

As they say, “Change is a Coming”
By Luke Bauman, Executive Director
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At 7:00 a.m. on April 14th, I was sitting in the auditorium at General Mills Corporate headquarters. I was listening to politicians and economic development leaders from around the Twin Cities introduce the “Greater Minneapolis - St. Paul Regional Economic Development Partnership.” This new partnership is the result of 2 years of work by an informal group of Twin Cities business and political leaders called “The Itasca Project.”

Essentially, this group is organized just like our own Wright County Economic Development Partnership. They are a 501c3 nonprofit private/public partnership and depend on the voluntary and benevolent involvement of the private and public sectors for success.

The featured presenters were Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak, St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, John Foley of 4Front (a New Initiative to Showcase Minneapolis Saint Paul as Premier Center of Creativity & Innovation) and the new CEO of the new Partnership Michael Langley.

The message they were communicating to this gathering of economic development leaders was clear: a regional effort is needed in the greater Twin Cities area. The area is expressed as the 13 county metro area and includes Wright County.

First up was Mayor Rybak. He led by quoting another local leader by saying, “When the recession hit, we got organized.” He then went on to highlight the region’s highly educated workforce, robust R & D environment, and quality of life.

Mayor Coleman came next and articulated some challenges the area is facing; such as a persistent achievement gap and flagging talent and innovation attraction. He stated that the R&D and education happens here, then they leave for California, Boston, or Austin.

Then John Foley of 4Front stepped in to provide a context and some motivation. He said, “I am getting sick and tired of hearing about Sioux Falls and Austin!” He contended that they, and others around the world, are running rings around any economic development efforts that are coming out of this area.

Finally, the CEO of the new Partnership, Michael Langley, provided some vision of how the Greater Minneapolis – St. Paul Regional Economic Development Partnership will proceed.

This new Partnership is coming into existence to regionalize and consolidate economic development efforts in the greater Twin Cities area and our Wright County economic development efforts are sure to be affected, one way or another.

What all of this means for Wright County remains to be seen. I had a quick conversation with Mr. Langley after the forum. He stated emphatically that he wanted to “come to us.” He has in

mind to put on a big event in Wright County. The exact reason and nature of this event hasn't come to light yet. But, make no mistake, they are interested in working with us somehow.

In order to begin to prepare for these unknowns, I am proposing a county-wide gathering of economic development leaders so we can discuss things at the Wright County level. We need to listen to and consider very carefully what the MSP Regional Partnership has to say, but we should do so with our local interests in mind. If we know and understand each other here in Wright County, we will be better servants of our Wright County communities and better participants in the regional efforts presented to us.