site selectors, corporate prospects, and potential investors looking to assess Greater Topeka's competitive position on a host of key criteria and data indicators. Annual reports, electronic newsletters, target industry materials, inhouse publications, and other owned media would reflect a consistent graphical and thematic design and compelling content.
- Paid media should focus on online publications and websites with a broad reach specific to Greater Topeka's priority target sectors. Advertising should appeal to decision makers beyond the typical audience of economic development professionals and relocation specialists.
- Greater Topeka's earned media investments in a public relations contract with a boutique national firm have paid strong dividends and should be sustained at current or increased levels.

Targeted out-of-market events

- Scheduling of marketing trips and event attendance should continue to be streamlined in favor of opportunities to travel with state and regional partners and network with a broad range of decision-makers and prospects. Pre-travel work to schedule meetings with top site selectors and corporate representatives should continue, as well as follow up outreach after the event.

In-market relationship building and prospect hosting

- As the principal economic development entity in the region, GO Topeka should continue to build relationships with local economic development practitioners and elected officials to ensure consistent messaging and project management protocols with prospects. Inbound

marketing with site selectors and relocation targets should capitalize on a signature local event to incentivize participation in a carefully planned, memorable familiarization tour and visit.

Effective utilization of incentives

- Economic development professionals should consistently assess the value and efficacy of state and local incentive tools to determine if adjustments or enhancements are necessary to improve Greater Topeka's ability to attract and secure value-added investments.
-

Developer Outreach and Engagement

WHAT

GO Topeka would formalize a process to cultivate a group of development firms to position as qualified partners for local and out-of-market economic development prospects. This would entail reaching out to existing local companies and identifying potential outside firms to engage in discussions on Topeka-Shawnee County opportunities and how to capture them. GO Topeka could work with in-market economic development professionals or practitioners in the broader region to identify firms to contact.

Efforts would seek to build relationships with interested developers to get them to understand the dynamics of the Greater Topeka market, the types of projects drawn to the area, and the typical requirements and responsibilities involved in bidding for solicited work. Ultimately, a goal would be to enlist developers as promoters and champions for business opportunities in Topeka-Shawnee County.

Outreach could entail specific information-sharing on the economic development prospecting process and the time-sensitive nature of responses to requests for information (RFIs) and build-to-suit construction quotes from prospects or via contacts at the Kansas Department of Commerce, KCADC, or other partners.

As a more robust developer network is cultivated, discussions could expand to include potential incentives for preparation of shovel-ready land and risk-sharing with economic development to enhance the supply of speculative buildings, lab spaces, and sites. These would be supported by data and specific examples of past and ongoing prospect inquiries and initiatives such as the Innovation District anchored by the ASTRA Innovation Center. It will be important to manage any perceived preference issues with developers engaged in relationship-building efforts.

WHY

Economic development requires so-called “product” to be effective. Product is comprised of physical space that can accommodate the expansion of existing firms, relocation of new prospects, and launch requirements of startup businesses. It can take the form of available development sites, existing or speculative industrial, commercial, research, and office buildings, and customized spaces like wet labs, clean rooms, logistics centers, and other industry-specific developments.

Economic development professionals typically cultivate a network of local and outside developers and leverage them to respond to prospect inquiries – including RFIs – for details on available properties and cost estimates for “build-to-suit” space demands. In active development markets there is typically

a cadre of developers and property representatives at the ready to act on new prospect opportunities. This competition leads to an array of bids for prospects to review.

In Topeka-Shawnee County, officials note that there are numerous construction companies but not the type of developers normally engaged in prospective economic development. This complicates the provision of timely build-to-suit estimates for RFIs and means prospect companies or site selectors often receive proposals only from GO Topeka. Without developers in the market – local or non-local – to engage with prospect employers and construct speculative buildings across multiple product types, it will be difficult for Topeka-Shawnee County to reach its full growth potential.

The region also suffers from a lack of available research space. The development of speculative research labs will be especially critical for the creation of an innovation district surrounding the ASTRA Innovation Center. Without these spaces, research-based private firms interested in locating proximate to the campus' incubating startups, higher ed-affiliated labs, and R&D operations of private animal science and ag tech companies will have limited options.

HOW

Rostering potential development partners

- Ongoing work to identify potential partners for speculative and build-to-suit development projects should continue, including maintaining a consistently updated database of local and out-of-market firms and representatives.
- Existing relationships should be leveraged to determine additional prospects to incorporate into Greater Topeka's developer network.

Information sharing and education

- Formal and informal discussions with potential development partners should include data-supported examples of economic development project outcomes and the benefits to firms of participating in prospect management efforts and negotiations.
- If necessary, local development firms could work with colleagues more experienced in economic development-supportive activities to explain process dynamics and the value of submitting responses to requests for information and proposals.

Leveraging the network

- Regular communication with development partners should keep firms apprised of Greater Topeka's project pipeline, opportunities to engage with specific prospects, and follow up on the results of past inquiries.

C2C Collaborative and Data Exchange (CE7)

WHAT

Acknowledging that schools alone cannot successfully prepare students for post-secondary opportunities, hundreds of communities across the country have established public-private partnerships to support and advance school districts' performance goals. These collaborations can take many forms, but they share a commitment to utilize data to inform strategy, organize around volunteer teams focused on key components of the cradle through career pipeline, and coordinate and manage efforts through an entity charged with serving as the network's "backbone."

A cradle to career partnership was proposed for Momentum 2022 but did not gain traction. However, stakeholders feel that the opportunity remains a key priority and warrants inclusion in the Momentum 2027 vision plan.

The Cradle-to-Career Collaborative and Data Exchange (working title) would serve as a coalition among Shawnee County Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) to 12 school districts and key partners to share and leverage data to inform district-level planning, curricula and programming, facilities development, technology needs, and partnerships to best serve the needs of students advancing to higher education and the workplace. The Data Exchange would aggregate performance data from all participating districts to determine county-wide trends, achievement gaps, and supplement district-level data to guide decision-making.

The goal of the Collaborative and Data Exchange would be to enhance coordination and alignment among Shawnee County districts to optimize the talent pipeline from the cradle through careers. It will not be a prescriptive authority but a tool to align educators and partners behind a common vision and outcomes for developing a competitive workforce for local businesses.

The breadth of partners engaged in the Collaborative will be equivalent to what is necessary to ensure that organizations, practitioners, and employers impacting Topeka-Shawnee County's talent development system have a seat at the table to discuss how best to cultivate the community's next-generation workforce.

Partnerships brokered through the Collaborative will provide support to address critical needs for new and enhanced programs, technology, infrastructure, and policies affecting Greater Topeka's educational outcomes. Tactical priorities and measures to track progress towards achievement will be identified, confirmed, and advanced by Collaborative partners.

Often, C2C partnerships establish a performance threshold and align strategic efforts around achieving it. These are typically based on historical educational trends and aspirational goals. For example, if a

community's workforce trails top competitors in the percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree or higher, a C2C goal would be to meet or exceed these competitors' attainment rates in ten years. Other communities have established goals for 70 percent or higher of the local adult population to receive some type of post-secondary degree or credential.

Once consensus has been reached on a specific performance goal, the C2C collaborative's work would align behind collecting and leveraging data to inform and adjust coordinated tactics to achieve the stated target. Quantitative measurement would track not only topline goal attainment but also the numerous trendlines that affect progress towards that metric.

As it considers its achievement goals, Topeka-Shawnee County's C2C Collaborative should claim racial and ethnic student performance equity as one of its core philosophies. It is important to set critical equity-focused objectives both at the K-12 and post-secondary level to address industry gaps in representation by partnering to ensure that all students, especially those across differences, are provided with intense interventions in high growth, high demand occupation areas through job shadow and apprenticeship opportunities. Tracking enrollment rates of BIPOC students and high school graduation rates across racial/ethnic demographics will be necessary to measure progress towards achieving equity goals.

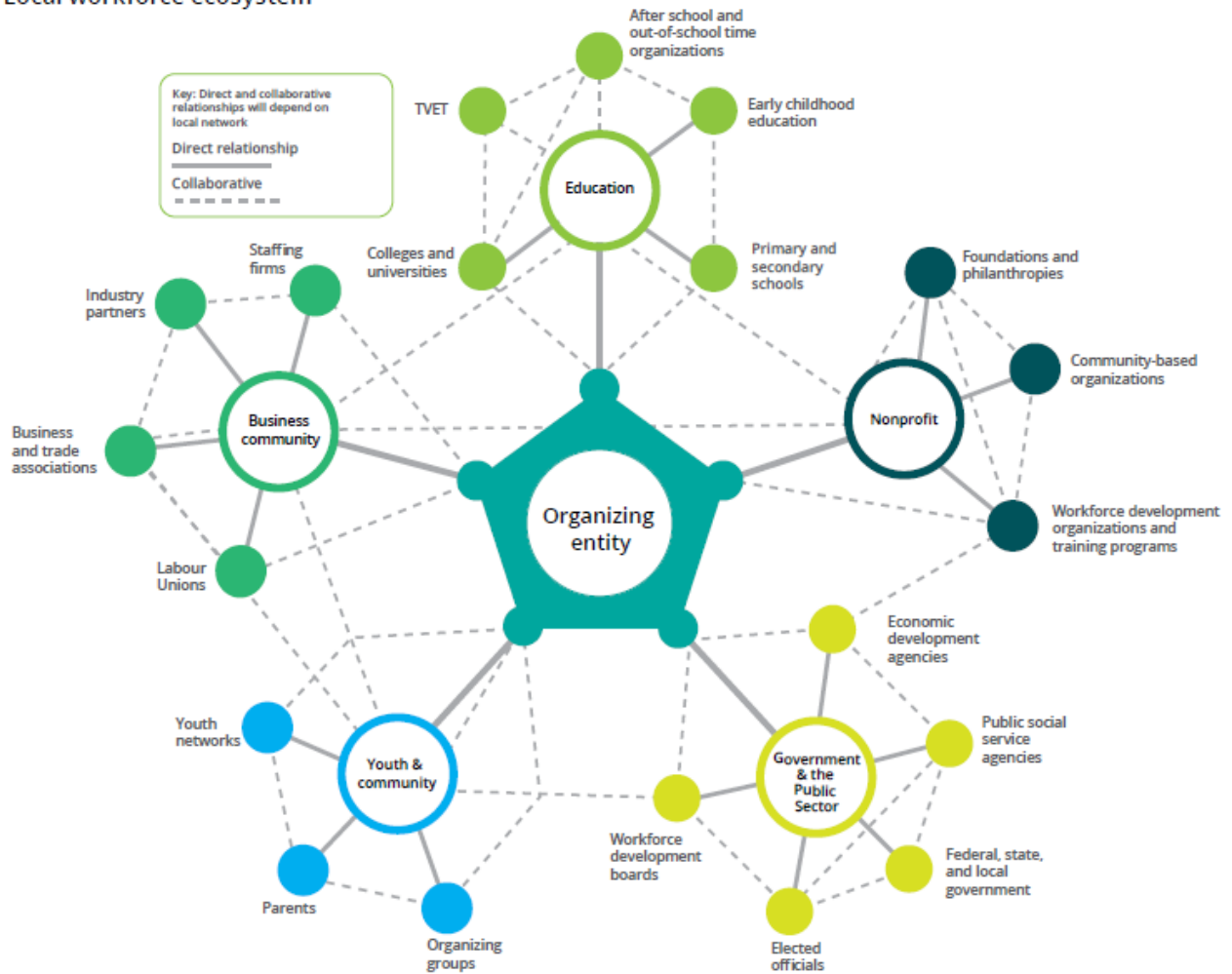
WHY

The quality and capacity of a community's workforce is the most important determinant of its economic development success. Projections are that currently tight labor markets will continue to be constrained as multiple factors limit their potential to expand. This is especially true in Topeka-Shawnee County, which has struggled to grow its population in recent years. Maximizing the capacity of the existing education and workforce system to produce college-and-work-ready graduates is therefore essential to sustaining and growing the local economy.

Because there are so many factors beyond classroom education that contribute to successful and equitable student outcomes, many communities have formalized public-private coalitions across the supply, demand, and support sides of cradle-to-career education to advance coordinated efforts to improve student performance and career readiness.

The following graphic from a recent Deloitte "framework for action" titled *Preparing tomorrow's workforce for the Fourth Industrial Revolution* effectively conveys the complexity of the typical local workforce ecosystem and the need for an "organizing entity" like a C2C coalition to understand and connect it.

Local workforce ecosystem



Source: Deloitte

HOW

Outreach and coalition-building

- It will be critical to commit the time and effort required to engage with Shawnee County public school district administrators and board members to determine what is necessary to secure their support. Lessons from Momentum 2022 efforts should be applied to renewed attempts to create a C2C coalition.
- Outreach to the business community, social services entities, government, and other potential partners should clearly articulate the need for the C2C coalition and highlight applicable partnerships from peer communities. If necessary, representatives from peer C2C partnerships could be engaged to speak with Topeka-Shawnee County leaders on the challenges and benefits of building out these models.

Organizational design and goal setting

- Once partners have committed to joining the coalition, their leaders should be empowered to help establish the entity's parameters, set shared performance goals, and design the systems and structures defining the Collaborative's operations.
- It is critical that the cost of funding and managing the coalition and Data Exchange are assessed, with decisions made on the entity(ies) charged with administering its operations.
- Consideration should be given to utilizing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to formalize the support of participants in the Coalition and Data Exchange effort.

Development and administration of the Data Exchange

- Concurrent with the organizational design phase, leaders should identify an entity to house and manage the Collaborative's Data Exchange and secure participation agreements from Shawnee County school districts.
- Key performance indicators, processes, and protocols for data collection, analysis, dissemination, and reporting should be agreed upon, with districts assured that their data will be generalized into regional averages. Ongoing assessment of regional performance should help inform district-level needs and tactics.

Leveraging the Collaborative

- Once operational, the C2C Collaborative and Data Exchange should be overseen by a leadership group offering guidance to administrative staff and acting as liaisons with their districts, organizations, governments, corporations, and agencies to align policy/program development and capital expenditures with the performance goals of the collective.
-

Washburn Next

WHAT

Washburn Next (working title) would become a community-wide effort to support Washburn University and Washburn Institute of Technology (Washburn Tech) to become maximum-impact institutions that recruit, retain, and graduate work-ready students to power Topeka-Shawnee County's future workforce.

The initiative will capitalize on the unique nature of the schools as co-governed entities to advance institutional strategies that take advantage of the strengths of each campus to create a seamless pipeline of talent to local employers. **Washburn Next will not replace existing institutional strategies but leverage community partners to optimize their components and implementation.**

Leaders from across Topeka-Shawnee County public, private, and civic sectors should work closely with the Washburn system to provide the support, guidance, advocacy, and – as feasible – resources to enable the schools to effectively fulfill their missions.

The Washburn institutions have both committed to advance equitable outcomes for their students of color and ensure that a diversity of residents can access educational programming. The development of the Washburn East campus in East Topeka greatly improved the system's capacity to serve communities of color in neighborhoods adjacent to campus. Washburn University officials have spoken of efforts in the planning stages to launch an initiative that could serve as a "moonshot for equity" for current and future students.

The Washburn Next coalition must include membership that reflects Topeka-Shawnee County's true diversity and ensure that efforts to grow the capacity and impact of the Washburn system acknowledge the opportunities and needs of diverse populations across the region.

WHY

As was echoed repeatedly during Momentum 2027 stakeholder input, the Washburn campuses are critical Topeka-Shawnee County assets that must perform to their full potential for the community to achieve its desired economic outcomes. Development of the Washburn East campus in East Topeka was cited as one of Momentum 2022's signature wins and an example of the potential impact of Washburn investments.

A focus on Washburn does not diminish the importance and impact of other local higher educational institutions, but instead recognizes the unique and outsized role the Washburn system has on Topeka-Shawnee County's future success.

Washburn University has continued to evolve as a top institution in Kansas but has seen recent enrollment declines and remains disconnected in certain ways from the greater Topeka community. Local leaders believe that the university must greatly increase its enrollment and graduate output to contribute fully to local population and economic growth. They also feel untapped opportunities exist to expand Washburn University's impact on entrepreneurship, research and innovation, and community development.

As enrollment at its sister institution has fallen, Washburn Tech has experienced the opposite trend. Though its student population has steadily increased in the past decade, stakeholders question if this growth is sustainable without expansion of the campus' facilities footprint and programmatic capacity. New and expanded partnerships with private sector entities and local governments can help Washburn Tech identify and advance opportunities to augment its resources, infrastructure, and human capital to train Topeka-Shawnee County's next-generation workforce.

HOW

Establishing a public-private Washburn Next coalition

- A group of influential leaders from across the community would be empaneled to create a working group with the express purpose of strategizing the most effective ways for local public, private, and civic institutions to support the Washburn campuses.
- The Washburn Next working group will not supersede or replace any current public-private board or committee engaged with the Washburn schools but serve a complementary function aligning the work of all community partners behind supporting and advancing institutional goals.

Optimizing and aligning strategy

- Working from existing institutional plans, the Washburn Next coalition will determine how best to influence (and, potentially, align) Washburn system strategies with support available from community partners.
- Based on assessments from Washburn campus administrators and community leaders, actionable priorities could be established to inform short-and-longer-term strategic outcomes under the Washburn Next banner.

Activating community support and partnerships

- As strategic priorities and tactical opportunities are confirmed, Washburn Next coalition partners would collectively advance implementation of high-impact growth initiatives.

Career Navigation Center (CE8)

WHAT

The C2C Collaborative would ideally seek to engage students and direct them to the most appropriate post-graduate opportunity, including two-or-four-year college, short-term career-based training, or directly into a job. However, many high school graduates still find themselves unemployed, underemployed, or in a career they trained for they no longer enjoy. Others leave college before earning their degree and are unsure of their next steps towards quality employment. For these individuals and other adults who find themselves at a life crossroads, it is important that support exists to guide them towards workforce opportunities that provide family-supporting wages and address critical employer needs.

In most communities – Topeka-Shawnee County included – programs to train adults for occupations and careers providing good wages and advancement opportunities are available, but the challenge is making potential clients aware of these resources, how to access them, how to pay for them, how to receive training while potentially balancing existing employment and child care responsibilities, and how to be placed in a job once a credential or degree has been attained.

To complement these programs and ensure that their utilization is optimized, **Topeka-Shawnee County would create an online Career Navigation Center as a partnership of area education and training providers and other support entities to serve as a virtual one-stop shop for adults looking to reenter the workforce or upskill into new careers.** The Center would not directly provide training but serve an intermediary function, working to advise and connect adults with education and workforce programming, scholarships and grants, and available support services to guide them on their journey towards new skill attainment and more rewarding employment.

Operating virtually, a rotating schedule of advisors from local colleges, universities, training centers, and social services providers would be available via appointment to provide free advisement to adults interested in obtaining a new degree or credential or completing a program where they accrued credits but did not graduate. Restrictions on in-person advising during the Covid-19 pandemic proved to many workforce intermediaries that virtual consultation was preferable and easier to access for users, more flexible for advisors, cheaper to administer, and led to improved levels of engagement with potential clients.

Counselors at the Center would help candidates identify and plan a course of study leading to a quality job in local demand and assist them with accessing scholarships and other funding resources, affordable child care services if needed, transportation assistance, and connections with employers

via experiential learning programs and job-placement services. For clients with existing college credits, advisors would help determine how they could be applied to degree attainment in their chosen field.

The Career Navigation Center provides a key opportunity for participating institutions and organizations to pool resources to improve access to and utilization of existing and potential programs. Partners at the Center and across the community would collaborate to effectively promote the online consultation service and ensure that any interested adult is able to access the site and make an appointment to speak virtually with an advisor.

WHY

Provision of continuing education and life-long learning opportunities was a key priority of Momentum 2027 stakeholder input and discussions among the process' Steering Committee. With local employers reporting crisis-level issues finding qualified talent – especially for entry-level and middle-skill occupations – counseling services to expand the pipeline for these positions would strongly resonate with Topeka-Shawnee County's business community.

The Career Navigation Center would also enhance opportunities for disadvantaged populations to access employment in high-demand careers with strong advancement possibilities by providing them online support and counseling to receive training, manage life challenges, and connect with potential employers. Community partners like local libraries could serve as access points for online counseling sessions.

Better career outcomes for unemployed and underemployed adults would raise standards of living, bolster local spending and economic growth, and potentially improve mental and physical health outcomes in the community.

For Topeka-Shawnee County adults who have completed some college but did not graduate, support from the Center can help them retrack their degree path and improve their prospects for higher-paying employment. The Momentum 2027 Competitive Assessment revealed that 23.5 percent of Topeka-Shawnee County adults have completed "some college," but did not attain a degree. This was highest of all the comparison areas and above the national rate of 20 percent.

HOW

Outreach and collaboration

- Targeted partners in education and training and social services should be engaged to discuss the vision for the online Career Navigation Center and discuss their potential roles in designing, resourcing, and staffing its services.

- Existing federally funded and institutional career services departments and centers should be acknowledged and integrated into Career Navigation Center discussions to ensure that the new model complements, not duplicates, existing efforts.
- Corporate and philanthropic partners could be approached to consider resourcing the design, development, and administration of the Center website and funding the participation of advisors to staff the site and provide no-cost counseling to local clients.

Program inventory and website development

- Partners should inventory and assess all existing efforts applicable to the Center's referral network. Based on the assessment, a database of degree and certificate programs and providers, available social services, and links to individual and consolidated job boards should be compiled and updated regularly.
- Website buildout would create a compelling interface, dynamic landing and sub-pages, useful digital information and testimonials, links to partners and programs, and a user-friendly appointment request form.

Training, launch, and promotion

- The roles of partner staff and rotational schedules to ensure sufficient coverage of virtual consultation hours should be formalized, with participating personnel trained in the Center's operating procedures and support protocols.
 - After initial promotion and launch, the Center should be consistently updated and enhanced based on staff and client feedback.
 - Ongoing marketing of the Center should utilize multiple media and engage all relevant community partners, governments, institutions, companies, agencies, and organizations to effectively promote the web domain and resources of the Center.
-

Child Care Task Force (CE9)

WHAT

A top employer concern expressed through Momentum 2027 public input was a lack of available child care. More than any other, this deficit was said to be limiting employees' ability to access the workplace and causing staff shortages for companies across all sectors. While the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted this issue for many, stakeholders said a scarcity of affordable licensed child care services has been a long-term issue in Topeka-Shawnee County. Even for families that can afford child care, there are often a limited number of slots available.

Because of its impact on the ability of adults to access training and the workplace, **GO Topeka should empanel and administer a Child Care Task Force as a component of its existing business programming.** The task force would research, evaluate, and recommend viable opportunities to increase child care availability in Topeka-Shawnee County.

To maximize the availability of child care slots, Greater Topeka companies should be included at all stages of the child care capacity discussion. This includes understanding firms' existing programs and employee support services to access licensed, affordable child care. Collaborative discussions should center around opportunities for local companies to partner on shared solutions to the child care crisis, including the potential to expand the capacity and eligibility requirements for existing programs and the creation of new jointly sponsored and funded programs and centers.

It should be acknowledged that child care services, including Pre-Kindergarten and related programs, are expensive propositions; few U.S. communities are able to offer universal early childhood services. However, advocacy efforts through the Child Care Task Force and other influential platforms can seek to compel elected officials at the state and federal levels to appropriate sufficient funds to enable local private and not-for-profit entities to develop additional child care capacity.

A key partner in Topeka-Shawnee County's child care expansion efforts is Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas, a locally headquartered agency serving 33 counties. The agency also operates a resource center for families seeking child care across the entire state of Kansas. Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas helps individuals find solutions for their child care needs; connects families and expecting mothers with information and community resources; and assists early learning programs with their services to children and families. With few exceptions, their services are provided at no cost. The agency also offers technical assistance and education opportunities for prospective and current child care providers.

WHY

Increasingly, business retention and expansion activities are geared around issues of talent, today's number one competitive issue in economic development. In Topeka-Shawnee County, enhancing talent availability for local companies by identifying solutions to employees' child care challenges would greatly improve the likelihood firms can approach and exceed their growth goals.

At its core, the current child care crisis (a national, not just local issue) is about access, both to education and training and the labor force. Without a reliable, trusted source of child care, potential workers are not able to fully participate in the local economy. Topeka-Shawnee County's labor availability challenges compel the community to pursue every potential opportunity to increase workforce access and capacity.

HOW

Empaneling and empowering a Child Care Task Force

- As a component of existing business efforts, an ad hoc group of experts, workforce representatives, employers, child care providers, government officials, community leaders, and other stakeholders should be brought together to explore ways to increase Topeka-Shawnee County's number of licensed child care slots. Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas should be considered a key potential resource.
- A full inventory of existing private and not-for-profit early childhood programming, services, and facilities should be conducted to determine how current efforts can be leveraged and expanded. Consideration should also be given to pursuing shared solutions such as jointly funded early childhood programs and centers.
- Task force discussions should be supported by research of comprehensive and smaller scale programs in U.S. communities that have successfully enhanced the provision of quality local child care. State and federal advocacy to increase funding for expansion of Greater Topeka child care programming could also be a component of early-stage efforts.

Confirming and implementing task force recommendations

- Viable recommendations from the Child Care Task Force should be vetted with all necessary partners. Adjustments or enhancements to proposed strategies should be considered.
- When consensus is reached on go-forward task force recommendations, coordinated efforts should identify and secure resources to implement approved tactics.

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (CE10)

WHAT

During the week of January 24, a group of carefully selected leaders participated in a facilitated retreat to discuss the framework for a comprehensive Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategy for Topeka-Shawnee County. **Because equity is at the core of desired Momentum 2027 outcomes, it will be a concept applied across all Key Initiatives.**

The framework will represent the first step of a weeks-long process to formalize an actionable strategy to diffuse D&I concepts and supportive actions into the functional fabric of Topeka-Shawnee County's community and economic life. When approved, the D&I Strategy will call upon all governmental, institutional, corporate, and organizational stakeholders to incorporate D&I principles into operational missions and practices.

Momentum 2027 will adopt the approved D&I Strategy as its roadmap for realizing a more equitable and inclusive Topeka-Shawnee County. Its components will impact multiple Momentum 2027 key initiatives; these tactical relationships will be referenced in the Momentum plan when the D&I strategy is finalized and will inform all related implementation activities.

Commitment from the entire community and connecting work across companies and institutions will be required to make Topeka-Shawnee County a more diverse and inclusive community, including identifying and tracking performance metrics to ensure efforts are on course to achieve desired outcomes. This will include purposefully educating local stakeholders on why diversity and inclusion has positive benefits for all residents and businesses.

WHY

Diversity and inclusion are broad concepts, but at their core they speak to community composition and the opportunities inherent in becoming a place that respects, embraces, and leverages the differences between people as a strength. Diversity is not just about skin color but gender identification, physical and mental abilities, socioeconomics, religious affiliation, lifestyle choice, and other elements that influence who we are and how we live.

As communities across America continue to diversify and bifurcate along racial, ethnic, and income-driven lines, there is growing consensus on the potentially destructive impacts of inequitable economic growth on the welfare of these communities and the nation as a whole.

Economists and the business community are starting to take notice. As Chamber Executive magazine reported, "What has been traditionally seen as a sort of moral issue – inclusion – has become a central

concern for economists seeking to promote prosperity...Regions that are more equal and more integrated – across income, race, gender and place – have better economic performance, on average, than those regions that are more unequal and more divided.”²

The non-profit workforce and education advocacy organization JFF aggregated selected research on the economic impacts of diversity, equity, and inclusion into a paper called, “Inclusive Economic Development: Good for Growth and Good for Communities.” Multiple findings concluded that economically healthy cities are more inclusive than distressed ones. Studies also found that economic exclusion is harmful to the economy, resulting in lost economic output and lost earnings and necessitating costly poverty alleviation measures.³

Momentum 2027 Competitive Assessment data research and stakeholder input concluded that Topeka-Shawnee County continues to experience income, wealth, and educational performance gaps by racial and ethnic population group. Many persons of color also feel that the benefits of the region’s economic progress have not been felt equally across the community.

The D&I Strategy provides the opportunity for open and honest dialogue about racial and ethnic disparities in Topeka-Shawnee County, their potential causes, and tactical solutions to foster equitable growth for the benefit of the entire region.

HOW

Topeka-Shawnee County D&I Strategy development and finalization

- Ongoing work of the strategy’s volunteer leadership team will lead to the creation and approval of a comprehensive D&I plan. Once finalized, the plan will be incorporated into all related Momentum 2027 key initiatives and implementation frameworks.

Comprehensive and collaborative strategic implementation

- Activation and advancement of the D&I Strategy will occur in lockstep with Momentum 2027 efforts. Partners overseeing the implementation of Momentum 2027 key initiatives will adopt D&I components into their tactical work plans and assess progress towards aspirational goal achievement.

² <https://secure.acce.org/articles/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/embracing-the-challenge/>

³ <https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/CA-IED-research-overview.pdf>

“My Topeka” Campaign (CE11-12)

WHAT

The “My Topeka” campaign (working title) would seek to engage and empower everyday citizens to take pride in where they live and express that pride publicly. The campaign is envisioned as an internal communications initiative to elevate Net Promoter Score sentiments and create positive community advocates.

It must be acknowledged that community pride campaigns are very challenging to effectively implement. At the end of the day, positive sentiments about a community are most strongly impacted by visible evidence and personal experience of economic growth, new development, enhanced quality of life amenities, improved public aesthetics, etc. However, it is also important that residents know all their community has to offer.

Topeka-Shawnee County should challenge itself to think outside of the box with the My Topeka campaign. How can it be interactive? Are there creative incentives that could be used to compel stakeholders to participate? Can it be fun? Maybe there are prizes awarded for most likes for a social media post tagged with #mytopeka. Perhaps participants in My Topeka challenges can accrue points that can be used towards free meals, T-shirts, gift certificates at local businesses, etc. Maybe there is an annual My Topeka Scavenger Hunt incorporating several local destinations.

Younger participants with active and popular social media accounts could be cultivated as key influencers to help enhance Greater Topeka’s “cool” factor among existing residents and external audiences. Providing these influencers with tickets to events, My Topeka swag, and other benefits could help incentivize their participation and amplify their messaging.

My Topeka could have an online portal, social media feeds, branded merchandise, and opportunities for sponsorships and affiliated events. Program designers should reach out to partners across Topeka-Shawnee County’s marketing, PR, advertising, and promotion sectors for ideas and feedback on My Topeka strategies. Differing perspectives on Greater Topeka from natives and transplants could be highlighted.

Integral to a campaign to leverage Topekans as local promoters is ensuring they have a complete picture of the community’s activities and assets. My Topeka should therefore leverage ongoing efforts such as self-guided tours, informational signage, event calendars, community celebrations, and other opportunities to experience and learn about the place where they live. If enhancements or consolidations of multiple communications channels into one information hub are needed to ensure that residents are fully aware of scheduled events and activities, these should be pursued.

WHY

As evidenced in Momentum 2022 feedback and, less so, Momentum 2027 public input, Topeka-Shawnee County residents often struggle to see the community in a positive light. While sentiments have improved in recent years, as evidenced by improving Net Promoter Scores measured by GTP, lack of pride or optimism about Greater Topeka's advantages and prospects adversely impacts efforts to move the community forward and promote it as a desirable location for companies and talent.

However, there is much to be proud about and, given the opportunity, residents have shown that perceptions of a disinterested and disconnected stakeholder base do not tell the whole story. An example of this was the creation of a new Topeka flag. Spurred by the Forge, Topeka's young professionals group, the Topeka Flag Redesign Initiative was launched in July 2018 and captured the attention of the entire community. More than 300 designs were submitted to Forge, which chose three finalists for a public vote; the winning design received over 70 percent of the nearly 4,000 votes cast.

The positive spillover of the flag project resonated with many Momentum 2027 public input participants. The My Topeka campaign represents an opportunity to take the lightning in a bottle captured from the new Topeka city flag and extend it into an ongoing initiative.

HOW

Partner outreach and program design

- Initial efforts would focus on engaging a creative team of local partners to brainstorm potential program features. This would include understanding and leveraging existing efforts that engage and inform Topekans on community assets and activities.
- As campaign components are formalized, staff could secure funding partners, sponsorships, and commitments to offer prizes, awards, merchandise, co-branding opportunities, and other My Topeka benefits.

Launch, adjust, and sustain

- Campaign launch could be accompanied by a well-publicized event, prize giveaways, social media blasts, cultivation of younger social media influencers, and other high-profile strategies to get the public's attention.
- As My Topeka is implemented, the ad hoc creative group enlisted to help design the program could be revisited to advise on how efforts can be improved and sustained.
- Compelling My Topeka outcomes could be incorporated into public relations strategies to secure out-of-market earned media coverage.

Choose Topeka 2.0

WHAT

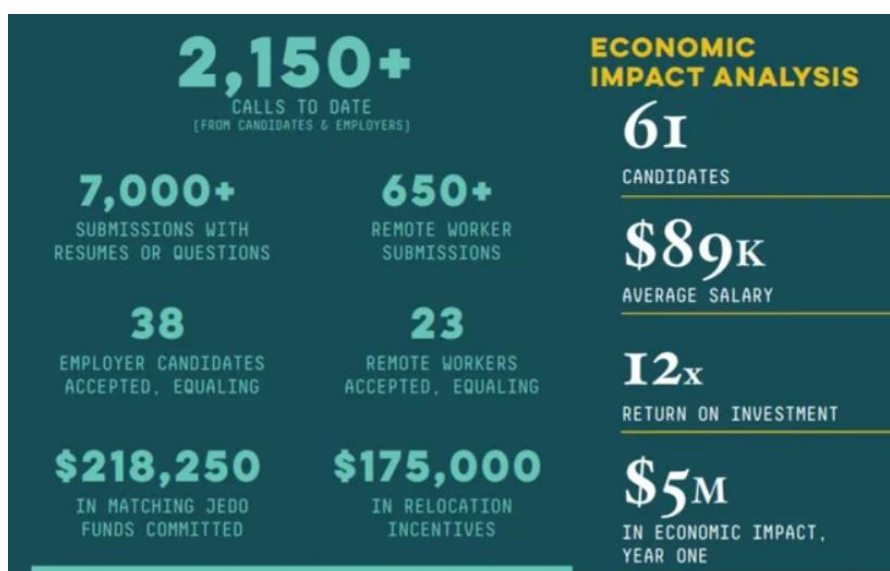
The Choose Topeka program was developed out of Momentum 2022 as a tool to stem the tide of talent working in Shawnee County but living elsewhere, especially the Kansas City market. The onsite incentive was funded in part through employer matching funds, though not all employers in Shawnee County participate in the program.

As the Covid-19 pandemic took hold and remote work became a growing phenomenon, Choose Topeka was expanded to include anyone in the country willing to relocate and work remotely from Shawnee County for one year. The program awards up to \$15,000 in benefits based on applicants' salary, with the minimum salary for qualification being \$35,000.

Requirements for the onsite incentive include: 1) Employer participation; 2) Eligible to work in the U.S.; 3) Moving to Topeka for a full-time position; and 4) Purchasing or renting a home in Shawnee County as primary residence within a year of a hire or move. The remote worker option is for applicants not currently residing in Topeka-Shawnee County who move to the community to work for a non-local employer in a full-time remote capacity.

Information released February 2022 highlighted results from Choose Topeka's first year. Just over 60 people accepted the relocation incentive and moved to Greater Topeka; 38 were candidates sponsored by employers while the remaining 23 worked remotely. The average salary of relocated workers was \$89,000, contributing to an economic impact of \$5.0 million – a 12 to 1 return on program dollars.

CHOOSE TOPEKA YEAR ONE RESULTS



Source: GO Topeka

Though successful both in participation and earned media benefits from articles in high-profile national publications, Choose Topeka applicant counts are dwindling. **To continue leveraging the program as the region's principal talent recruitment initiative, program officials acknowledge that enhancements must be made.**

There are many options for a Choose Topeka 2.0 effort. Principal among them is a focus not only on attracting new residents but keeping them in Greater Topeka for the long haul. Wraparound services to root remote workers in the community is a hallmark of the Tulsa Remote program, one of the first relocation incentives to gain traction nationally. Over 90 percent of Tulsa Remote participants remain in the region after their one-year commitment expires.

Choose Topeka program managers said an original intent of the program was to engage remote workers in local community networks, but the Covid-19 pandemic threw a wrench in those plans. With future incentive awards, efforts to retain participants long-term in Topeka-Shawnee County should be formalized in Choose Topeka programming.

In Momentum 2027 input, local employers said they were aware of Choose Topeka, but that few had taken advantage of the incentive. Ramping up efforts to increase companies' usage of the tool could help drive up participation rates.

There is also the potential to expand Choose Topeka into more of a comprehensive talent attraction campaign focused on key markets and direct outreach to Topeka expatriates utilizing alumni lists from local high schools and universities. Sophisticated data analytics and artificial-intelligence-powered software have assisted other communities with identifying the highest-value markets to target through talent attraction investments.

Very early discussions have explored the potential to synthesize Choose Topeka and Visit Topeka messaging into a more seamless campaign to promote the region externally to talent. Though preliminary, this could also include a campaign to engage social media influencers in promotion efforts and other advanced promotion strategies.

Additionally, the Choose Topeka incentive itself could be enhanced by expanding its use options; for example, offering the potential to use the incentive directly on child care or some other spending category.

WHY

Choose Topeka began as a business retention strategy to address employer concerns that talent residing outside the community would tire of the commute and look for jobs closer to home. Currently, almost 40 percent of people who work in Topeka do not live in Shawnee County. The Choose Topeka program offers a competitive tool to recruit these workers to reside in Greater Topeka to support the

expansion of the local tax base, which would benefit schools and to allow the city and county to have more resources to improve quality of life for their citizens.

The fact of the matter is that Topeka-Shawnee County's population growth has been flat for 20 years; the current total population of 177,000 has increased only 4 percent since 2000. Net domestic migration – the number of residents moving to a community from elsewhere in the United States – is a critical component of population growth in addition to natural change (births minus deaths), and international migration.

Increasing Greater Topeka's net domestic migration rates will be critical to growing the population and workforce to support the needs of local employers.

Choose Topeka has also earned notable earned media benefits for Topeka-Shawnee County. An October 9, 2021 profile in the Wall Street Journal on talent attraction incentives prominently featured Choose Topeka and, along with articles in dozens of other publications, have greatly improved external awareness of the community.

HOW

Assessing Choose Topeka efforts to date

- A thorough program review would be helpful to determine how Choose Topeka has performed, assess what has worked well and what was less successful, and to identify necessary program adjustments and enhancements.

Retooling the program for Momentum 2027

- Based on the program review, a Choose Topeka 2.0 model would be developed for implementation through Momentum 2027. The refreshed program would likely include a stronger focus on remote worker retention, expanded breadth of target markets, expats, greater employer utilization, and other improvements.

Considering longer-term opportunities

- Exploring the potential to synthesize elements of Choose Topeka and Visit Topeka messaging could be a means to unify external campaigns around themes that effectively appeal to talent across multiple interests.

Talent Immersion Efforts

WHAT

Talent that develops strong bonds with a community, becomes embedded in professional networks, owns a home, or develops a support system of interpersonal relationships among friends and relatives is much more likely to reside long term in the area.

Greater Topeka understands this reality and works to retain the next generation of local talent through multiple programs, including Leadership Greater Topeka, the Forge Young Talent young professional network, the Topeka Youth Commission, Top City Interns, and Executive Immersion Services designed to enhance the transition for senior executives and C-Suite leadership new to Topeka-Shawnee County.

Along with continuously assessing and improving existing programs, **stakeholders identified additional groups that would benefit from talent-immersion efforts. Principal among them were college students**, especially from Washburn University and Washburn Tech. Young adults come from counties across Kansas and beyond to access higher education in Greater Topeka institutions. While in the community, many report being unaware of local attractions and amenities and disconnected from opportunities to volunteer and otherwise engage in local activities.

Washburn representatives said the system's colleges would be receptive to efforts to better engage their students in the life of Greater Topeka, not only to enhance their educational experiences but also expose them to the possibilities of life in the community after graduation.

Select existing business leaders could also benefit from talent immersion efforts. Many managers and executives are not new to the market and did not participate in EIS nor participated in Leadership Greater Topeka. A high percentage of them also do not reside in Topeka-Shawnee County and are less familiar with its amenities. However, they would still benefit from more support to tell the region's story to current and prospective employees, colleagues, and members of their professional networks. One business leader noted, "Internally, I could really use more help promoting Topeka. I couldn't tell you what's a nice restaurant area in the city. I need to sell an image of living and raising a family here."

EIS programming could be offered to exiting Greater Topeka business leaders as a benefit of organizational membership or a fee-for-service arrangement. Executives interested in learning more about the community or to better sell its benefits could take advantage of EIS services like the Custom Briefing Book, Community Status Report, Family Integration, or Tailor Services. Or they might simply want a personalized tour of top sites, attractions, destinations, restaurants, or businesses.

It is imperative that talent immersion efforts, regardless of the program or target group, institutionalize processes to ensure that a full diversity of Topeka-Shawnee County stakeholders participate in and benefit from these services. Embedding the next generation of leaders in the community should be fully inclusive of all Topekans if true future equity is to be attained.

WHY

Retaining talent provides greater value and likelihood of success than attracting new residents. Existing high school and college students, young professionals, business executives, and prospective leaders of all stripes provide fruitful opportunities to engage and root in Greater Topeka.

Formalizing and expanding personal and professional networks is also a proven way to advance community and economic improvement strategies. Being able to tap into strong, stable, and trusted systems of interpersonal relationships can often mean the difference between a controversial yet beneficial policy, program, or development succeeding or never seeing the light of day. The “secret sauce” of many successful communities is the commitment of leaders and average citizens alike to embrace progressive change and make the necessary investments to see it happen.

Stakeholders report that Topeka-Shawnee County must continue to make progress leveraging the benefits of its diversity to attain its desired future. Key to this future is the immersion of all citizens in the fabric of leadership and community.

HOW

Continued enhancement of existing programs

- Staff and volunteer leadership should consistently determine how efforts like Leadership Greater Topeka, the Forge, the Topeka Youth Commission, Top City Interns, and GO Topeka’s Executive Immersion Services can remain relevant, diverse and inclusive, and impactful for talent retention and leadership development.
- Assessing and incorporating key features from comparison programs in peer communities is a proven way to keep current initiatives relevant and reflective of national best practices.

Targeted program expansion

- Program operators and their advisors should explore the potential to expand talent immersion efforts to additional key constituencies – specifically college students and existing corporate leaders.
- Proactive outreach to partner institutions, organizations, and individuals will be important to ensure that new and expanded programming is effectively designed and implemented.

APPENDIX A: KEY INITIATIVE SUMMARIES

Topeka-Shawnee County Housing Strategies

The Shawnee County 2038 Comprehensive Plan adopted in November 2018 included a chapter on Housing and Neighborhoods assessing future demand and recommending tactical priorities for the county's future housing sector. It advised county officials to focus on fostering the construction of affordable housing options while letting the market produce higher-end homes. To complement countywide goals in the Comprehensive Plan, the City of Topeka commissioned a Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy to assess the city's housing needs at all income levels and establish actionable strategies to improve existing housing stock and effectively plan to meet future demand. On December 8, 2020 the City of Topeka adopted an Implementation Plan for the Citywide Housing Market Study and Strategy that further prioritized short-and-long term activities.

Housing Advocacy Task Force

To proactively influence policy makers and voters and identify strategies to further advance market-rate residential development in viable neighborhoods, Topeka-Shawnee County should assemble a Housing Advocacy Task Force of key leaders and expert to guide local efforts to resource and build for-purchase and rental housing of all types. Facilitated Task Force meetings would customize narratives to establish policy priorities, build consensus around enhancing and better utilizing existing incentives, and promote new housing opportunities in proven sub-markets.

Downtown and NOTO Master Plan

To plan for the next generation of downtown development, the Topeka Planning and Development Department produced an updated Downtown Master Plan (DMP) which was approved by the Topeka Governing Body on May 4, 2021. Setting the stage for the next ten years of downtown development, it built on the efforts of the 2019 Downtown Market Study by creating a series of District Plans based on the market study recommendations; NOTO/River North was one of these districts. Each District Plan included prescribed land use, zoning, and streetscape improvements and allocated shares of the Market Study's ten-year recommendations for housing units, office uses, retail, and hotel beds.

21st Century Riverfront

Leveraging years of planning and proposed development scenarios along the Kansas River in Downtown Topeka, local leaders have determined that current opportunities warrant a major push to transform the city's riverfront. Current plans call for the development of a "vision book" for the Kansas Riverfront, informed by extensive community input. The final vision book would catalyze efforts to raise funds for preferred projects and initiatives. District Plans in the Downtown Master Plan could directly inform and direct riverfront development opportunities.

Gateways and Corridors

To enhance perceptions of Topeka-Shawnee County among residents, visitors, and investment prospects, the community would focus on aesthetic improvements at priority gateways and roadway corridor segments through multi-pronged, coordinated efforts. The gateway component would initially focus on the transformation of one or more principal entry points to Downtown Topeka into a signature gateway(s) for the city. Complementing the gateway initiative would be expanded efforts to upgrade the look, quality, and vitality of key corridor segments across Topeka-Shawnee County. Activities could focus on 1) Street maintenance; 2) Beautification; and 3) Development support.

Topeka Arts and Culture Master Plan

The arts engagement organization, ArtsConnect, is coordinating the development of an Arts and Culture Master Plan to answer the questions, "What does this community need?" and "How can the arts provide a springboard for this?" Based on these findings, the Topeka Arts and Culture Master Plan will guide the work of arts organizations and artists in alignment with established community priorities and work plans, offering a pathway forward for the arts and culture sector in Topeka.

Active Recreation Initiatives

To improve public health, expand talent-and-family-friendly assets, and create new opportunities for sports tourism, Topeka-Shawnee County should prioritize initiatives that promote active recreation. These include: 1) Building a new destination family park near the Southwest Topeka Aquatics Park; 2) Development of a Master Plan for Gage Park; 3) Implementation of the Topeka Fast-Track Bike Plan; and 4) Development of new and expanded youth sports facilities that position Topeka-Shawnee County to compete for hosting tournaments and reducing local families' travel requirements to out-of-market events.

Existing Business Services

Business retention and expansion (BRE) visits will utilize customized survey instruments to record and track companies' current and projected growth trajectories, talent demands, expansion opportunities, infrastructure and technology needs, and concerns that could be assisted through legislative and regulatory advocacy. Results of BRE surveys will inform staff efforts across Greater Topeka Partnership affiliates to ensure that Topeka-Shawnee County employers receive the support necessary to sustain and grow their operations.

Career Connections Program

The Career Connections Program would be a centralized, managed hub to connect interested students with local firms offering job shadowing, internship, and apprenticeship slots. The program operator would work closely with Pre-K to 12 school districts, two-and-four-year colleges, and employers to maintain a clearinghouse of experiential learning opportunities at Topeka-Shawnee County companies and ensure education and training faculty and career placement officers were aware of – and utilized – this resource for students looking for workplace experience in their desired fields.

ASTRA Innovation Center and District

The ASTRA (Animal Science, Technology, Research, and Agriculture) Innovation Center is envisioned as a 60,000 square foot project anchoring a planned Innovation District in downtown Topeka. The campus will seek to leverage the estimated 20 global startups participating each year in Plug and Play and serve as the “center of gravity” of global entrepreneurial ecosystem-building activities in Topeka-Shawnee County. Eventually, the campus could be utilized for networking and meetup events, how-to sessions and classes, information sharing, and co-location of support services, organizations, and personnel. Mentorship and business growth counseling could also be concentrated on site.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building

Assisting a formal or loosely affiliated group of entrepreneurs, technologists, small businesspeople, faculty, enterprise support personnel, and other stakeholders with cultivating a more dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem in Topeka-Shawnee County would create more fertile ground for home-grown startup development and retention of firms incubated through Plug and Play. GO Topeka and other area resources and stakeholders should continue efforts in planning, development, and hosting of entrepreneurial networking events, pitch competitions, informational sessions, incubator or accelerator

programs, volunteer mentors for inexperienced founders, “matchmaking” between startups and potential capital providers, and other initiatives.

Targeted Corporate Attraction

GO Topeka markets Topeka-Shawnee County to corporate prospects outside the region by developing and updating the content on the organization’s economic development website (gotopeka.com); investing in paid media through advertising placements in key trade and business publications; securing earned media coverage via a public relations contract with a national firm; building relationships with site selection professionals and corporate relocation officers; traveling to targeted relocation markets and industry conferences; in-market hosting of influencers and prospects; and leveraging incentives tools to finalize relocation deals. Allowing for the continuous need to assess targeted priorities, BRS does not envision Topeka-Shawnee County’s external corporate marketing and attraction activities changing in Momentum 2027.

Developer Outreach and Engagement

GO Topeka would formalize a process to cultivate a group of development firms to position as qualified partners for local and out-of-market economic development prospects. This would entail reaching out to existing local companies and identifying potential outside firms to engage in discussions on Topeka-Shawnee County opportunities and how to capture them.

C2C Collaborative and Data Exchange

The Cradle-to-Career Collaborative and Data Exchange (working title) will be a formalized coalition among Shawnee County Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) to 12 school districts and key partners to share and leverage data to inform district-level planning, curricula and programming, facilities development, technology needs, and partnerships to best serve the needs of students advancing to higher education and the workplace. The Data Exchange will aggregate performance data from all participating districts to determine county-wide trends, achievement gaps, and supplement district-level data to guide decision-making. The goal of the Collaborative and Data Exchange will be to enhance coordination and alignment among Shawnee County districts to optimize the talent pipeline from the cradle to careers.

Washburn Next

Washburn Next (working title) would become a community-wide effort to support Washburn University and Washburn Institute of Technology (Washburn Tech) to become maximum-impact institutions that recruit, retain, and graduate work-ready students to power Topeka-Shawnee County's future workforce. The initiative will capitalize on the unique nature of the campuses as co-governed entities to advance institutional strategies that take advantage of the strengths of each campus to create a seamless pipeline of talent to local employers. Washburn Next will not replace existing institutional strategies but leverage community partners to optimize their components and implementation.

Career Navigation Center

To complement existing programs, Topeka-Shawnee County would create an online Career Navigation Center as a partnership of area education and training providers and other support entities to serve as a virtual one-stop shop for adults looking to reenter the workforce or upskill into new careers. The Center would not directly provide training but serve an intermediary function, working to advise and connect adults with education and workforce programming, scholarships and grants, and available support services to guide them on their journey towards new skill attainment and more rewarding employment. Operating virtually, a rotating schedule of advisors from local colleges, universities, training centers, and social services providers would be available via appointment to provide free advisement to adults interested in obtaining a new degree or credential or completing a program where they accrued credits but did not graduate.

Child Care Task Force

Because of its impact on the ability of adults to access training and the workplace, GO Topeka should empanel and administer a Child Care Task Force as a component of its existing business programming. The task force would research, evaluate, and recommend viable opportunities to increase child care availability in Topeka-Shawnee County. Collaborative discussions could center around opportunities for local companies to partner on shared solutions to the child care crisis, including the potential to expand the capacity and eligibility requirements for existing programs and the creation of new jointly sponsored and funded programs and centers.

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

During the week of January 24, a group of carefully selected leaders participated in a facilitated retreat to discuss and decide upon the framework of a comprehensive Diversity and Inclusion Strategy for Topeka-Shawnee County. The framework is the first step of a weeks-long process to formalize an actionable strategy to diffuse diversity and inclusion concepts and supportive actions into the functional fabric of Topeka-Shawnee County's community and economic life.

"My Topeka" Campaign

The "My Topeka" campaign (working title) would seek to engage and empower everyday citizens to take pride in where they live and express that pride publicly. The campaign is envisioned as a multi-platform, multi-media internal communications initiative to elevate Net Promoter Score sentiments and create positive community advocates. The campaign could have an online portal, social media feeds, branded merchandise, social media influencer cultivation, opportunities for sponsorships and affiliated events, and leverage and inform promotional activities of local multi-state and multinational corporations.

Choose Topeka 2.0

The Choose Topeka program was developed out of Momentum 2022 as an incentive to stem the tide of talent working in Shawnee County but living elsewhere. To continue leveraging the program as the region's principal talent recruitment initiative, program officials acknowledge that enhancements must be made. Principal among them is a focus not only on attracting new residents but keeping them in Greater Topeka for the long haul. There is also the potential to expand Choose Topeka into more of a comprehensive talent attraction campaign focused on key markets and direct outreach to Topeka expatriates.

Talent Immersion Efforts

Greater Topeka works to retain the next generation of local talent through multiple programs, including Leadership Greater Topeka, the Forge Young Talent young professional network, the Topeka Youth Commission, and Executive Immersion Services designed to enhance the transition for senior executives and C-Suite leadership new to Topeka-Shawnee County. Along with continuously assessing and improving existing programs, stakeholders identified additional groups that would benefit from talent-immersion efforts, including college students and select existing business leaders.

APPENDIX B: COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES

The following projects, programs, and initiatives are profiled to enable Momentum 2027 implementation partners to explore example efforts similar to the strategy's Key Initiatives. The comparison examples are not intended to represent the best practices in these spheres (although some may be considered as such) but rather opportunities to highlight processes and outcomes that can inform Topeka-Shawnee County implementation activities. Entities and/or individuals engaged in these comparison examples could potentially serve as resources to advise Momentum 2027 partners on their forthcoming efforts.

CE1: Lima (OH) Housing Task Force

<https://www.limahousingtaskforce.org/>

One recommendation from a 2019 report assessing Lima's housing challenges was to establish a committee to address the full spectrum of housing needs in the community. In 2020, Mayor David Berger established the Lima Housing Task Force. Subcommittees and their responsibilities are as follows:

- The Design and Infrastructure Subcommittee focuses on physical housing stock, including existing structures, new construction, and recommend changes necessary to encourage a diversity of housing types across the city. The subcommittee also "stress tests" development scenarios, discusses housing prototypes associated with income level affordability, and considers strategies to implement mixed-use and mixed-income development.
- The Innovation and Sustainability Subcommittee reviews creative partnerships and innovative funding mechanisms to jump start and increase the supply of housing units in Lima. The group also discusses incentives and resources needed to spur housing preservation and development.
- The Policy and Implementation Subcommittee is tasked with assessing a variety of best practice housing policies for both short- and long-term implementation. It is also conducting a long-term analysis of legal, financial, and organizational capacities to support new policies and programs aimed at achieving the goals of the task force.

CE2: Grand Action 2.0 (Grand Rapids, MI)

<https://www.grandaction.org/>

Grand Action 2.0 is a not-for-profit economic development organization with a primary mission of identifying transformational, capital-intensive projects along Grand Rapids' riverfront and adjacent areas

and galvanizing public opinion and support along with potential funding strategies to realize them. Grand Action 2.0 continues the legacy of Grand Action, which helped five signature river-adjacent projects take root in the 1990s. The organization will manage the implementation of the eponymous Grand Action 2.0 plan, a vision for a 31-acre riverfront site in Downtown Grand Rapids.

Unveiled to the public in March 2021, Grand Action 2.0's plan features a 12,000-seat amphitheater, an adventure park with a zipline and kayak launch sites, housing towers containing up to 1,750 apartments, and ground-floor retail space. The 31-acre stretch being considered for redevelopment is located on the east bank for the Grand River along Market Avenue between Fulton and Wealthy streets. The vision for the site is designed to complement efforts by Grand Rapids Whitewater to restore the rapids in the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids. The plan recommends the following components for consideration:

- 10+ acres of new public open space connected to the Grand River
- Alternatives for new pedestrian bridges to the west side of the Grand River
- The Grand Rapids "Green Ribbon," an elevated and dedicated riverfront park connecting to the river trail system between Fulton and Wealthy Streets
- Adventure park, kayak pit-stop, zipline and seasonal attraction or cultural park
- Community green space to accommodate multigenerational gatherings and activities
- Ground floor retail and trend-forward mixed-use prioritized for minority-owned businesses
- 12,000-seat amphitheater
- Up to 1,500-1,750 mixed housing units, with a dedicated site at Wealthy and Market Avenue for affordable housing on the park and river
- 1,675 new parking spaces to support mixed-use and other functions
- Recommended sites for future downtown development of housing, soccer venue or aquarium

CE3: Great Streets Akron (Akron, OH)

<https://www.greatstreetsakron.com/>

Great Streets is a City of Akron initiative aimed at improving 13 of the city's Neighborhood Business Districts by enhancing, growing, and connecting districts and empowering the unique, local culture that makes them neighborhood "hubs." The concept of placemaking is the key approach to planning and urban design efforts driving the initiative. The program's Business Resource Guide provides a starting point to navigating city, county, and state resources as they apply to business development, including a

local Matching Façade Grant Program. Efforts also address transportation, public safety, aesthetics, urban design, and public space improvements.

CE4: Branson (MO) RecPlex

<https://www.bransonmo.gov/626/Branson-RecPlex>

The Branson RecPlex is a multi-purpose sports complex that combines recreation, fitness, and sports in one location. The 44,000 square foot recreation center features two gymnasiums for basketball and volleyball, a fitness center, a three-lane indoor track, locker rooms, community rooms, a party room, and concession area. Outdoor facilities include a 12,250 square foot aquatic center, soccer fields, baseball/softball complex, picnic pavilions, a large children's playground, and walking paths over the 40-acre site. Branson actively recruits youth tournaments to travel to the community for their event, touting the area's natural amenities and family-friendly activities.

The Branson RecPlex has hosted 12 national sports tournaments including both the boys and girls USSSA World Series events and AAU National Championships since it opened in 2005. It has also been home to over 100 state and regional events in baseball, basketball, volleyball, swimming, tennis, and martial arts.

CE5: Ascend Network (Central Indiana)

<https://ascendindiana.com/>

Ascend Indiana is the talent and workforce development initiative of Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP), which was formed in 1999 to bring together the chief executives of Central Indiana's prominent corporations, foundations, and universities in a strategic and collaborative effort dedicated to the region's prosperity and growth.

Ascend has focused its efforts around three core priorities: connecting job seekers to career opportunities through the Ascend Network talent platform; providing strategic consulting to address labor market gaps through Ascend Services; and informing workforce research and public policy through data aggregation, analysis and thought leadership.

The Ascend Network is the organization's job matching platform that connects job seekers with in-demand careers, while helping Central Indiana employers find and hire qualified candidates. Job seekers and college students can create a free account with the Ascend Network to access job and internship listings posted by Central Indiana employers.

CE6: Cortex Innovation Community (St. Louis, MO)

<https://www.cortexstl.com/>

Formed in 2002, Cortex is the non-profit master developer of the Cortex innovation district and is responsible for planning land use, land development and redevelopment; placemaking; district branding and marketing; entrepreneurial development, programming, support; financing, and fundraising for the 200-acre hub of business, innovation, and technology. Cortex empowers business owners and startups by providing access to the networks, talent, training, capital, and space necessary to grow a company. Their mission is threefold: to create jobs within the St. Louis region; to generate new tax revenue for the City of St. Louis and St. Louis Public Schools; and to maximize inclusive access and engagement in all district offerings.

When its development plan is complete, Cortex will have created 4.5 million square feet of mixed-use buildings (research, office, clinical, residential, hotel, and retail), a MetroLink light-rail station, a major highway interchange, and a publicly accessible park, all totaling \$2.3 billion of development. It is anticipated that 15,000 permanent jobs will be added to the St. Louis region. Currently, over 415 companies and 5,800 employees are in the Cortex Innovation Community.

CE7: Learn to Earn Dayton (OH)

<https://www.learntoearndayton.org/>

A member of the Strive Network, Learn to Earn Dayton is a one-county cradle-to-career partnership in Montgomery County, Ohio working towards a “big goal” of ensuring 60 percent of county working-age adults will have a two-or-four-year college degree or high-quality credential by the year 2025.

The non-profit’s four-pronged approach includes creating and leveraging partnerships, promoting best practices, fostering equity by targeting sub-populations of children, and gathering data to inform decision-making. Specific strategies include:

- Supporting children from birth to age 5 so they are ready for kindergarten
- Giving every child the opportunity to attend at least one year of high-quality preschool
- Promoting all students’ attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism
- Expanding quality afterschool and summer learning opportunities
- Ensuring every child is reading well in 3rd grade
- Expanding high-school internship opportunities and career pathways

- Ensuring every high-school graduate has a plan to attend college or earn a credential after graduating from high school
- Driving up FAFSA completion; and
- Increasing the number of “stopped-out” students who return to college to complete a degree or credential

Learn to Earn Dayton’s funders are shown below:



CE8: Coastal Compass Education and Career Resource Center (Corpus Christi, TX)

<https://coastalcompass.org/>

The Coastal Compass Education and Career Resource Center is not part of the federally funded network of workforce centers overseen by workforce boards but rather one of the country’s few “one-stop” models for public education and workforce services. Through donations, grants, and partnerships with area educational and training organizations, the Center offers clients comprehensive education and workforce training services free of charge. Staff and a rotating schedule of advisors from area colleges, universities, and training centers help clients understand and advance training and career opportunities. While the

Center has a physical location, it also began offering virtual consultations to clients during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of Coastal Compass' offerings is Recapture Your Dream, a free program that provides direct assistance to individuals that were once enrolled in a college or workforce program but have stopped out. Other programs include: Financial Aid 101; college admissions support; college planning checklists for high school students; Education to Employment Partners career pathways; Keys to Your Future career exploration; scholarship application support; and veterans services.

Compass Center funders include the City of Corpus Christi, Goodwill Industries of South Texas, Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend, United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, Corpus Christi Library Council; Craft Training Center of the Coastal Bend; Corpus Christi Independent School District; University of the Incarnate Word, Texas A&M Corpus Christi, Texas A&M Kingsville, Saint Leo University, Del Mar College, Coastal Bend College, and Education Service Center, Region 2.

CE9: Childcare Task Force (Boise, ID)

<https://www.cityofboise.org/departments/mayor/childcare-taskforce/>

Affordable, accessible, quality childcare was one of the top recommendations from the City of Boise's Economic Recovery Taskforce. To this end, a Childcare Task Force was convened in March of 2021 by the City of Boise to address existing hurdles to accessing childcare in the city and to better understand the needs of the childcare industry, childcare workers, and parents in Boise. The taskforce identified three areas of impact to focus attention and resources: licensing, accessibility, and affordability.

Over the course of four months, the task force worked towards addressing the issues facing childcare in Boise and developed specific recommendations the city could pursue in three areas of impact: 1) What the city could do itself, 2) What the city could do in partnership with businesses and community members, and 3) What businesses and community members could do to support childcare businesses and access to childcare.

CE10: Cincinnati (OH) Regional Chamber Diversity & Inclusion

<https://www.cincinnati-chamber.com/membership/your-partner/diversity-inclusion-your-partner>

The Cincinnati Regional Chamber sees as one of its goals partnering with business leaders to develop a culturally competent workforce and more equitable region. As such, its top priority is to support the business community with education and resources to help deliver economic inclusion, retain and promote

diverse talent, understand health disparities and their impact on the workforce, and understand businesses' role to improve sustainable inclusion practices.

The Chamber accomplishes this through multiple programs, including:

- Cincinnati Compass, a collaborative project with the City of Cincinnati, University of Cincinnati and more than 60 community partners focused on increasing available resources and opportunities for immigrant populations.
- The CLIMB Awards, which recognizes companies and organizations helping the region achieve greater heights of success through building a diverse workforce, championing equitable human resources practices, and developing inclusive cultures.
- A Cultural Competency program that develops skills for building bridges across the cultural, political and social divides to better grow the economic prosperity and equity of the region.
- Connect ERG, a network of cross-company employee resource groups across the region's 16 county metro area focused on advancing inclusion by leveraging their resources and networks to attract, grow, and retain diverse talent.
- Diversity Leadership Symposium, an event that emphasizes the importance of workplace diversity.
- A Minority Business Accelerator that establishes relationships with top regional, minority-owned companies, known as portfolio firms, and provides advisory support and coaching to help them acquire resources needed to excel.
- Stir! Multicultural Networking Reception, a networking event for seven local chambers to come together and promote, elevate, and celebrate the many cultures in the region.
- The Inclusive Chamber Podcast, which features local leaders providing information on how to develop a culturally competent workforce.

CE11: KC Heartland – Share the Love (Metro Kansas City, MO-KS)

<https://kc.org/share-love>

The KC Heartland campaign is the region's internal and external branding initiative for talent. It has multiple components, including opportunities for residents to become a KC Heartlander and "share the KC love with the world." Heartlanders get access to special perks like custom content, exclusive updates on local happenings, discounts at certain stores and businesses, and additional benefits throughout the year.

Other ways residents can “share the love” is by submitting candidates for the KC Hearts + Minds program that showcases Kansas Citians doing exciting things worth sharing. They can also use #KCHeartland across social media channels to share their KC Heartland moments and the reasons they enjoy living in greater Kansas City. KC Heartland also makes available Zoom backgrounds, logo images, and lock-ups to support users’ amplification efforts.

CE12: Ask a Local (Omaha, NE)

<https://www.omahachamber.org/talent-workforce/jobs-careers/ask-a-local/>

As part of Greater Omaha’s talent attraction efforts, residents can sign up for the “Ask a Local” program and have their bios and contact information posted on the Omaha Chamber’s talent and workforce page. The website urges visitors to get a local perspective, noting that, “These local Omahans are ready with answers when new residents or those looking to relocate to Omaha have questions.”

Each Omaha ambassador lists a different set of interest areas for visitors to ask the about, including outdoor recreation, cooking, LGBTQIA+ communities, craft beers, roller derby, food, theater, sporting events, live music, neighborhoods, family activities, childcare, schools, food, and expatriate and immigrant issues.