

MetroBusinessNet Spring Meeting
June 12 and 13, 2003
New York City

THURSDAY, JUNE 12

Opening session:

John Colborn, Deputy Director at the Ford Foundation, talked about the future of MetroBusinessNet. The project will likely end up under a new program officer whose responsibilities will include regional economic development and workforce development, he said.

Session one:

“Linking Regional Sector Strategies to Economic Opportunity: The St. Louis BioBelt”

First presentation:

Joe Cortright, Vice President of Impresa Consulting in Portland and a FutureWorks consultant, gave an overview of the biotechnology industry and its implications for regional economic development. A decade ago, everyone wanted to be the next Silicon Valley, he said. Three or four years ago, every region wanted to attract the dot-coms. Now biotech is the Next Big Thing. Biotech, according to Cortright’s definition, refers to genetic or cell-based products and medicines that treat diseases. He said pinning economic development hopes on biotech was an “idea virus” that has caught on among mayors and economic development leaders across the country.

Cortright, whose “Signs of Life: The Growth of Biotechnology Centers in the U.S.” was published last year, gave three lessons to be learned from the biotech industry:

1 -- Biotech companies derive real advantages from being near each other, so the biotech industry naturally forms clusters. The U.S. biotech industry is concentrated within nine metropolitan areas: Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, Raleigh-Durham, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington/Baltimore. The extent of the concentration is remarkable: Eight of every nine dollars of venture capital spending on pharmaceuticals occurs in these nine regions; three-fourths of biotech firms with 100 or more employees are in these nine regions; and just under two-thirds of biotech-related patents are awarded there.

2 -- The advantages of scale in the biotech industry mean regions can gain advantage by picking a niche and expanding that niche. A region can’t afford to be world-class at everything, especially since research is so expensive and only rarely leads to profitable companies. A company, and a region, has to decide for itself, “What am I good at?”

3 -- Entrepreneurial activity and venture capital are very important to the development of any biotech cluster. It’s not enough to have smart, well-educated people. A region needs smart researchers who want to take advantage of that research and start businesses. Despite the perception of fast-moving, worldwide capital markets, venture capitalists are surprisingly local. They like to keep a close eye on their investments, so companies that are close to venture capital communities have a better chance of attracting their money.

Second presentation:

Dick Fleming, President and Chief Executive Officer of the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association, and Bob Coy, the association's Senior Vice President for Economic Development, joined Stan Mulvihill, Vice President of the housing development firm, McCormack Baron Salazar, Inc., to present an overview of development in St. Louis. Particular attention was paid to the St. Louis BioBelt and the Chouteau Lake & Greenway Master Plan.

Fleming said St. Louis defines plant and life sciences broadly, to include biotech, pharmaceuticals, hospitals and medical devices. He said St. Louis used to be known by the slogan, "Shoes, booze and last in the American League," a reference to the perennially underperforming St. Louis Browns baseball team, which left the city for Baltimore in 1953. In recent years, the St. Louis region's biggest problem has been urban sprawl, with jobs leaving the city for the suburbs. "The city is a poster child for the consequences of sprawl," Fleming said.

Bob Coy highlighted some noteworthy characteristics and trends in the St. Louis region, including slow population growth, 50-plus years of out migration, a state law prohibiting the city from annexing any land, and the intensification of poverty and crime in urban areas. Few people realize St. Louis was once the fourth largest city in the country. In 1950, the city had 860,000 people. Today, it has about 325,000.

Against that backdrop, St. Louis has launched an economic development strategy that features the new BioBelt, which touts itself as "The Center for Plant and Life Sciences." Several strategies are guiding its evolution:

- 1 -- Establish a brand, a national and international image, so that people recognize the name "BioBelt" and equate St. Louis with plant and life sciences. Rally a statewide coalition behind that brand.
- 2 -- Build an entrepreneurial culture that encourages using all that great research to build companies. St. Louis is close to opening a Tech Transfer/Commercialization Center that will act as a "midwife," allowing research work to give birth to new-economy companies. Building this entrepreneurial culture also requires a homegrown, locally-managed venture-capital industry that focuses specifically on the plant and life sciences.
- 3 -- Take advantage of local intellectual capital, by using tax credits to encourage plant and life sciences.
- 4 -- Ensure a favorable business climate to boost the plant and life sciences.
- 5 -- Build, attract and maintain a quality workforce, including through internship and co-op programs. The city school system is developing a four-year secondary technical school dedicated to life sciences.

After the St. Louis presentation, the conference participants met in randomly assigned groups to discuss it, and then report their comments to the rest of the group.

Much of the feedback wondered if the St. Louis strategy paid enough attention to diversifying the city's neighborhoods and improving conditions for low-income residents. Earl Maxwell from Austin, leading shareholder with the accounting and consulting firm Maxwell Locke & Ritter LLP, cautioned St. Louis not to follow the same path Austin took when it embarked on an economic development plan 15 or 20 years ago. Austin has enhanced salary growth and boosted

the number of high-paying jobs, but Maxwell said a large number of people have been left behind, especially the low-income residents of East Austin.

He said unless St. Louis' development helps the low-income residents of East St. Louis, across the Mississippi River from St. Louis' center city, the city's growth will ignore MetroBusinessNet's commitment to equity. "Unless you connect it to east of the River, it has nothing to do with what we've been doing here for the last three years," Maxwell said. If Austin had it to do over again, Maxwell said he would suggest that they build a community college and semiconductor factory in East Austin.

Fleming said St. Louis' strategy is committed to helping low-income communities, but you have to start somewhere – in this case, with St. Louis' center city. He said it's more appropriate to compare St. Louis itself to East Austin. Both need a lot of help.

Trina Villanueva, Community Council Manager with the Bay Area Council's Community Capital Investment Initiative, said any regional development plan must include the community-based organizations that are the "eyes and ears of local neighborhoods."

Several other people wondered if St. Louis was putting all its eggs in one basket, in effect trading an over reliance on the old-economy manufacturing sector for a new over reliance on biotech.

Bob Weissbourd, President of RW Ventures in Chicago and a FutureWorks consultant, said regions should be flexible and shouldn't over plan their development strategies. He wondered rhetorically if specialization strategies such as St. Louis' focus on plant and life sciences were effective.

Other questions centered on St. Louis' transportation strategy – Once the Technopolis is built, are people just going to drive in to work and drive home at day's end? – and the business leadership – Once the current leadership leaves, is there an institution or framework to take its place?

Sunne McPeak, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Bay Area Council in Northern California, said whichever path a region chooses, it should make sure to rally all the local stakeholders around the cause as early as possible.

FRIDAY JUNE 13

Session two:

“Reporting Out:” Feedback on MetroBusinessNet from its members, gleaned from their own experiences in their own regions.

Bob Coy represented the St. Louis region:

1 -- Don’t assume that business leaders understand the stake they have in social equity, in the needs of distressed areas in their region, or in the effect that low-income communities have on a region’s overall competitiveness. Many don’t get it.

2 -- Business leaders don’t have much tolerance for “process for process’ sake.” Show them short-term and long-term objectives.

3 -- Don’t assume that the business community is united in its view of economic disparity and what to do about it. Fortune 500 companies, mid-cap firms and small businesses all have different views. Dick Fleming said that larger Fortune 500 companies understand systemic regional issues better than small businesses. It’s hard to get mid-cap and small-business civically involved and to take a long-term view. “One of the challenges is, how do we get beyond the trained elephants to get the wild elephants on board,” Fleming said.

In fact, they tried in St. Louis to incorporate the mid-cap companies into the Regional Chamber and Growth Association, but those companies’ need for independence was so great, it threatened to tear the RCGA apart. So the RCGA suggested the mid-caps form their own separate organization. Now the RCGA works with that separate group on some issues.

Bob Peck, President of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, chimed in on this point. He said larger firms join because of a commitment to helping the region, but he agreed that small firms don’t hold a larger, long-term view about helping the region. Eighty percent of small firms join chambers of commerce to get new business, not to improve the region, he said. What’s more, many of the “new economy” firms, including biotech firms, are losing money, so their executives have to focus on making money, not on improving the region. Another obstacle for regional business-civic groups is the consolidation of local banks and other businesses into larger national bodies. That means local company executives have to ask permission from national headquarters to take local action. There’s less local connectedness.

Sunne McPeak, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Bay Area Council, said many larger, longstanding companies have a tradition of civic engagement, but they are losing their CEOs to other companies or even to jail. So you have to broaden and deepen the regional commitment in each company beyond the CEO, she said.

In St. Louis, Dick Fleming said the RCGA made a decision to change its own focus. Traditionally, chambers of commerce have tried to attract more members because they thought sheer numbers increased their political clout. But the RCGA told its small-business members that it was going to start looking at its members as civic investors rather than just members who would sell to one another.

Fleming said the RCGA doubled the minimum member investment and approached companies that it felt weren’t doing enough to improve the region. The result? The RCGA added \$2 million in revenues with only a slight decline in members. Membership has dropped by a couple hundred to about 4,000 members, Fleming said.

4 -- Business leaders are often naïve about the political challenges of tackling regional disparities, so there is a need for business leaders to discover these issues for themselves. The regional business organization has a critical role to play in this process.

5 -- Recognize the need for a balancing act between a disciplined, long-term view and the business community's desire to pick "low-hanging fruit."

6 -- Recognize that it is risky for leaders of business-based civic organizations to address many social-equity issues. Those efforts can hurt membership dues, if some members disapprove of the efforts and pull out, and even threaten the leader's job. Business institutions and funders need to recognize that planning and collaboration and outreach to other groups aren't cheap. Businesses and foundations often don't like to pay for this.

7 -- Don't underestimate the positive impact when a business organization pays attention to community groups. It creates a sense of inclusiveness and validates everyone's roles, creating a sense of goodwill between groups that are often at odds.

8 -- Suggestions for the next round of MetroBusinessNet expansion: Pittsburgh, Seattle, Cleveland, San Diego, Louisville.

Johnny Mack, President of the National Institute for Community Empowerment in Atlanta, represented the Austin region:

1 -- Community development isn't just a program you implement. It's a process that has to be inculcated into the region, especially in a place such as Austin which is very young and very smart but which doesn't have a tradition of community development.

2 -- "Starting where you are." Austin's process has taken a bit longer than in other places because it lacked a tradition of community development.

3 -- You need committed champions in your community, people who understand what you're trying to do.

4 -- You have to have a single, shared vision of what you're trying to do. "Turfism" will be an obstacle to that – people trying to promote their own group or agenda.

5 -- Of the three MetroBusinessNet objectives – business competitiveness, regionalism, and social equity – Austin decided not to tackle all three at once, but to focus on social equity.

6 -- There is a natural tension between business efficiency and social and economic equity. Sometimes you have to give up some of one to obtain the other. An example is the "living wage." Some businesses think it's not efficient, while others think it's the right thing to do.

After Austin's presentation, Sunne McPeak said that tension between efficiency and equity is time-defined. That is, in the short term, businesses focus on efficiency, but in the long term, you need to maximize the region's assets to have a prosperous economy.

7 -- There needs to be a transformation in the business community to understand how best to interact with underserved and distressed communities.

8 -- Community-based organizations need to “learn by doing,” not just by being directed by others.

Barbara Johnson from the Austin Area Research Organization said her group, which includes 70 business and community leaders, has had a longstanding commitment to social equity, but didn't know how to act on it. MetroBusinessNet's project, which focused on creating wealth for poor communities, galvanized AARO's members and gave them a forum for action. AARO and the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce have developed different roles, Johnson said, particularly since the economic downturn forced the Chamber to focus on traditional economic development. That left AARO to take on more responsibility for issues such as education, transportation, and the workforce that the Chamber used to take on in more prosperous times. Austin's Chamber of Commerce is comprised of companies, while AARO is comprised of individual leaders, Johnson said.

Earl Maxwell, Former Chairman of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, said AARO offers the stability of its 70 members. It includes 10 past chairmen of the Chamber of Commerce. There's been a lot of turnover at the Chamber in the last two and a half years, so MetroBusinessNet has been turned over to AARO. The Chamber would prefer getting on board once there's a deal, rather than engaging in the “messy” process of community-relationship-building in Austin's poorest areas. AARO has no desire to get involved in job creation, recruiting or direct economic development, Maxwell said. Instead, AARO's goal is to create the infrastructure in the communities so the Chamber can create jobs.

If MetroBusinessNet expands, Maxwell suggested it include at least one new member that is young and “institution-less” like Austin. He suggested Portland, Seattle, Raleigh-Durham, and Albuquerque.

Erin Flynn, Vice President of FutureWorks, said Austin's case raises questions about MetroBusinessNet and what kind of regions should be included if the network expands. Some areas like Austin are younger areas that have no established infrastructure on the community side or the business side.

Sunne McPeak said on the question of business' role, she doesn't believe business leaders should go in and organize community leaders. But business leaders do have to understand the organizations and the indigenous leadership. If we're going to support an investment, we need to know the leaders in that neighborhood and we have a responsibility to interact with them, she said.

Frank Beal, Executive Director of Chicago Metropolis 2020, represented the Chicago region:

1 -- It's difficult to shift the business community from its belief that community-building is charity. "There's a lot of talk about the social responsibilities of companies, but mostly companies say, 'I'm here to make money, and if I create jobs, isn't that good?' and you press them, and they say, 'OK, I'll buy a table at the next fund raiser,' but they still don't get that helping the community helps their company," he said.

2 -- With respect to MetroBusinessNet, "guilt works." Because we got a large chunk of money to do the jobs-housing mismatch project, it has infiltrated all we do. For example, Chicago Metropolis 2020 hired Boston Consulting Group to do a study, which estimated that the cost to business of the jobs-housing mismatch is \$200 to \$300 million per year. That focus on jobs and housing led them to introduce legislation to reform transportation agencies in the Chicago area. The bill was approved into law.

3 -- We're strong believers in the marketplace, but our agenda is "market intervention" – changing public law, policy, practice and programs to allow the market to work more effectively. Metropolis 2020's goal is to influence the public sector, which creates the tax, zoning and regulatory policies in which markets operate. That context in Chicago is an environment that promotes sprawl and disinvestment in the inner city. We think that outcome is wrong and inefficient, so we try to change it.

4 -- Local governments remain our biggest, strongest, worst enemies. They don't like what we are trying to do. They are defending their local sovereignty.

5 -- The misunderstanding between business and community groups is deeper than expected. It's true that some businesses don't recognize their own self-interest in issues of social equity, but many community-development organizations don't know what a business is, how a firm's accounting works, or how a market works. It's difficult to have a conversation when there's that much misunderstanding.

6 -- The worst thing to do is have a staff come up with good ideas and seek champions. Better is to have a staff that believes in something and then carries it out.

7 -- Be very wary of collaboration. It's a high-cost way of doing business. Be very clear about what you do. In our community, the number of meetings you could go to just to have a seat at the table is "mind-boggling."

Bob Peck, President of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, opened the report from the Washington region with a few comments.

"Being from Washington, we're doing this by committee, so I'll start and then Caroline Cunningham can come up.

"First of all, we've had a -- I don't know if it's a unique experience with MetroBusinessNet, but we started off with one project and we've shifted to another, so I thought I would tell you, we started out with ..."

"A bait and switch!" said Brian Bosworth.

"It was a bait and switch, and the other thing is that MetroBusinessNet was very flexible with us on something," said Peck.

“We started out working on a community-business partnership, a program that the Board of Trade had started in which small and minority, mostly minority businesses -- the idea was a good one, and then I’m going to short-circuit this thing -- team them up with larger Board of Trade members, presumably to mutual benefit. And here’s where I think things got off track, and we’ve revamped the program and that’s no longer a part of MetroBusinessNet so I’ll pass off to Caroline to tell you what we are doing.

“I think it got off the track for a couple reasons. One, and it’s been talked about before, firms that got involved in the program for whatever reason right or wrong, believed that they were doing charity.

“Number two, there were no real outcomes and measures insisted upon, so it was an open-ended commitment. We had firms in this program for five, six, seven years that weren’t doing any business. The small firms weren’t getting any business out of the large ones, the large ones were barely talking to the small ones, and yet we had presumably 50 or 100 firms claiming they were part of this program. It left a bad feeling – I think it was detrimental in the minds of some of the large business leaders in our region about what this kind of small minority-business program is all about. It reinforced the idea that it’s an act of charity, it’s ‘Something Else,’ it’s outside your regular supply chain. Then we changed it.

“One other thing that happened that’s important in our region is that all of the small businesses were in the District of Columbia. It reinforced the idea that, ‘The city is poor, the suburbs are rich, so you do a little bit of charity somewhere in an inner-city neighborhood in Washington.’ It was not at all where I think anyone intended that program to go. It’s just where it got stuck in neutral, and we’ve changed it. We’ve brought in a woman who had worked in CRA programs in some banks. She’s very hard-headed. That’s not fair. She’s very hard-nosed, and we’re going to have a much more rigorous program.

“The other thing I’ll just note is that I think because the Board of Trade can be -- to tell you what the caricature of the Board of Trade is in the community still, is a bunch of old white boys. I think the Board of Trade didn’t feel terribly comfortable in the small minority-business community so they went to a bunch of CDCs and said, ‘Nominate some businesses for us to work with.’

“How do I say this nicely? There are some CDCs in Washington that are terrific, there are many more that are not. The quality control wasn’t there. I think that’s something we all ought to recognize. You need to know what you know and what you don’t know and make sure you get in bed with the right folks. (Laughs from the audience) That’s something my folks told me, too, but I didn’t listen to them.

“One other thing I’ll just note about the community to introduce Caroline. In Washington the Board of Trade started in 1889 as the city chamber of commerce. It expanded as the region did, particularly in the last 30 or 40 years to become the regional chamber of commerce. I always say that’s kind of a blessing and a curse. It’s a big canvas to paint on, but it can be so amorphous nobody quite knows what you’re doing.

“The levers are still with local government and the feds. Nobody can pull the feds’ levers in our region, and the local is something else, their local chambers. The Board of Trade is still the dominant big business organization in the region. There is however also something called the federal city council, which is a CEO organization that sounds kind of like AARO in Austin, founded in part because some people were pissed off at the Board of Trade in the ‘50s and formed their own group. But that’s all right. About 200 CEOs, and they care about some things that

otherwise the Board of Trade might deal with. For example, they're working very hard on reforming the school system in the District of Columbia. They've taken on that project. We don't. That's both good and bad for the Board of Trade."

Caroline Cunningham, Vice President for Regional Partnership at the Greater Washington Board of Trade, represented the Washington region:

1 -- It's important to maintain the credibility of the organization – in this case, the Potomac Conference, which she oversees. The Conference was known as a “talkathon” rather than a “do-athon.” She's trying to change that.

2 -- People recognize the organization as a neutral space, which is a good thing. It isn't perceived as too closely aligned with one group or another.

3 -- Creating leadership groups is important. At a recent meeting on the biotech industry, the Potomac Conference was able to pull together venture capitalists, university presidents, federal laboratory directors and political leaders.

4 -- It's important to take advantage of assets that are available to your particular region.

5 -- If you don't have the ability to execute projects well, you lose credibility, so you have to be careful which projects you undertake.

6 -- Greater Washington lacks some of the long-term, family-based, well-established philanthropic entities that are present in Philadelphia, New York and other regions. Particularly with corporate turnover and company relocations, it's difficult to find regional leaders.

Dick Fleming wondered if the Potomac Conference could be independent of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, instead of a wholly owned subsidiary. He said the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association had created a group called the Metropolis Forum which encourages young people to take on civic leadership. But the RCGA had given the Metropolis Forum its independence.

Bob Peck said the Greater Washington Board of Trade has been known the last 15 years exclusively for transportation, so it needs to be able to highlight Potomac Conference's work to maintain its own image.

Joe Gross, President and Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Systems, represented the Northern California Bay Area:

1 -- There's no substitute for deep corporate engagement. Chief executives come and go, but participation will continue if civic involvement is institutional rather than individual. In the Bay Area, we've achieved that deeper involvement through the investment funds. For example, banks are more likely to care about social equity if they're invested in the funds.

2 -- Building partnerships takes time. You develop trust by working together over time.

3 -- Working together allows you to set up relationships, including among staff and consultants.

4 -- These efforts require money. It's important to persuade foundations and businesses to stay committed financially.

5 -- You need a media strategy. For example, we're trying to get publicity in the trade and investment journals about what a good investment the funds are.

Session three:

What should be the future of MetroBusinessNet?

Sunne McPeak said the goal of MetroBusinessNet should be to change the business culture in this country. It should build on the lessons gleaned from New York City and previous MetroBusinessNet gatherings as well as from the compendium that Steve Michon and John Parr are working on. It should meet annually, say for five years, in an annual gathering of the country's major business organizations to focus on changing the culture of business to achieve a prosperous economy and reduce social inequities. Another aspect would be expanding the community of MetroBusinessNet members. A competitive entry process announced by Ford would raise the interest of regions around the country in joining the network.

"Be really bold," she said. The MBN network has so far been very effective in transforming practices to harness the marketplace for the betterment of communities. Foundations including the Ford Foundation have made 25-year-commitments to community-based organizations, so to expect MetroBusinessNet to have completed its work with business leaders after only three years is expecting too much. She praised MetroBusinessNet, but urged it to be "really, really bold." She said MetroBusinessNet should expand, but not drop its original members. The current members should be considered mentors to the new members.

Earl Maxwell said his group in Austin would love to have MetroBusinessNet support beyond the current three-year timetable. Two years ago, when Austin formed its business-led steering committee, all 20 or 22 of those business leaders committed to a 10-year commitment in Central East Austin. He said no group of business leaders in Austin has even agreed to a 10-year commitment to anything. Extending MetroBusinessNet's work would solidify those growing ties.

Dick Fleming agreed that MetroBusinessNet should stay together. He said the institutional development of community-development corporations occurs over a long period of time, and business-led institutional development should be allowed the same long-term process. A national foundation like Ford is well-positioned to keep that long-term perspective, he said. MetroBusinessNet should expand incrementally. He doesn't think it should merge with the Alliance for Regional Stewardship. The Alliance would be strengthened by greater business participation, but the Alliance should partner with MetroBusinessNet, not merge with it. What value does MetroBusinessNet add? It gives members exposure to edge presentations on cutting-edge topics, such as those offered by Weissbourd and Cortright, and by Kathryn Wylde, Richard Baron and Shelly Herman.

The conference participants also take home plenty of value from talking with others who deal with similar issues in regions around the country, he said. "There is a value-add to having the continued cross-fertilization of the five communities. We are very different, but we have a lot that we're learning from one another," he said. "This business network is a vehicle for net resources, net resources in terms of people, in terms of ideas, and to some extent, dollar-wise...Nurturing that network would be a long-term value-add."

Barbara Johnson of Austin said MetroBusinessNet members have only now after three years of meeting together begun to trust each other enough to offer criticism and share advice on each other's programs and ideas. It would be a waste to throw that trust away and not continue the MetroBusinessNet network, she said.

Caroline Cunningham said MetroBusinessNet should continue. “We’ve come to a place where we’re starting to trust each other and it’s a great place where we can vet ideas, get positive and negative feedback in a way where we can go back to our community and grow the project in a more efficient and impactful way,” she said.

Bob Weissbourd said Frank Beal of Chicago had told him it was worthwhile to bring in new members.

Brian Bosworth said Frank Beal told him MetroBusinessNet must continue to be a business-focused group. MetroBusinessNet is not a collection of multi-sector organizations, it is a collection of business organizations. It should seek partners in community-organizations and government-based organizations, but the target, the audience, the subject and object of this needs to be business-based groups.

Erin Flynn asked if MetroBusinessNet should raise money from regional foundations, and not just the Ford Foundation? Would your members contribute financially to support your participation in this MBN network? she asked the conference participants.

Bob Peck said MetroBusinessNet would be more valuable if members paid for it. These meetings are always good therapy, good networking opportunities. It’ll be more difficult to persuade members to pay for studies or assessments by MBN, but he supports requiring members to pay for their own travel to and attendance at meetings. One concern, though, is that if you just rely on member payments without foundation support, you wouldn’t have the money to pay people to put the meeting agendas together and organize presentations. He wouldn’t want to come to a meeting just to report on what each MBN region is doing without presentations.

Dick Fleming said we would support a “blend.” He said with more money behind it, the product can be richer.

Brian Bosworth said Sunne McPeak is talking about a bold vision for MetroBusinessNet, not just expanding the membership from five regions to six or seven or eight, but actually in a five-year campaign to change the business-civic culture around the country. To do that, you have to go out and do annual events, publications, targeted marketing strategies, tap sophisticated thought leaders, and create partnerships with national business organizations. It’s not unreasonable for MBN learning network members to pay the costs of the learning networks, but once you expand the network and go external, that’s fundamentally different.

Erin Flynn said from FutureWorks’ perspective, the vision is to expand to new members, “to go bigger.” “It’s to have a bigger vision about changing the culture of business,” she said. “This is our laboratory, and then we go big.”

Bob Weissbourd said you can’t take the show on the road unless you continually build your own capacity. It’s not just a laboratory ... you get better by taking it on the road. You build a set of knowledge products that are essential to creating a field of practice around this, and in doing so you also get better yourselves.

Brian Bosworth said we are impressed by the resources that are out there ... the resources that can be brought to bear in regions where the lead business-civic institution is really serious and wants to do something. There are a lot of resources out there.

Bob Peck said that's the right vision, but it's a "quantum leap from where this network is right now." You'll have to put together a core of business leaders ...

Brian Bosworth said that's why he likes the idea of a national business organization that is itself willing to see this as its agenda in concert with our group.

Dick Fleming said it'd be interesting to know if right now there are conversations percolating among the business CEO leadership of the Roundtable or other groups that MBN could tap into...

Brian Bosworth said CED seemed like the best partner for the new study of the 30 metro areas, but it's not clear if they would be a good partner for expanding the MBN network. It's unclear who would be the best partner: Maybe NAB? The Conference Board?

Michelle from the Ford Foundation said you need to look for an organization that's going to be an advocate for the idea, and not just a "vessel." You need an organization that's going to have a point of view. One obstacle to approaching national business organizations: Most of them are comprised of individual firms as members. It's difficult to persuade individual firms to fight for a regional agenda.

Brian Bosworth said maybe the answer is to create a national campaign and rally these national business organizations behind it. You don't knight one of them to go out and lead you into battle. You have to bring them together. After all, we're building the examples of how regionally-based business organizations are really important.

Some QUOTES of NOTE:

"The challenge is, how do we get beyond the trained elephants to get the wild elephants on board."

Richard Fleming, President and Chief Executive Officer of the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association, on the need to show mid-size and small businesses the importance of improving their region.

"It's a great place where we can vet ideas, get positive and negative feedback in a way where we can go back to our community and grow the project in a more efficient and impactful way."

Caroline Cunningham, Vice President for Regional Partnership at the Greater Washington Board of Trade, speaking about MetroBusinessNet.

"This is a very effective vehicle through which to transform the practice in a given community, and to harness the marketplace or market forces for the betterment of the community."

Sunne McPeak, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Bay Area Council in Northern California, speaking about MetroBusinessNet.

“That’s the value of having a young community within the MetroBusinessNet network, because you do have communities that are at different stages throughout the process. The real value is in learning that continuum: How does a very mature community respond versus how does a community that’s not very mature respond?”

Johnny Mack, President of the National Institute for Community Empowerment, Inc. and a consultant to the Austin region.

“You can’t have a downtown that looks like Beirut and pursue knowledge-workers saying, ‘This is a great place to build your career.’”

Richard Fleming, President and Chief Executive Officer of the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association, on the link between attracting workers and improving the community.

Some thoughts on “themes:”

-- Expansion of the network, including possible regions and the role of current members in that expanded network. Also, which partners should MBN seek as it extends its reach? National business organizations? If so, which ones?

-- How should MBN be funded? Are members of the network willing to ask their own members for money to participate? Should MBN approach other foundations besides Ford?

-- The different views of civic engagement in the business community. Large, long-established companies get it. Small and mid-caps don’t. From MBN’s point of view, it’s important to recognize that difference.