

The Tribune Building – Home to the Partnership for Sustainable Communities

An Initiative of Incommune and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

The financial crisis, and subsequent recession, set in motion a change that policy makers are only now fully grasping. Unlike the cyclical downturns of the past when job losses ultimately resolved in job gains shared broadly, for some, this time, there will be no return to the prosperity of the past. The economy now supports all the jobs lost and many more; wages are up in every sector; talent shortages are the norm; and the stock market, though a bit rocky of late, is still near the apex of a ten-year gain. What all of these economic gains mask is the uneven growth and prosperity felt by individual, largely rural, transitioning economies and their citizens.

When researchers first began reporting on the “haves and have-nots”, the focus was on the wealth of individuals...men and women juggling multiple jobs, one hospital stay from bankruptcy, and on the brink of eviction. More recently that research has turned to communities.

Rural America is experiencing a time of rapidly increasing change. Recent data from the Brookings Institution finds a sharp divergence of large and small communities since the financial crisis. They find the divide between the prosperity of major metro areas and small towns is widening and accelerating. Their analysis of population, employment, and growth finds the determining factor, more than any other, is size. Brookings authors Mark Muro and Jacob Whiton found...

“the 53 largest metro areas (those with populations over one million residents) have accounted for fully 93.3 percent of the nation’s population growth since the crisis, but an incredible 96.4 percent of it since 2014 (though they account for just 56 percent of the overall population). Even more significantly the biggest metros generated fully two-thirds of output growth on the economic front and 73 percent of employment gains between 2010 and 2016.

By contrast, smaller metropolitan areas with less than 250,000 people – representing 9 percent of the nation’s population – have lost ground. Since 2010, in fact, these communities made a negative contribution of -6.5 percent to the nation’s growth... As for the rural tier, the trends have been even worse. By the 2014 to 2016 period, rural communities’ contribution to national population growth had turned negative....growth across communities now tracks exactly with their size.”

Communities in Transition

Throughout the country our small towns and rural communities are facing unprecedented challenges. Even more cruel has been the fate of older industrial and extractive economies....coal, iron ore, timber, and fishing. Such communities, prosperous for generations --- even a century or more, find it particularly difficult to climb back. Unaccustomed to the need to continuously build the economy through economic development, and largely dependent on a single industry, there are few obvious and ready alternative models for achieving family and community wealth. But, thus challenged, our communities and their institutions are resilient.



Colleges and Universities in Transition

Amidst these challenges, it has become increasingly apparent that smaller colleges and universities in struggling communities are particularly impacted. Yet few seem to see their fates as entwined. Advisors counsel shuttering underused buildings, slashing workforce, recruiting from far-flung populations, and cutting programming. Few suggest greater alignment or engagement in the growth of the regional economy. Recent case studies, and bold institutions in the midst of transitioning economies, such as University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) and Mid-State Technical College (MSTC) suggest a different path.

Community Wealth Transition

Community Foundations mirror the historical success of their enlightened communities. Built regionally by the wealth of the Greatest Generation and Baby Boomers, community foundations largely have ample resources, at least for now. However, many are experiencing a crisis of relevancy. Though worthy stewards of family wealth, changing economic circumstances and growing inequality in the communities they serve demand more...greater alignment with not just individual donor needs, but community potential, priorities, and more collective, inclusive and long-term outcomes. For a few, these charges have proved compelling. Incurage Community Foundation (Incurage), in response to economic crisis nearly two decades ago, adapted its model to increase relevance and align with changing community needs. Incurage is a leader among such foundations seeking to maintain relevance and accelerate mission by investing the resources in their charge not just prudently but impactfully in greater alignment and *in partnership with* the communities they serve. This includes Incurage's strategic acquisition and development of the iconic Tribune Building, on the Wisconsin River in downtown Wisconsin Rapids.

How does the Tribune Building support Regional Transformation?

The engines of economic activity in central Wisconsin, as measured by employment, income, and assets, are: paper, timber, and cellulosic technologies; agriculture, especially potatoes and cranberries; and healthcare. However, each of these sectors is evolving, in some cases destabilizing over a century of regional economic restructuring, creating the need for new investment, and the opportunity for entrepreneurial activity. The Tribune Building, as envisioned, provides the opportunity for these critical economic drivers, new investors, and entrepreneurs to come together in new and more sustainable business models, share critical information, collaborate on joint projects, and spur innovation.

First, through its physical space. The Tribune Building provides three space clusters that foster collaboration and entrepreneurship, facilitate community inclusion, and leverage scarce resources. The space clusters promote the fluidity of the modern educational and work models. Youth and adult learners and entrepreneurs seek a continuum of K-16 learning and training opportunities that transcend rigid institutional boundaries and provide stackable credentials and career path skills inclusive of entrepreneurship and self-employment, and alternative business strategies, such as worker-ownership and cooperatives. For example, the first-floor cluster includes the Restaurant-Brewpub, Micro-Brewery, and Culinary Kitchen, with street level access to the adjacent Farmers Market.



Tribune Building ↔ Farmers Market Sustainable Ag and Food Systems Cluster

Farmers Market



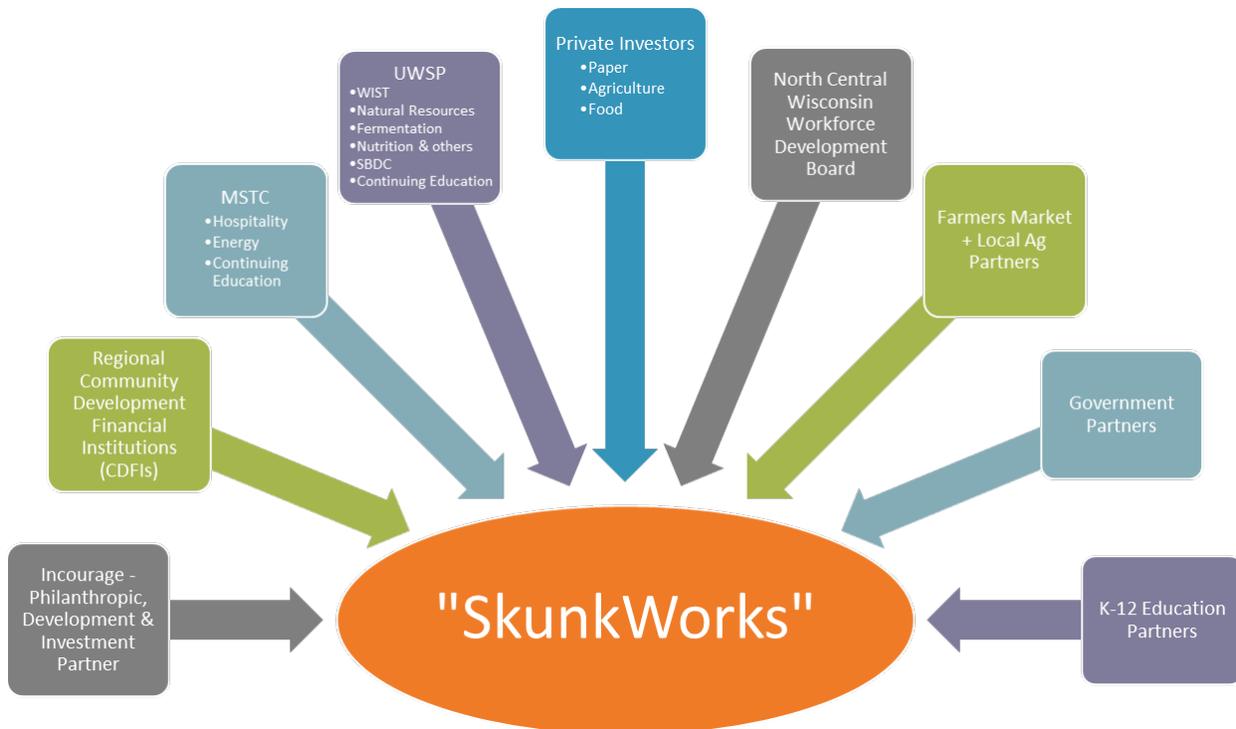
This cluster welcomes residents and visitors with healthy food and drink prepared with locally-sourced ingredients while promoting innovation and entrepreneurial opportunity across the underlying regional food-ag value chain. Together the cluster will accommodate small batch brewing for established breweries; next step product testing for home-based cooks, bakers, and brewers; culinary internships and master-brewer training; and entrepreneurship support, value-added agriculture, ag-entrepreneurship, and youth entrepreneurship. The proximity of these uses allows for shared equipment and personnel, welcoming community access, collaborative problem solving, K-16 / business / training partnerships, and an energetic productive vibe.

Secondly, through its intellectual leadership. With leading sponsorship by Incourage and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP), the Tribune will be home to The Partnership for Sustainable Communities. Through co-location and active collaboration of multiple economic anchors and critical central Wisconsin institutions, the Partnership will send a powerful message of the seriousness with which regional institutions view the need for innovation and potential for transformation.

This second-floor cluster will foster a “SkunkWorks” of these leading institutional collaborators that cuts across organizations and disciplines. Partners include the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) and its Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technologies (WIST) and College of Natural Resources, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC); and programs including but not limited to nutrition, fermentation, and design; Mid-State Technical College (MSTC), including hospitality, energy, and building; Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which are a source of flexible capital and technical assistance for entrepreneurs, small businesses and farms and community development organizations; North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board; and Incourage; as well as access to UW-Extension 4-H and youth programming, Farmers’ Market; and private investors in paper, agriculture, and food. Incourage brings extensive experience in convening these leading organizations building networks,



relationships and common purpose; as well as a network of regional and national philanthropic and impact investing partners to leverage local grant and investment support for promising developments.



A SkunkWorks is an innovative undertaking, with the term originating during WWII at Lockheed Corporation in response to an urgent request from the Pentagon for a new fighter jet. Lockheed engineers understood this would require intense collaboration across disciplines and multiple organizations. SkunkWorks represents work that occurs outside the normal channels of research and development within any individual institution. This and similar Partnership activities aim to allow competitors to collaborate, eliminate bureaucratic restrictions, and enable ideas to collide across disciplines to create new ideas, more innovative products, and stronger solutions rarely possible within a single institution. Far more than shared office space, the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and its critical institutions together have the potential to inform, support, and enable the economic change envisioned by the region. Research, training, lectures, conferences and workshops, business and entrepreneurship support, alternative career pathways and models for ownership, access to financing, and informal collaboration among partners and the community create a vibrant “ecosystem” grounded in regional intellectual capital and its practical application. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities honors the key assets that have long fueled the economy while providing the infrastructure needed to foster, retain and attract the innovators and entrepreneurs of the future.

Thirdly, through its process of community inclusion. The Tribune Building has been an ambitious project from its conception. Few building projects have so actively encouraged the partnership of regional organizations and residents in strategic mission and design. Incourage, the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, and its partner institutions, are deeply committed to not just an improved economy but a



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sustainable one. It is their belief that a fully informed and engaged populace is essential to a sustainable community and economy.

Incourage will continue to welcome the community throughout the building and its programming. Outdoor event space will house lectures and musical entertainment; the micro-brewery and culinary kitchen will encourage home cooks and brewers with opportunity for experimentation; youth entrepreneurs will collaborate with industry, scientists, and policy makers in the SkunkWorks; and the rooftop café annex will host special events, music, and the best views in the region.



Going forward the community will continue to inform and shape the Tribune Building and its mission as a regional collaboration supporting the economic transformation of central Wisconsin.

The importance of this project as a visible representation of the changes our cherished institutions must make individually, and demonstration of the collaborations required for those individual transitions to achieve meaningful impact, cannot be understated. The Tribune Building and its partners demonstrate the process of inclusive and collaborative leadership and decision making, with potential to energize a new and revitalized economy and community for generations to come.

