

Project
Destiny
*a blueprint for community
growth in central Iowa*

Co-Chairs:

G. David Hurd
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**Greater Des Moines
Partnership Mission:**

The Greater Des Moines Partnership is the economic and community development organization serving Greater Des Moines. Its mission is to maximize local resources to address opportunities for economic and community growth. Greater Des Moines will reach its full potential only through a united economic development effort, with one voice, one mission, one focus.

Project Destiny

Vision

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Proverbs 29:18

More than a decade has passed since the Des Moines Vision Plan sparked bold planning and development in our city. Today our community pauses to ponder the future. We take direction from the Vision Plan principles – dream big, don’t settle for good enough, think long-term, work together to get the job done.

Visionary thinking built the momentum for Des Moines’ progress to date. Visionary thinking and courageous leadership will propel Des Moines toward its destination as a world-class, mid-size city.

As we stand on the verge of greatness, our dream for the next decade envisions a truly world-class city that offers more than basic services and a good quality of life, but innovative amenities that create a dynamic community where people want to live, work and play. Our vision encompasses specific development projects and a better definition of our brand and values in order to effectively represent our community to internal and external audiences.

The current planning effort, aptly named Project Destiny, has embraced a watchword: **focus** — focus on a few *moments* or centers of excellence — places and conditions with energy and potential to propel us forward.

Featured Priorities

The following strategies are culled from the recommendations of five Project Destiny work groups: Quality of Life, Workforce and Education, Human Services, Infrastructure, and Public Finance.

I. Improve Quality of Life

Strategy A: Support and expand the Principal Riverwalk and the Des Moines Riverfront Master Plan

Strategy B: Create a regional arts, culture, science and recreation improvement district

II. Transform the Human Services Delivery System

Strategy C: Create and empower the Greater Des Moines Human Capital Council

Strategy D: Create and nurture Circles of Support

Strategy E: Invest resources in early childhood development programs

III. Streamline and Reinvent Local Government

Strategy F: Regionalize local government services

Strategy G: Create a Metro Planning and Development Authority

IV. Engage the Community in Life-Long Learning

Strategy H: Assist in evolving the “Downtown Campus”

V. Establish New Revenue For Local Governments

Strategy I: Establish a metropolitan local option sales tax as a shared revenue source

Project Destiny

Greater Des Moines in 2010 and Beyond

A message from Steve Zumbach,

2003 Chair, Greater Des Moines Partnership

As I began my term as 2003 Chair of the Partnership, I issued a challenge to our membership and to our community: Create a blueprint that will allow Greater Des Moines to build on the lessons of the past by thinking strategically and working together, cooperatively. Over the past year, literally hundreds of community representatives have weighed in on how to ensure local economic growth and opportunity.

Passionate volunteers took up this challenge. They invited broad participation and discussion on the strengths and weaknesses we face in achieving a world-class metro area that is consistently ranked among the very best places to live, learn, work, invest, and play. Project Destiny leaders kept the work focused and on target. I thank each of the volunteers who invested so much of themselves in this effort and, more significantly, in the future of our community.

The goals and strategies outlined in this report represent transformational change. The resulting blueprint will provide a pathway to realize our vision. The Partnership will help the entire region to build on past successes to achieve a robust and diversified regional economy; a well-educated, civically engaged and progressive populace; an unparalleled quality of life; and responsive, cost-efficient, and effective government and human services.

Today, I am more excited about the destiny of our community than ever before. Greater Des Moines has a future that is beyond bright. And we can see it from here.

- Steve Zumbach

Transforming Greater Des Moines

A message from

G. David Hurd and Sunnie Richer, Project Destiny Chairs

Six years ago, community leaders—representing neighborhoods, businesses, and government—came together to work on the Major Projects Task Force. This group defined the scope of major projects that would serve as significant amenities for the residents of central Iowa, attract people to downtown, and enhance the image of Greater Des Moines. Their recommendations became known as the Capitol City Vision Plan and included recommendations from Mario Gondalsonas to reclaim the area around Gray's Lake, creating the Gateway East and West project, developing the riverfront, and building an events center, a downtown library, and a downtown science center. Nearly all of these will be accomplished in the next five years.

During the past year, a new group of leaders (list on page 13) representing a broad range of expertise — created a plan that builds on the successes of the Major Projects Task Force. The scope of Project Destiny was expanded to cover five areas: Quality of Life; Infrastructure; Human Services; Education and Workforce Readiness and Public Finance. Each area had two chairs and a working group that studied the issues and developed recommendations.

As a result, our vision for a transformed Greater Des Moines includes not only infrastructure projects, but also education and human development projects. We have focused not just on downtown, but on building a regional community that includes all of Greater Des Moines.

The transformational solutions outlined in this executive summary will help us attain our vision – to be a world-class region, consistently ranking among the very best in the United States—among the best places to live, learn, work, invest, and play. Project Destiny provides the plan to make that vision a reality.

We gratefully acknowledge the hours and expertise that those who served on Project Destiny invested in creating this plan...and in ensuring a vibrant and vital community for all of us tomorrow.

- G. David Hurd and Sunnie Richer

Project Destiny

I. Improve Quality of Life

Strategy A: Support and Expand the Principal Riverwalk and The Des Moines Riverfront Master Plan

(Quality of Life Task Force)

Waterfront revitalization projects have proven to be a popular and successful economic development strategy in numerous cities. They can be parks or commercial developments, public attractions or convention facilities. They typically help attract new commercial and residential development and they offer recreational, cultural and historical attractions that entertain and educate visitors and residents. The visionary Principal River Walk and the Des Moines Riverfront Master Plan will spur more development along the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers, and we must leverage these unique opportunities. The Partnership will engage the community in full support of an expanded vision for the Principal Riverwalk and the Des Moines Riverfront Master Plan in order to:

- Create greater accessibility for enhanced fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and whitewater activities.
- Build a “technology canal” anchored by the new Science Center to meld the history of the riverfront with current and future technologies.
- Provide year-round recreation on the east side of the river.
- Enhance the skyline by creating more recreational green space at the river’s edge.
- Establish an historic park at the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers.

Principal Riverwalk Investment: \$25 – \$30 million.

Return on Investment: Riverfront becomes a “Center of Unique Interest” for the region and a welcoming, safe, diverse, year-round entertainment and recreational area.

First Action Step: Secure additional federal resources to finance the Principal River Walk, secure local public and private revenues for operation & maintenance requirements.

Timeline: Phase One underway to be completed in the next three to five years.

Strategy B: Create a Regional Arts, Culture, Science, and Recreation Improvement District

(Public Finance Task Force)

Project Destiny recommends the creation of a regional “Cultural, Arts, Science and Recreation Improvement District” encompassing Polk, Dallas and Warren Counties and their municipal governments throughout Greater Des Moines. The “Improvement District” will be a regional public/private partnership organized to advance and help finance quality of life amenities in Central Iowa, funded by a portion of a half-cent municipal local option sales tax (See Strategy I). This revenue would be used to finance the following categories of operations:

- Regional cultural, science and arts organizations and public art projects.
- Recreational trails construction, operation and maintenance.
- Operational support for publicly owned regional facilities like the Iowa Events Center.
- Administrative operations of the Improvement District.

Investment: \$15 million will be raised annually from a half-cent local option sales tax (see Strategy I) and \$2.1 million annually from an increased Hotel/Motel tax (see illustration page 12).

Ongoing: \$15 million annually (see above).

Return on Investment: \$15 million leveraged into at least \$25 million annually, reducing dependency on property tax revenues and other local revenues for support of regional facilities.

First Action Step: Secure agreement among public investors and Partnership members for new revenue stream and functions of the “improvement district.”

Timeline: Begin January 15, 2004 – “Improvement District” in place by July 1, 2005.

Project Destiny

B 1: Connect Recreational Trails

(Infrastructure, and Quality of Life Task Forces)

Project Destiny envisions Central Iowa as the “Trails Capital of the World.” The local terrain, with rolling hills, scenic waterways, and centuries-old forests provides an excellent environment for recreational cycling, running, and walking. Central Iowans have demonstrated broad support for the use and appreciation of the existing trail network. The Project will assist public and private organizations in the community to plan and build a regional recreational trail network that will:

- Expand and connect recreational trails throughout the greater Des Moines area, with the central business district at their hub.
- Establish agreements between the Polk County Conservation Board and the cities of Central Iowa to develop a comprehensive regional plan and construct the recreational trails.
- Develop both urban trails and clearly marked bike lanes on existing streets to make alternative work commutes easier and to allow safer connections between trails.

Investment: \$50 million over 12 years (from local option tax).

Return on Investment: An integrated and fully connected trail system will provide universal access to unstructured at-will recreation (especially attractive to young professionals and families), and will increase connectivity and access to many more “centers of unique interest” throughout the region.

First Action Step: 1) The Partnership, Metropolitan Planning Organization and Metro Advisory Council will convene a “Regional Trails Summit” and 2) assist local governments to develop regional cooperative agreements.

Timeline: Comprehensive plan and regional agreements – Two years; Construction – eight to 10 years.

B 2: Establish Public Art in Downtown and in “Centers of Unique Interest”

(Quality of Life Task Force)

Research confirms that art in public places enhances the aesthetic environment, encourages diversity and inclusiveness, provides important landmarks, creates a more memorable community and even deters vandalism. Project Destiny proposes a substantial commitment to (and development of) a coordinated public art program, the likes of which has not been undertaken by any U.S. city our size. The Project will assist appropriate public and private investors to develop a comprehensive plan to locate public and interactive public space throughout the metro, including large and small works of visual art, fountains and other water features that will dramatically improve the look and appeal of the downtown community (Gateways East and West and the riverfront corridor).

Investment: \$9 million (33 % from local option tax – see Strategy I).

Return on Investment: Creates a more vibrant and “cosmopolitan” downtown area, enjoyed beyond the traditional 7am – 6pm timeframe.

First Action Step: Formation of a “Metro Public Art Steering Committee.”

Timeline: Five to Seven years.

B 3: Develop a Partnership group to market, promote and support the art, cultural, recreational, leisure, and lifestyle amenities of Greater Des Moines

(Quality of Life Task Force)

The Project seeks to create a new functional group within the Greater Des Moines Partnership that will strengthen and promote metro-area artistic, recreation and cultural activities. This element of the Project is a non-duplicative role as there are groups dedicated to promotion of *pieces* of Greater Des Moines’ culture, but no single resource exists with a mission to strengthen and support all of these amenities.

Investment: \$ 96,000 first year (Partnership budget)

Return on Investment: The project will coordinate and promote a regional communications network that will increase community awareness and participation in metro arts, recreation and cultural activities; increase offerings, and promote round-the-clock, year-round activities that appeal to different audiences.

First Action Step: Identify and set aside Partnership funds and hire a project director

Timeline: Implemented and operational by September 1, 2004

Project Destiny

II. Transform the Human Services Delivery System

Strategy C: Create and Empower the Greater Des Moines Human Capital Council

(Human Services Work Group)

There are nearly 200 nonprofit agencies, employing about 2,500 people that provide human services in the Greater Des Moines area. On any given day, these dollars, agencies, and employees touch the lives of at least 25 percent of the families in Polk County. The current system is woefully fragmented: each funding source has its own legislative mandates, priorities, rules, regulations, and policies that impact both providers and consumers. Many of these regulations are overlapping or conflicting, and may not respond to the needs and priorities of the community. Without a centralized, coordinated oversight and management vehicle, the effectiveness of the dollars and work invested in providing human services is diluted. Project Destiny therefore recommends creation of a new system of human services funding and service delivery, with a full-time executive director reporting to a new, empowered governance board called the Greater Des Moines Human Capital Council. Built from the existing Human Services Planning Alliance, the Council will provide oversight, ensure coordinated service delivery, and ensure better use of the more than \$656 million that is poured annually into our human services system by federal, state, county, and city programs.

Thousands of people in the Des Moines Metro area are trapped in a cycle of poverty. The very real costs of this cycle impair our workforce, our schools, and overburden the justice system. Our economy, our future, and our children depend on immediate, transformational change.

Investment: \$250,000 (new investment) per year, for a full-time Executive Director, assistant, and office space, supplies, and equipment.

Return on Investment: Improved, more efficient and cost-effective human services delivery/development systems that provide better results and reduce dependency.

First Action Steps: Engage the Partnership as a representative on the Council; vet concept to stakeholders and community; hire Executive Director; elevate authority of the Greater Des Moines Human Capital Council by creating positions that ensure a guiding coalition of key leaders.

Timeline: Position funded and Executive Director hired by March 1, 2004.

Strategy D: Create and Nurture Circles of Support

(Human Services Work Group)

Far too many members of our community are unable to reach their potential, because they are disconnected from the support, help, and opportunity they need. Because of language and cultural barriers, isolation, fear, and lack of support, too many families limit their futures - and those of their children - while a fragmented and incomprehensible system of human services programs creates lengthy, frustrating searches for information, support, and needed services.

Building on the "Name Each Child" model, Project Destiny proposes that the community link formal and informal support systems into what we call "Circles of Support." Circles of Support will increase the economic and academic success of those working to get out of poverty while at the same time creating an incubator for learning and behavioral change. The Circles will assist people in poverty to empower and organize themselves, and make life changes by connecting residents, service providers, neighborhood institutions, faith-based organizations, and civic, business, and government leaders. All of these systems of support will work in concert to improve the status and strength of individuals and families in our highest-risk neighborhoods. Circles of Support will change structures, policies, and systems to create lasting change.

Investment: \$374,250 for pilot year, reaching 200 families at \$1,871 per family (for coaches, incentives for savings, and matching funds). The pilot project will be documented in detail, to provide learning for increased efficiencies and effectiveness in expansion years.

Return on Investment: \$652,800 in savings on welfare and food stamps. In addition, there will be 200 fewer families on welfare; more people will earn a livable wage, and our engaged community becomes stronger.

First Action Step: With the leadership of the Executive Director and the newly created Human Capital Council, identify and redirect existing dollars to invest in Circles of Support. Engage community-wide support, recruit volunteers.

Timeline: Launch yearlong pilot project April 1, 2004.

Strategy E: Invest Resources in Early Childhood Development Programs

(Human Services Work Group)

Research shows that investing in early childhood development reduces future dependency on public assistance. Children who are not ready to learn upon entering kindergarten will be far behind their classmates by the fourth grade and are most likely to drop out of school before they reach 10th grade. This perpetuates a dangerous and debilitating cycle of poverty. We can, however, break this cycle. By investing in children from birth to age five, we can ensure readiness for kindergarten, increase the high school graduation rate, and develop a strong, stable, and productive workforce for tomorrow. The Project proposes a focused investment in quality early childhood daycare centers. Caregiver certification and emphasis on kindergarten readiness will improve the entire childcare system.

Investment: \$29 million per year, a combination of redirected existing dollars and new investment.

Return on Investment: Increased school performance in five years; increased high school graduation rates in 15 years; declining number of people unemployed and/or dependent on welfare within 15 years; a stronger, more qualified, more productive workforce in 15 years.

First Action Steps: Create a Human Capital Council (see Strategy C) to identify existing dollars in the human capital delivery/development system that could be better invested, and advocate, if necessary, for additional new investment. Leverage work and energy of the Women's Leadership Initiative.

Timeline: Dollars identified and a phased program launched by October 1, 2004.

Project Destiny

III. Streamline and Reinvent Local Government

Strategy F: Regionalize Local Government Services

(Public Finance Task Force)

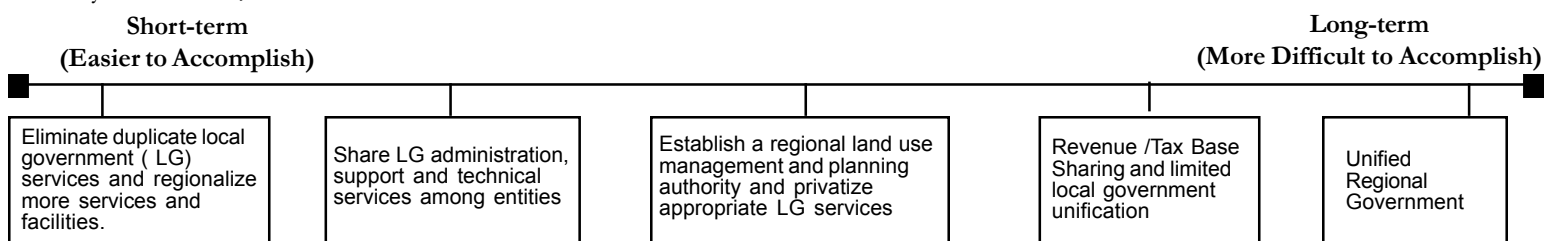
Regionalism and tax-base sharing are public policy strategies whose time has come. Duplicative services among the region's governing bodies, inefficient use of monetary resources, and shortsighted community planning have failed to create the world-class region we wish to be. Iowans must adopt regional approaches to financing and delivering the services of local government (LG). The current system; an incomprehensible labyrinth of the tax policies of the counties, cities, school districts and dozens of other taxing districts in greater Des Moines, must be replaced.

County, city, and school governments must work together to identify and eliminate duplicative services and eliminate non-essential programs. Merged services and consolidation of many local government functions links the future of all neighborhoods and communities. In addition, streamlining local government services and revenue sharing can:

- Provide a more equitable distribution of local resources to address regional issues.
- Provide economies of scale in purchasing goods and services.
- Eliminate duplicate services.
- Coordinate balanced growth of cities by establishing growth policies that conserve open space and farmland and help direct growth toward revitalization of established communities .

Greater Des Moines shouldn't be viewed by the electorate as a crazy quilt of 69 independent local governmental bodies with the city of Des Moines stitched in the middle but rather as a single community with an interwoven economy, housing market, retail network, transportation system, cultural and education opportunities.

Mergers of local services promise leaner governments, better-planned and more strategic economic development, and reduced competition for development among neighboring communities. Project Destiny's Public Finance Task Force recommends that the Partnership's Government Policy Council and Executive Committee endorse the proposed Des Moines - Polk County Charter. The Task Force will be actively involved in the Partnership's on-going consideration of the proposed Charter, including participation in meetings, hearings and deliberations of the Government Policy Council and the Affiliate Chambers of Commerce, and lobbying for a supporting resolution from the Executive Committee. The Work Group seeks to secure the Partnership's endorsement by mid-March, 2004.



Strategy G: Create a Metro Planning and Development Authority

(Infrastructure and Public Finance Task Forces)

Central Iowa competes for business development in an environment with no physical borders, and yet duplication of business development efforts, confusion, delays and frustration create very real barriers to achieving our goals. The overall costs of projects can be reduced if communities within Polk County work together to implement standardized policies regarding planning and land use development. To this end, Project Destiny calls on all local governments in Central Iowa to create a metro planning authority, under the jurisdiction of Polk County or multiple counties (Polk, Dallas, Warren) to design standards consistent throughout Greater Des Moines for building codes, permitting requirements, regulatory interpretation, processes, time requirements, inspections, fees, and enforcement, so that the development process will be consistent from county to county and city to city.

Investment: Start-up costs: \$250,000 from existing local government resources.

Ongoing costs: \$1.75 - \$2.5 million annually from existing local government resources.

Return on Investment: New policies will streamline processes, significantly reduce costs, and increase efficiency.

First Action Step: Assist the metro's county and city governments to develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) designed to establish a Metro Planning and Development Authority.

Timeline: Agency start-up within 18 months; fully operational in two years.

Project Destiny

IV. Engage the Community in Life-Long Learning

Strategy H: Encourage Evolution of the "Downtown Campus"

(Workforce and Education Task Force)

Project Destiny supports the mission and work of the Des Moines Higher Education Collaborative. We commend the leadership of the institutions that formed the collaborative in 1998 as a means to concentrate their class offerings, certificate programs and facilities in a central location in downtown Des Moines.

Project Destiny endorses these efforts and encourages the participating institutions to accelerate efforts to create broad curricula and diverse professional development programs serving the needs of central Iowa businesses. To assist with this goal, the Partnership will establish a "Business/Higher Education Coordination Work Group" to advise the Board of the Collaborative in defining (and responding to) professional development and training needs. The Work Group will include representatives from the Partnership's Board and the Collaborative Board; and it will be co-chaired by a member from each board.

Project Destiny envisions a "downtown campus" built on the foundation of the John and Mary Pappajohn Higher Education Center. We believe the "Center" will be a catalyst to enhance culture and diversity, improve workforce skills, provide professional training and expertise and bring vitality and economic growth to the Gateway development area. The "Center" will be the magnet that attracts business and well-educated people to Greater Des Moines – and to the "downtown campus." Professional Studies programs offered by the Center will foster the region's economic growth, help businesses to develop improved products and services, and assist new start-up businesses. The Center will also offer certificate programs for employees of participating businesses.

Investment: Time, energy, existing financial resources and will of the leaders of participating institutions.

Return on Investment: Better-educated workforce, a strategic business partner and community resource capable of responding to the diverse needs of business and the workforce. Capitalize on new library location and help create a more vibrant and "cosmopolitan" downtown that is utilized beyond the traditional 7am – 6pm timeframe.

First Action Step: Formation of "Business/Higher Education Coordination Work Group" and a Summit of College and University Presidents serving Central Iowa.

Timeline: Five years.

"Learning throughout life is seen to be one of the most powerful imperatives for the future development of economic wealth, social stability and personal fulfillment...the place where the action will happen is in the towns, regions and cities of each nation."

- Norman Longworth,
Lifelong Learning in Action

Project Destiny

V. Establish New Shared Revenue Source for Local Governments

Strategy I: Establish a Metropolitan Local Option Sales Tax

(Public Finance Task Force)

Central Iowa's local governments are much more reliant on property taxes than the rest of the nation where cities and counties have access to local sales taxes as a significant source of revenue. Project Destiny recommends that Central Iowa voters act to provide their local governments with new revenues from a regionally based local option sales tax to be used to reduce pressure on property taxes. With voter approval, cities and counties can extend property tax relief to tax payers by diversifying local government revenues and shifting support of some local government functions from the property tax to the local sales tax. Project Destiny proposes that new sales tax revenues be collected region-wide and used primarily for property tax relief by funding operations at publicly owned regional facilities, building recreational infrastructure, and supporting regional cultural and arts organizations.

The abundance of tax-exempt and non-taxed property (including government properties) located in the City of Des Moines creates disproportionately higher property taxes for Des Moines property owners and residents. The Polk/Des Moines Taxpayers Association estimates that the value of tax exempt and non-taxed property in Des Moines approaches \$2 billion – resulting in lost tax revenue totaling about \$34 million. To achieve the goals outlined in this report, we must create a region in which individual communities are not pitted against each other. Sharing the cost of the programs outlined here, and sharing the burden created by tax-exempt and non-taxed property, is essential to the task of leveling this playing field.

Investment: The Partnership will lead a campaign to establish a countywide municipal local option sales tax in order to achieve many of the priorities outlined by Project Destiny. The local option sales tax will be \$.005 (one-half of one percent) until the year 2010, and will increase to \$.01 (one percent) beginning in 2010 when the one percent school infrastructure sales tax will expire. The tax will be collected in Polk County, divided among local governments and other community based entities to:

- Help support the enhanced Riverwalk, expanded recreational trails, and cultural and arts organizations through the Arts, Culture, Science, and Recreational District.
- Reduce local property taxes and reduce the property tax differential through debt reduction.
- Support operations of publicly owned regional facilities.
- Beginning in 2010, continue support for schools (infrastructure construction, capital improvements, and technology) from a portion of the replacement municipal local option tax.

Return on Investment: The sharing of tax base growth will reduce property tax disparity among central Iowa's city and county governments and will spur the evolution of a locally, nationally and globally competitive, *unified* development environment.

First Action Step: Develop and negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among county & city governments related to division of revenues.

Timeline: Submit municipal sales tax referendum to the electorate before May 2005.

Project Destiny Revenue Flow *

½ Cent Local Option Sales Tax and 2% Hotel/Motel Tax

Countywide * ½ cent sales tax
\$30 million



50 % (\$15 million) distributed to Cultural, Arts, Recreation and Science Improvement District

50 % (\$15 million) distributed to local governments for debt reduction & property tax relief

Regional Facilities
\$ 6.0 million annually

Recreational Trails
\$5.25 million

Cultural and Arts Organizations
\$3.75-\$5.85 million



Tier 1 organizations
Budget > \$2 million
\$1.7 - \$ 2.6 million

Tier 2 organizations
Budget > \$ 1 million
\$ 750,000 - \$ 1.17 million

Tier 3 organizations
Budget < \$ 1 million
\$ 930,000 - \$ 1.46 million



County wide 2% Hotel/Motel tax
\$ 2.1 million

*** Note:** This illustration is applicable only to the Public Finance work group's analysis of Polk County and its political subdivisions. The Project Destiny recommendation is for a regional sales tax to include Dallas and Warren Counties. If the recommendation is realized, the projected new revenues available for tax relief and for support of regional facilities and organizations will be much greater than demonstrated here.

Project Destiny Leaders & Volunteers

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Steve Zumbach, 2003 Partnership Board Chair, Belin Law Firm

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Stacey Johnson – Iowa Taxpayers Association
Susan Judkins – Iowa League of Cities
Tom Kane – Des Moines Area MPO
Jeff Riese – Polk/Des Moines Taxpayers Association
David Roederer – Facilitator: StrataVizion Group

Sponsoring Organizations

Downtown Community Alliance
Greater Des Moines Partnership

The Project Destiny leadership and staff wish to express our sincerest and special thanks to the nearly two hundred Partnership and community members who provided valuable input to the task forces through on-line surveys and other contributions too numerous to list here.

Project Destiny

*a blueprint for community
growth in central Iowa*

This “Featured Priorities” report is a sampling of the many recommendations of the Project Destiny Work Groups. Complete reports from each of the five work groups are posted on the Partnership’s web site and can be found at:

<http://www.desmoinesmetro.com/projectdestiny>.