

Friday, Sep. 25, 2009

Report to help city sharpen focus

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The Wichita Eagle

Which industries should Wichita try to recruit and how can it get them?

Answering those questions will be at the heart of a consultant's report the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition has commissioned.

The coalition has hired Site Selection Group of Dallas. The study likely will cost about \$70,000, plus travel expenses, said coalition president Vicki Pratt Gerbino.

The coalition will use funds already supplied by the city of Wichita and Sedgwick County.

The study comes five years after a similar study by Whittaker Associates.

King White, president of Site Selection Group, said competitive communities need to hone their approach regularly.

Some suggestions in the Whittaker report, such as chasing automobile parts plants, are no longer viable. New industries, such as alternative energy, weren't even mentioned.

"Most of these studies are done every three to five years, and five is on the outside, so you're definitely due," White said. "With all the changes that are occurring in the economic conditions and the global marketplace, you need to do this sooner rather than later."

Gerbino said the new study would take a fresh look at:

- * Wichita's assets and liabilities in attracting companies
- * Which industries it makes sense to pursue
- * How best to pursue them
- * Which companies to contact

She said she hopes to gain insight into the underlying issue of how some communities move away from dependence on one industry, while other communities never do.

She said North Carolina and South Carolina have been able to diversify away from the textile industry into a wide range of well-paying sectors.

But states such as Michigan, Indiana and Ohio are now suffering deeply because of their dependence on the auto industry, despite attempts to diversify.

Gerbino particularly liked that Site Selection Group spends most of its time advising companies on where to move factories and other facilities.

This study will allow the coalition to chase the right projects more effectively for Wichita's long-term future, said Lyndon Wells, the coalition's board chairman.

"This allows us to take more of a rifle-shot approach," he said.

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