

FOCUSING ON THE ISSUES



2015 PUBLIC POLICY GUIDE



GREATER BURLINGTON PARTNERSHIP



ADVOCACY IS A MUST!

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce exists to be a catalyst for economic growth and community development in Des Moines County. For a Chamber of Commerce to be successful, it is imperative that it work within the political realm to advocate positions important to business. The purpose of this set of position statements is to reflect those issues the Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce believes are in the best interests of the business community in Greater Burlington and Des Moines County. These statements reflect the opinions of our membership of nearly 700 as measured by the annual “Political Action Agenda Survey,” are then recommended by the Government Relations Committee, and lastly, are adopted by the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

The federal government, State of Iowa and our local community must do everything possible to encourage investment and job creation. There is an alarming trend to take business for granted and to underestimate the fierce competition of a global marketplace. Private businesses reach a point where tax and fee increases and ever-increasing regulation become too burdensome and inhibit growth. The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce strives to be the advocate for business in the Greater Burlington community and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason Hutcheson', written over a white background.

Jason Hutcheson
President & CEO
Greater Burlington Partnership

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FUNDING FOR OUR ROADS AND BRIDGES

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce understands the vital importance of an established transportation system that connects Greater Burlington with the surrounding region and beyond. Addressing transportation and infrastructure concerns is necessary to continue everyday business and attract new developers to the area.

Our vast transportation network requires significant maintenance on an annual basis, and the system is simply not generating enough revenue to keep pace with wear and tear. With fewer drivers on the road and the purchase of more fuel-efficient vehicles, Iowa has seen fewer and fewer dollars going into the road use tax fund. The state now faces at least a \$215 million backlog of critical infrastructure needs and is ranked 2nd worst among states with structurally deficient bridges. One in every five bridges in Iowa is considered structurally deficient- including one on Burlington's Main Street, Cascade Bridge.

It has been 25 years since the user fee was adjusted. This puts Iowa behind only three other states for the longest time without an increase. Our current fuel tax is tied for the 35th lowest in the country and all bordering states except for Missouri have a higher state fuel tax. Road funding is different from other sources and uses of revenue. The dollars generated by the road use tax fund are constitutionally-protected and can not be used for any other purpose.

There is lots of discussion and speculation as to how the funding could be generated. The Chamber of Commerce supports this robust conversation as long as the finished product creates the necessary dollars to repair and expand roads and bridges across the state. The gas tax has served as a fair system for financing our roads given the more one drives, the more one pays. However, it may be time for a longer term solution called a hybrid approach. With this option, there could be a decrease in the cents-per-gallon gas tax with the addition of a percentage-based sales tax at the wholesale level. This model would help the road use tax fund grow with inflation.

In addition to the Chamber of Commerce, the Highway 61 Coalition has long been a forefront advocate for an increase in infrastructure funding. This corridor is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, four-lane expansion the State of Iowa needs. The support for the completion of the Highway 61 corridor as four lanes from Keokuk to Dubuque is immense. The new Ft. Madison by-pass has continued to improve the corridor, and the area is encouraged by the release of potential site plans for an expanded Highway 61.

No matter what route the Governor and Iowa Legislature decide to take, the people of Iowa will thank them for finally leading the way on this issue that has faced cities, counties and the entire state for decades.



TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce understands the vital importance of an established transportation system that connects Greater Burlington with the surrounding region and beyond. Addressing transportation and infrastructure concerns is necessary to continue everyday business and attract new developers to the area.

- **Support** the completion of the Highway 61 corridor as four lanes from Keokuk to Dubuque. The new Ft. Madison by-pass has continued to improve the corridor, and the area is encouraged by the release of potential site plans for an expanded Highway 61.
- **Support** the four lane completion of Highway 34 in Illinois as well.
- **Support** new or alternative sources of revenue including a fuel tax increase to provide the resources necessary to maintain existing and develop new transportation infrastructure.
- **Support** fully funding the Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century Fund (TIME-21).
- **Support** the comprehensive plan for flood control on the Mississippi and improvement of the levee system to a “500 Year” level of protection. The Governor and legislature are urged to join Illinois and Missouri in support of levee system improvements.
- **Support** the modernization of the Mississippi River’s lock and dam system.
- **Support** the continued State of Iowa funds for the commercial and general aviation available through the Southeast Iowa Regional Airport.
- **Support** the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), Essential Air Service, Small Community Development Grants, and other programs that develop and maintain facilities at airports and support commercial air service.
- **Support** funding at the Iowa Department of Transportation for rail service into industrial parks and sites appropriate for rail projects.
- **Support** continuing reinvestment in city and county roads and infrastructure even as budget challenges exist.
- **Oppose** the State of Iowa defunding longtime state supported roads, putting the financial burden on county and city governments.



WORKFORCE & EDUCATION

The future lies with those that are being educated today. The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce continues to support a vitally strong relationship between K-12 school districts, community colleges and employers.

- **Support** assistance from the State of Iowa in creating tools to attract and retain young workers and skilled workers in order to fill the void that will be created by anticipated retirees.
- **Support** business and education partnerships in order to provide the number and quality of workforce entrants that employers require.
- **Support** the continued community college administration of the Iowa New Jobs Training Program. Maintaining a strong partnership between business, education and government is beneficial for the community. Community colleges can continue to provide students with the necessary knowledge employers are looking for with an emphasis on efficiency efforts in order to provide employers with the maximum dollars possible.
- **Support** reforming education in Iowa. World class standards for students, teachers and administrators must be adopted. Excellence in teaching must be rewarded and poor teaching cannot be tolerated. Business and education partnerships must be strengthened. Technical education must be strengthened to provide the number and quality of workforce entrants that employers require.
- **Support** the essential cooperation between the local school districts and the communities in which they serve. Working hand-in-hand is beneficial for all parties involved.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

There are a variety of instances in which a hand-up is necessary for struggling individuals and families. However, recent trends have shown greater dependence on government programs.

- **Support** establishing a time limit similar to the Family Investment Program for the utilization of Section 8 Housing vouchers, keeping in mind those that are permanently disabled and the elderly. This will help best serve the people that need the assistance the most and reduce the dependence on government assistance.
- **Support** more clarified rules and regulations for Section 8 Housing vouchers portability. This will maintain the vouchers in the geographical area that they are supposed to be utilized.
- **Support** public-private partnerships establishing work and training programs for able-bodied adults receiving any form of social assistance. This will help to fill the workforce void employers are experiencing and create a more established sense of independence for those receiving aid.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce continues to support economic development programs that attract quality jobs, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and help make Iowa a place to invest as well as helping those already here expand their operations.

- **Support** Iowa's direct incentives budget, a critical part of successful recruitment, via the High Quality Jobs Program. Funding flexible incentives is imperative if Iowa wants to effectively compete for investment and jobs.
- **Support** economic development programs that attract quality jobs, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and help put Iowa over the top for businesses looking for a place to invest as well as helping those already here expand operations.
- **Support** continued funding of Historic Tax Credits to incent private investment in downtown districts.
- **Support** an increased maintenance and funding of the Historical Resource Development Program and the Historic Sites Preservation Grant in order to spur downtown development projects.
- **Support** an increased funding in the State of Iowa's tourism spending in order for communities, regions and the State to maximize the economic development opportunity of tourism.
- **Support** the local allocation of hotel/motel tax monies for continued aggressive marketing in order to attract visitors from all regions of the country.
- **Support** funding the Economic Development Authority's administrative funding, incentive fund, and financial assistance tax credit pool. It is imperative that the State of Iowa and local communities have incentive tools to maintain and attract jobs and investment.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce recognizes local economic development tools, such as tax increment financing (TIF), as invaluable and integral pieces of Iowa's economic development efforts. A well-executed TIF management program promotes job creation, enhances the tax base over the duration of the program, and allows local governments to incur debt in a sustainable manner. As the state legislature grows more uncomfortable with TIF, it is absolutely essential that local governments use discipline when deploying TIF dollars. Failure to do so will encourage the legislature to pass new restrictions-limiting the use of this powerful tool.

- **Support** local control over TIF districts for continued utilization of dollars for both horizontal and vertical infrastructure development and encourage its use as an incentive tool for job creation projects. This limits the need for the legislature to adopt new, arbitrary rules in a one-size-fits all approach.
- **Encourage** local governments to create and promote a 'TIF Release Plan' which forecasts revenue voluntarily released from TIF accounts in future years. This will give all taxing jurisdictions an ability to predict future general fund revenues.
- **Encourage** the use of TIF for producing public buildings if, and only if, the entities within the building produce significant revenues.



TAX POLICY

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce applauds Iowa's passage of the largest tax reduction in Iowa history in the form of property tax reform. This brought welcome relief to commercial and industrial taxpayers. Yet, Iowa's tax system remains a barrier to economic growth. The Tax Foundation ranks Iowa's business climate 41st in its State Business Tax Climate Index. The high and complex taxes make Iowa less competitive and require an explanation of taxes to prospective businesses. In economic development, if you are explaining, you're losing. It is time to address Iowa's non-competitive income taxes on corporations and individuals.

- **Support** efforts to simplify and reduce corporate income taxes as a means to better market Iowa as a destination for job-creating investments.
- **Support** the elimination of federal deductibility for corporate income taxes as long as it is coupled with lower brackets that achieve a tax reduction greater than what federal deductibility offers alone – or a two-lane system that allows for businesses to choose the current system or a new, simpler version. This will make Iowa's corporate tax code more marketable, competitive and understandable.
- **Support** simplicity in Iowa's personal tax code so that Iowa can better market itself for economic development. Flattening and streamlining the personal income tax will help illustrate that Iowa is working to attract talented people, businesses and new jobs. Taxes on individually-owned businesses, partnerships and limited liability corporations pay taxes through the individual income taxes of their owners. Lowering and simplifying personal income taxes will help foster economic growth by freeing more capital for investment in business expansion.
- **Support** including an extension of the targeted jobs tax credit program to communities adjacent to existing pilot cities. The State legislature should be applauded for their efforts in the recent retaining of the program.

MARKETPLACE EQUITY

- **Support** allowing states to collect sales tax from out-of-state establishments in order to reduce the inequity that now exists between online sellers and bricks-and-mortar businesses. Care should be taken to ensure an automated process which will simplify the reporting process.



SUPPLEMENTARY ISSUES

HEALTHCARE

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce understands the current uncertainty in the healthcare field. Establishing a transparent system that works for both employers and individuals is necessary.

- **Support** a re-examination of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in order to reduce the major underlying cost of healthcare, utilization.
- **Support** stronger communication and transparency to businesses and individuals as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is implemented.

FISCAL

- **Support** a balanced budget at all levels of government.
- **Support** reduced spending which includes that public employee wages and benefits are comparable to their private sector counterparts.
- **Oppose** the temptation to increase taxes.

IMMIGRATION

- **Support** streamlining the processes for immigrants, with the necessary skills and willingness to contribute to Iowa's economic growth, to become legal workers.
- **Support** efforts to secure the nation's borders to prevent illegal immigrants from gaining entry.

SOCIAL SECURITY

- **Support** efforts to make Social Security, a program that all Americans have paid into, solvent for future generations.
- **Oppose** penalizing workers who return to work prior to being fully vested in Social Security.



ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIVISION

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce is very involved in influencing public policy at the local, state and national levels. The Chamber of Commerce, as a business association, promotes positions that are favorable to business and will develop the local community. Each year, the Government Relations Committee recommends a legislative agenda to the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. This agenda is based on the results of surveys and other feedback that the Chamber of Commerce has received from its members. The Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors has adopted this legislative agenda, which is the guiding framework for staff and volunteer leadership during the year.

During the Iowa legislative session, the Chamber of Commerce hosts monthly “Eggs and Issues” breakfasts with state legislators. “Pasta and Politics” luncheons invite school board members, city governments and Des Moines County Supervisors for a question and answer interaction. These sessions are a forum for Chamber of Commerce members to speak directly with area representatives at the state and local levels.

Regional lobbying trips to Des Moines and Washington, D.C. are made with the Chambers of Commerce from Henry, Lee and Louisa Counties. During these events, attendees advocate for policy issues and projects important to Southeast Iowa. At the local level, Chamber of Commerce staff and volunteers frequently attend city council and Des Moines County Board of Supervisors meetings. There are often issues of importance to the organization and community on which the Chamber of Commerce wants to express an opinion or be there as a resource to answer questions.

Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce holds debates for school board, city council, supervisor and state office elections. These events provide an opportunity for the candidates to express their viewpoints on questions that are written from a business perspective.

Finally, an annual reception is held to pay tribute to the community’s local elected officials. Representatives of all levels of public service are invited, along with Chamber of Commerce members. As determined by the Government Relations Committee, Elected Official of the Year award is presented to an individual or individuals for their public service.

Greater **BURLINGTON** Partnership

Making Connections, Building Community

ABOUT THE GREATER BURLINGTON PARTNERSHIP & BURLINGTON/WEST BURLINGTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Greater Burlington Partnership is the identity for the overall organization which includes the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development, Convention and Visitors Bureau and Downtown Partners, Inc. Each division has a separate mission, but the entities share one vision: to ensure Greater Burlington is a growing regional center of commerce, industry, education, health care, entertainment and culture which provides a great place to live and work.

The Burlington/West Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce exists to serve as a catalyst for economic growth and community development. The Chamber of Commerce is funded by membership dues from nearly 700 members in Des Moines County and surrounding areas. The organization also holds a variety of member events which enhance the mission and provide additional financial resources.

GREATER BURLINGTON PARTNERSHIP

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