DUBUQUE AREA CHAMBER

LOCAL, STATE, & FEDERAL

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2024

DUBUQUE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
300 Main Street
DUBUQUE , IA 52001

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DUBUQUE AREA CHAMBER

Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce
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THE DUBUQUE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice for business and industry in the tri-state region. With more than 1,000 member businesses we represent a significant portion of employers and employees in the region. Our mission: ***To Build Member Success By Creating A Pro-Business Future*** is a key consideration in each and every one of the legislative priorities laid out in this agenda.

The 2023 Legislative agenda was created through a rigorous process that began in August of 2022. Six industry-specific meetings engaged nearly 100 businesses from across our membership, from one-person shops to the largest employers in our community. At the same time, the Chamber revamped its Business Advocacy Council with a host of new members representing those six industry categories we engaged back in August. This group then analyzed each policy position over the course of October and November, ensuring that broad agreement was reached.

The document before you is a result of hours of research, member engagement, and planning culminating a comprehensive and aggressive agenda for the year ahead.

We are honored to work alongside our elected leaders in congress, at the state capitol, and in our local city halls. We look forward to working with you to create a pro-business future in the tri-state region.

Statements of

CORE VALUES

Statements of CORE VALUES

Grow the Workforce

The Chamber supports efforts that promote the attraction and retention of workforce, as well as upskilling to meet the current and future needs of Dubuque business.

Reduce Regulation and Taxes

The Chamber believes the best way to promote economic growth is to keep money in the community and reduce red tape required to start and run a business. As such, the Chamber supports efforts to lower taxes and reduce business regulation, in order to foster a sense of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Promote Economic Growth

The Chamber believes all levels of government should encourage businesses and their surrounding communities to grow and thrive including through the use of incentives, in the form of funding or tax credits, to promote the growth of the Tri-State area.

Invest in the Community

The Chamber believes investments in infrastructure, recreation, public health, and more are to key to maintaining a vibrant community for everyone and we support such efforts.

Foster Global Trade and Commerce

In an ever more global economy, the Chamber recognizes the importance of international trade to growing a business. We support policies that will reduce barriers to the export of goods and services, and policies that promote local success on a global scale.

Local WORKFORCE

Communities across the region must do more to promote population growth. Only in the past five years have we returned to our pre-1980's peak in population, and without continued growth we risk losing key employers in our market due to a lack of available talent. We are at an inflection point and must be ready to take advantage of opportunities to grow housing stock, support the provision of childcare, and invest in quality of life so people who visit or move to our communities choose to stay.

Workforce

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Talent

Our local education institutions are the lifeblood of our economy, training the best and brightest in our future workforce and preparing them to be active members of the community. However, we must do more to retain this talent in our community. In a 2017 study by Iowa Workforce Development data showed that only 9% of students who plan to leave the state were currently employed compared to 21.5% of students who plan to remain in Iowa. With this knowledge, the Chamber will be working with our local education partners from kindergarten to graduate school to assist in the development of talent pipelines that assist in retaining talent in our region.

Collaborate with and support our local education institutions from K-12 to 4-year institutions. Support efforts to retain students after graduation and develop the talent pipeline including the creation of a local program to incentivize students to stay in the region.

Reducing Barriers to Employment

At the height of the pandemic, Dubuque County saw more than 8,000 individuals completely leave the labor force, meaning they were not employed, and were no longer seeking employment. Though we have recovered, Dubuque County remains more than 2,000 individuals below our pre-pandemic labor force levels (as of October 2021). Statewide labor force participation is at its lowest point since the mid-1980's. Studies have shown that childcare has become a significant barrier to employment as individuals who left the labor force during the pandemic realized that staying home with their children was more economically viable than going to work. The Chamber will work in partnership with local organizations that focus on childcare to help deliver solutions to employers of all sizes.

Promote housing development at all price points, with an emphasis on housing affordable to those at the median income level and below.

Promote transportation that addresses regional issues in transportation.

Support local programs that provide resources and support for veterans seeking employment.

Quality of Life

Investment in amenities that promote a high quality of life is key to attracting and retaining talent in our region. We believe municipalities in our region can and should continue to invest resources into the creation and maintenance of amenities, and ensure their policies promote investment in quality of life. Specifically, the business community supports:

Creation of a public art policy to facilitate art on publicly owned property.

Continued investment in parks, waterways, and facilities that meet the needs of residents.

Support local programs that provide resources and support for veterans.

Local ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Municipalities are the boots on the ground when it comes to growing our economy, increasing investment, and planning for the future. We believe it is imperative for municipalities across the Tri-State region to invest in small business, support restoration of service at the Dubuque Regional Airport, and invest in efforts that will promote vibrancy across the region. Economic development is also about community development and the business community's priorities at the local level reflect that recognition.

Economic Development

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Planning & Vibrant Urban Cores

As we saw in the 2022 Iowa Chamber Alliance Talent Poll, a major factor influencing individuals' decision to leave Dubuque, and Iowa, is a lack of entertainment – fully 41% of Iowans believe we have inferior entertainment opportunities. Furthermore, it takes only a moment to stroll down JFK Boulevard or Main Street, Dubuque to see that our urban core and business districts are distressed. We believe it is integral to develop an implementable plan for development in all of our regional municipalities that is forward thinking and aggressive, with the goal of talent attraction at the center. A vibrant urban core is key to that attraction and retention, particularly among young professionals.

Support and encourage efforts by communities across region to plan for the future, with a focus on encouraging development and amenities that will help attract and retain talent.

Support complete streets projects and planning in regional municipalities.

Promote housing development at all price points, with an emphasis on housing affordable to those at the median income level and below. Emphasize the importance of infill and downtown development.

Small Business Support

We believe municipalities have the opportunity to help lift up burgeoning entrepreneurs by supporting their establishment and early growth through small, targeted business grants. This type of funding is a first step in supporting broader entrepreneurial growth and will tie in with other regional efforts to support entrepreneurs that are further along the line.

Maintain and grow Dubuque's $50,000 grant program in the Economic Development Department.

Establish small business grant opportunities in communities where such a program does not exist.

Infrastructure & Air Service

The Chamber and business community see our role as cheerleaders and promoters of important investments in infrastructure across regional municipalities. Particularly when such public investment can unlock further private investment and growth, the Chamber will support communities on applications for funding, pen letters of support, and be a Champion for infrastructure investment. The Chamber will also maintain a leadership role and actively work with community stakeholders to return legacy air service to the Dubuque Regional Airport.

The Chamber will partner with municipalities to promote and support future infrastructure development.

Specific ask/action: The Chamber will continue to promote air service development alongside partner organizations.

Local REGULATION & TAXES

Businesses in the tri-state region believe in a light-touch regulatory approach that emphasizes narrowly tailored regulation for purposes of health and safety, that punishes bad actors while holding lawful business owners harmless. Overly broad regulation can unintentionally impact entire communities and industries and we believe refreshing certain policies can inversely provide new opportunities for growth in every community in the Tri-states. We also believe in the pursuit of competitive tax policy that provides for the efficient delivery of government services and programs while allowing business owners to invest back into their company and workers.

Regulation & Tax

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Maintain our Competitive Property Tax Rates

Dubuque maintains one of the most competitive property tax rates in Iowa, ranking the lowest out of the 25 largest communities in Iowa, and ranked 613 out of all communities in the state. This makes Dubuque a highly desirable location for capital intensive investment and the Chamber supports working to keep this rate low far into the future. We also support surrounding communities' efforts to reduce tax rates while still providing high quality public services.

Maintain competitively low property tax rates. Where not competitive, make strategic decisions to incrementally reduce rate without impacting municipal/county services.

Reduce Barriers to Business Growth

Regulations create real and hidden costs on every single business in the tri-state region. Fines and Fees structures directly impact the bottom line of small businesses in the area, while other process such as inspections and appeals can add to the time burden of dealing with local government. Regardless of how these regulatory hurdles manifest themselves on small business, they all create costs that inhibit growth and innovation in our community. The Chamber will consistently work to track and address proposed regulations at the local level that would negatively impact business growth.

Promote lowest regulatory hurdle for business when developing or updating municipal regulation, ensure impact is solely on bad actors rather than entire industry or sector.

Unified Development Code

According to the EPA Smart Growth Code Development resources "conventional zoning practice of the past several decades has separated residential, retail, and office uses. Today, however, this zoning stands in the way of communities that want to create vibrant, walkable neighborhoods that mix these uses and give residents the option to walk to the store, walk to work, or own a home business." As Dubuque and other communities evaluate their existing zoning and development codes, we encourage them to look to that vision of vibrant, walkable neighborhoods and a code that supports those goals.

The Chamber supports development codes that embrace new ways of thinking about community design and promote workforce attraction and economic development.

DUBUQUE AREA CHAMBER

STATE PRIORITIES

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2024

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State WORKFORCE

Iowa's talent challenges are wide ranging, impacting roles requiring no education to specialist medical providers and everything in-between. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics there were more than 113,000 job openings in Iowa in the fall of 2022. Recent reports on enrollment in Dubuque's higher education institutions and labor force paint a similarly grim picture. All the data underscores the fact that Iowa has not doubled its population since the early 1900's – we need more people, and we don't have them.

The Iowa Chamber Alliance conducted their first annual talent poll in late 2021 and found that quality of life is a driving factor on why people decide to stay – or not – in Iowa. That survey found that Iowan's view the entertainment options available in most Iowa communities to be sub-par, and a perception that services that are nec-essary to help get people back into the workforce are hard to access – childcare and housing stands out as particularly difficult to access.

On the following page we propose multiple actions the state can take to get more Iowan's working, to attract more workers to our great state, and retain them once they get here.

Workforce

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Talent Development

Workforce training programs are key to ensuring Iowa has enough qualified workers to fill open positions. Adequate funding for these programs may require additional resources to ensure Iowa is meeting its workforce needs. In particular, recent reports on enrollment in Dubuque's higher education institutions have driven concern that much more needs to be done to promote access to private higher education in Iowa – while continuing to support and promote the Regents universities whose graduates make up a significant portion of employees in the Dubuque region. We must also look to adequately support our community colleges and K-12 institutions who ensure students at any age are ready to enter the workforce with the skills necessary to succeed. We support the following actions:

Continued funding to the Future Ready Iowa Last Dollar Scholarship.

Continue/increase funding for community college General Aid; Increase funding for 260F program that supports training for current employees; and continue support for 260E which assists in training new hires.

Continued support for the Iowa Tuition Grant Program.

Reducing Barriers to Employment

Barriers to employment are obstacles that make it more difficult for someone to enter the labor force. Housing and Child Care in particular are areas where the State can positively impact labor force growth by promoting and funding solutions that reduce these barriers. For instance, Dubuque remains around 1,200 units short on housing to meet the current need, making it difficult for people at all skill and income levels to live where they work – how can we continue to promote housing development, particularly housing that is priced for Iowa and Dubuque's median income brackets, and lower quartile? Similarly, childcare remains a costly disincentive to work for many families, particularly those at the lower end of the income scale. When childcare costs more than the income individuals receive from employment, it simply doesn't make sense for some family members to return to work. Iowa has an opportunity to reduce these barriers to employment and increase the labor force participation rate. The Chamber proposes the following solutions to that end.

Increase housing development, particularly housing that is affordable for median income earners and below.

Support the following actions on workforce related incentives and programs:
- ***Continued investment in Workforce Housing Tax Credit Program***
- ***Continued support for LIHTC***
- ***Continued support for the Housing Trust Fund***
- ***Improved funding and eligibility for Child Care Assistance (CCA)***
- ***Increase reimbursement amount for CCA to better reflect the market rate for high quality childcare***
- ***Increase eligibility for CCA by stepping down eligibility/eliminating the cliff effect***
- ***Increase funding for WAGE$/T.E.A.C.H. to support those that provide early childhood care***

Keep Iowa a Welcoming Place

Iowa is well known across the country as a welcoming place. We like to hang our hat on the idea of "Iowa Nice" and we all take pride in our willingness to help a stranger on the side of the road, or welcome wind weary faces into our home on a cold, blizzard night. We must take that approach when we think about public investment in amenities and services. The business community believes strongly in promoting high quality of life for residents by investing in vibrant, livable spaces. We also believe in welcoming new residents to our state with open arms, and thoughtful incentives. In the competition for talent Iowa has a chance to lead the country. In particular we endorse the following approaches:

Continue Destination Iowa Fund Grant Program to support investments in projects and infrastructure that bolster the quality of life in Iowa.

We support the creation of a program that would incentivize individuals to move to Iowa, and graduates of Iowa's Community Colleges and 4-year institutions from out of state to stay in Iowa.

State ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The State of Iowa plays an integral role in growing the economy through investment and incentives that pave the way for business expansion and relocation. These programs show a positive return on investment and regardless of the exciting and important tax cuts passed in 2022, credits and incentives are still necessary to drive robust growth and development into the future. In addition to incentives, we believe it is imperative the state continue to invest in infrastructure and consider innovative new approaches to support culturally vibrant local economies across Iowa.

Economic Development

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Developing Cultural Vibrancy

State investment in placemaking is key to fostering a sense of growth and opportunity in communities large and small. Destination Iowa has largely been seen as a success and has helped to fund projects like the Field of Dreams in Dyersville, while the DRA (Formerly, Dubuque Racing Association) has submitted a grant application to help fund the redevelopment of Chaplain Schmitt Island.

However, the quick turnaround time for applications on large projects with many moving parts has forced some communities not to apply or submit less competitive applications. We believe a long-term, stable funding source for place making will deliver rewards for the state and have an immeasurable return on investment as we work to attract and retain talent while ensuring communities are able to adequately plan their applications.

Develop and implement sustainable funding for Placemaking, which will allow communities to adequately plan and apply for the program.

Air Service

Dubuque's loss of air service in September 2022 has had a significant impact on workforce attraction and retention efforts and makes business more difficult for companies who do business across the globe. Reduced access to air service means clients must travel more than an hour after landing at a surrounding airport to get to Dubuque, adding barriers to the success of deals, employment opportunities, and future business development. As the only airport in Iowa to have fully lost commercial service to an international hub (O'Hare), we ask that the state support effort to attract a new legacy carrier to connect Dubuque residents and businesses to the global marketplace.

Secure state funding to support potential minimum revenue guarantee for a legacy carrier in Dubuque.

Protecting and Enhancing Development Incentives

Economic development incentives are crucial to getting a project from an idea to shovels in the ground. These incentives are necessary for many projects to pencil out, particularly in the tri-state region where we have many historic structures that require remediation in addition to any remodeling. The Chamber supports maintaining, and where appropriate enhancing, the incentives for investment. Particularly after the 2022 tax changes saw a reduction in certain incentives – most notably the Historic Tax Credit – we believe it is important to return key incentives to their former level. We also support maintaining tax increment financing laws that have delivered robust return on investment and economic opportunity across the state by empowering local officials who are intimately involved in project development.

Return Historic Tax Credit to its former level and promote other incentives including: High Quality Jobs Tax Credit, Brownfield/Grayfield Program, Workforce Housing Tax Credit, Research Activities Credit.

We support the Tax Increment Financing program as it currently exists, in its full form.

State REGULATION & TAX

Iowa businesses enjoy a largely positive tax and regulatory climate, thanks in no small part to the 2022 tax bill signed by Governor Reynolds. Iowa businesses and residents will now have more freedom and ability to invest back into training, employee retention, and business expansion efforts while promoting Iowa as a great place to do business which will assist in business attraction. Iowa businesses continue to support a light-touch regulatory approach with narrowly tailored regulation meant to support good corporate stewards while ensuring bad business practices don't lead to a competitive advantage. As we look to the coming session, our focus is on both implementation and changes to certain tax items, and departmental/regulatory issues relating to transportation infrastructure and torts

Regulation & Tax

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Electric Vehicle Charging

The Iowa DOT's map of planned investment in EV charging stations on major roadways has left the Highway 20 and Highway 151 corridors to Dubuque off their map. Wisconsin has included the 151 corridor to Iowa's boarder in their proposal and we strongly encourage IDOT to consider amending their current proposal to include Dubuque, Highway 151, and Highway 20 in their plans for future investment in EV charging. As a major hub of tourism, Dubuque must have access to charging stations as carmakers transition their vehicles to non-fossil fuel engines. Much of Dubuque's tourism industry comes from communities within driving distance and charging will be a necessary amenity that families look for when planning travel.

Include Dubuque/ Highway 151/Highway 20 on EV Charging deployment map

Iowa's Water and Land Legacy

In 2010, 63 percent of Iowans voted to approve a constitutional amendment to create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund - a permanent and protected funding source dedicated to improving the state's water quality, protecting, and conserving Iowa's productive farmland, expanding natural areas including parks, trails, fish and wildlife habitat and providing recreation. The Chamber believes it is time to fund and implement the will of Iowan's and continue to improve the quality-of-life amenities that attract and retain top talent across Iowa. As a Mississippi River region, it is of heightened importance for our community to see Iowa's Water & Land Legacy funded.

The Chamber supports implementation of IWILL

Property Tax

The Chamber strongly believes in the importance of local control to make decisions about investments in roads, water and wastewater infrastructure, staffing, and economic development. We also believe in the need for a business-friendly tax code at all levels of government and are happy that Dubuque remains the community with the lowest property tax rate among the twenty-five largest communities in Iowa

Maintain local control while supporting a business-friendly tax climate that maintains state and municipal government ability to meet and exceed expectations of citizens and businesses.

Tort Reform

The threat of crippling lawsuits has impacted risk management strategies for the trucking industry and medical field over the past decade as jury awards for accidents and malpractice have skyrocketed. This has resulted in soaring insurance rates for both industries.

Pass trucking tort reform that limits liability for this key industry in Iowa

Pass medical malpractice reform that reasonably limits liability for Iowa medical providers

DUBUQUE AREA CHAMBER

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2024

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Federal WORKFORCE

The Tri-State's growing need for workforce is unsustainable. Iowa is the only state in the union not to have doubled our population since the early 1900's. Furthermore, Dubuque and Grant Counties have worked diligently and impressively to grow our population from the low-point of the mid-1980's while Jo Daviess County has continued to decline. The Dubuque MSA population peaked in 1976, while Grant and Jo Daviess counties peaked in 1981, and we returned to that peak only in 2013 and 2015 respectively – with Joe Daviess remaining far below their population peak.

The Dubuque Area business community strongly believe that business and government must come together to solve what has been and will continue to be the most pressing issue for growth – population.

The Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce proposes two important areas where the federal government can step in to assist business in solving the region's population dilemma: Investment in the development and retention of talent including funding for childcare programs and investment in Pell grants; and Immigration reform that ushers in a new era that embraces our history as a welcoming place where people from across the world can find their American dream.

Workforce

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Talent

Developing, attracting, and retaining talent in our region is of the utmost importance as we aim to solve the population issue. Developing talent means ensuring we can recognize and support skill development of our existing workforce. Attracting and retaining our talent will require investment in quality-of-life resources that families have come to expect. As we continue to see the lasting impacts of COVID-19 we believe the federal government can support talent initiatives in our communities through the following actions:

Increase federal funds for the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to support wage enhancement, recruitment, and retention in our childcare centers.

Protect and enhance the Pell grant to support enrollment in higher education.

Immigration

The American immigration system is not working for American businesses. An overly complex visa system, tied to outdated rules for residency and college graduates has made it difficult to attract, retain, and develop foreign talent who wishes to start a career and life in the United States. July 2022 Bureau of Labor Statistics Data shows nearly 800,000 open jobs between Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois alone – with more than 11 million job openings nationwide. The Chamber supports federal action to create, simplify, and expand the following programs:

Create a startup Visa program to support immigrant entrepreneurs and a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients.

Simplify the H-1B, H-2B visa application/approval process; post-graduate opportunities for employment and citizenship for foreign students who earn a degree in the United States.

Expand the cap on H-1B & H-2B visas and the Conrad 30 program for medical professionals.

Expand the qualifications for the Conrad 30 program, to include Dubuque's healthcare clinics and hospitals within the program.

Federal ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Tri-State area is a growing region of Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin and the federal government plays a key role in ensuring that growth continues. The passage of the bipartisan infrastructure package is the largest investment in generations towards America's global competitiveness, but we cannot stop there. We believe the federal government must continue to look for ways to support and incentivize future growth. For the Tri-States, that means continuing to work to promote solutions that will return legacy carrier service to the Dubuque Regional Airport; maintaining and enhancing development incentives; and supporting municipal requests for federal funding as a result of the bipartisan infrastructure law.

Economic Development

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

Invest in America's Global Competitiveness

The Federal Government plays a key role in financing economic development throughout the country. In addition, the federal government creates the framework for development through regulation and incentives. This includes the historic preservation tax credit, which in Dubuque alone has spurred more than $216 million in investment. We also will support local municipal applications to federal departments to access the significant funding made available by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Protect and enhance the historic tax credit.

Promote local applications for federal funding including funding to support South Port Flood wall enhancements and overpass development to mitigate impacts from the CN merger.

Request Army Corps of Engineers and federal legislators help with river transportation issues related to dredging and getting locks reconstructed south of Dubuque.

Air Service at the Dubuque Regional Airport

The Dubuque Regional Airport along with our location on the Mississippi river, an international trade thoroughfare, makes us a hub for logistics in the region. It is imperative to the future success of the tri-states region to support and grow these assets. To that end, Dubuque's loss of air service in September of 2022 has been a major blow to economic development and workforce attraction & retention efforts in the region. The business community supports efforts to restore service as soon as possible to ensure the tri-state region has ready access to the global marketplace.

Return Air Service to Dubuque

Increase the mandatory retirement age for pilots from 65 to 68 to provide some immediate, near-term relief to the pilot shortage issue.

Federal REGULATION & TAX

Businesses in the tri-state region believe in a light-touch regulatory approach that emphasizes narrowly tailored regulation for purposes of health and safety, which punishes bad actors while holding lawful business owners harmless. Overly broad regulation can unintentionally impact entire communities and industries. We also believe in the pursuit of lower taxation that provides for the efficient delivery of government services and programs while allowing business owners to invest back into their company and workers. To that end we support the following:

Regulation & Tax

PRIORITIES IN DETAIL

International Trade

America's access to the global marketplace is of the utmost importance to our status as a global leader in trade and diplomacy. The tariffs implemented over recent years have shaken up the status quo of trade and had unintended consequences of increasing prices directly to U.S. consumers and forced the unplanned disconnection of existing supply chains and formation of new ones. This disruption helps to explain the dire supply chain backlog which has finally begun to dissipate. In addition to tariffs, the U.S. leadership role in multi-lateral trade negotiations has faltered over the past half decade, with protectionist trade policies that negatively impact America's global standing. We can accomplish this while honoring and protecting American intellectual property which of paramount concern for investors and founders.

The Chamber supports a move back to multi-lateral trade that lowers the barrier to entry for U.S. companies into foreign markets while protecting intellectual property rights of American innovators.

Maintain Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

The tax cuts and jobs act was one of the largest investments in economic growth and competitiveness for America in decades. These tax cuts, which among other things brough our corporate tax rate from 35% to 21% making the United States competitive with OECD member states. According to a 2020 analysis by the Tax Foundation "OECD member states have an average statutory corporate tax rate of 23.51 percent, and a rate of 26.30 percent when weighted by GDP." The Chamber supports maintaining these tax cuts into the future to ensure we remain globally competitive for corporate investment in the coming decades. Included within the Tax Cuts and Jobs act is the Qualified Business Income (QBI) deduction. This deduction supports pass through entities as they grow and maintaining this provision is of great importance to the small business community.

Protect/renew the QBI deduction

Extension of opportunity zone program, allowing more projects to take full advantage of the tax incentives for investment.

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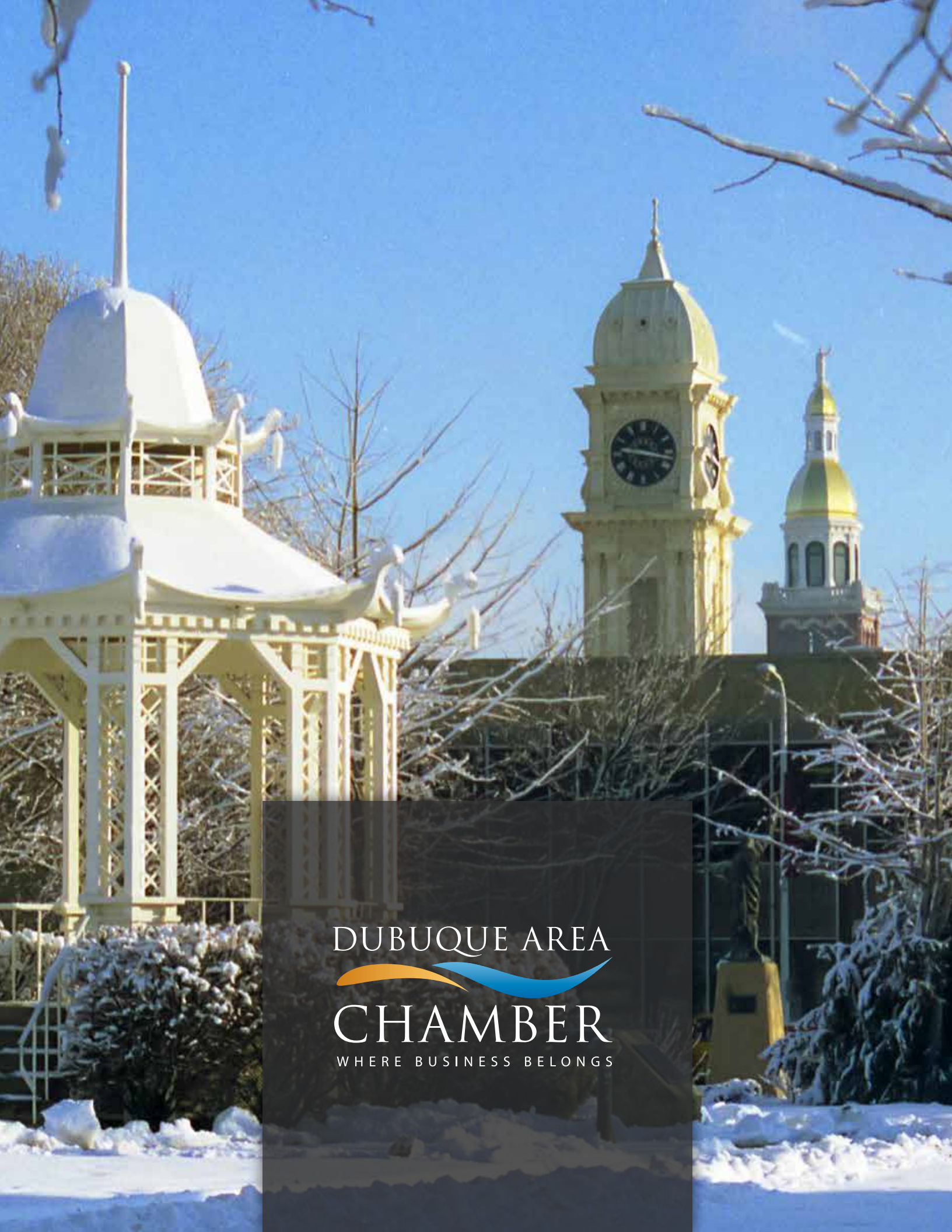

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