

AS I SEE IT

Madison could learn a lot from IBM-Dubuque partnership

IBM recently announced plans to open a technology service delivery center in Dubuque, Iowa. The facility will occupy the renovated Dubuque Building built downtown during the Great Depression. This massive structure formerly housed Roshek's Department Store and will be rebuilt to the highest environmental and ergonomic standards.

It is expected to create 1,300 jobs, but the IBM-Dubuque



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partnership goes much further than jobs. More recently, IBM has asked Dubuque to become a "Smart City" following a European program developed by IBM. The program allows IBM to use its massive array of technological equipment and expertise to improve how local water, energy and transportation systems operate. Dubuque will become the first U.S. Smart

City and the plan suggests that Dubuque will become an international model for environmental sustainability.

While researching this project and economic development in our neighboring state for a FutureIowa.com Web site, I found a great deal of cooperation and coordination among all levels of government, the private sector and public education. I was impressed with the ability to put together TIF, state incentives, historical use permits, educational partners and other perks for a project of this magnitude in a very short time span. What I discovered at the heart of the proposal was a fairly comprehensive plan already in place well before IBM came knocking.

Madison has had similar opportunities; in fact, we were on the IBM radar screen as they were looking in the Midwest for a site for their center. I question how many state and local officials, developers, UW staff, regional advocates, and press were even aware of their presence, much less working together to lay a package deal on the table.

We simply are not doing a good job of promoting our re-

gion and an even poorer job of courting companies that may be looking. Let's look at the variables for just one corridor in the city, East Washington Avenue. Do we have a good understanding of the existing inventory of brick and mortar and the availability of the buildings? What is the comfort level of the council for TIF and how quickly could we make a firm offer to a compa-

ny interested in the area? What state participation is available and who are the contacts? Could UW play a role? How would existing businesses in the area be involved?

In Iowa, when IBM announced they were interested, Dubuque already had many of the answers in hand. They had done the homework before they knew IBM was even looking. Contrast

that to Madison where we wait for a proposal before we even begin the process of approvals and participation — and we see vastly different approaches to attracting business to the area.

We need to look at some of the obvious areas for development and do a little pre-planning. In the case of East Washington Avenue, we have a new road, a proposed park, existing

buildings and a plan suggesting what we might like to see. This knowledge presents us with an opportunity to suggest what we may be willing to approve if the right company or project were to emerge. I am not suggesting a rubber stamp, but an opportunity to work with a company or developer with the clear understanding that we want them here and we can get things done. ■



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