

## Auburn Hills, Wixom, Troy tops in attracting new entrepreneurs

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A new study reports that Auburn Hills, Troy and Wixom are among the top communities in the Detroit area at attracting new, entrepreneurial companies.

The study released Monday by the University of Michigan-Dearborn reported that successful communities work at determining the needs of business and carry out relationship marketing akin to private sector firms.

Kim Schatzel, director of iLabs, or the Center for Innovation Research at the UM-Dearborn School of Management, said the two-year study was designed to highlight successful efforts at creating jobs.

The growth of entrepreneurial companies is critical to the creation of jobs, Schatzel said.

"Basically, it's those entrepreneurial companies that are creating the new jobs, while larger companies are cutting back," she said.

"We really have to be able to focus on the growth businesses," she said.

Students from U-M Dearborn spent two years reviewing development practices in 14 communities around Detroit, she added.

"More communities will be studied, starting next fall," Schatzel said.

"It's not a ranking. The goal is to highlight best practices so other communities can learn from communities such as Auburn Hills, Troy, Wixom and Ann Arbor, which stood out in the first study.

Each of the four communities highlighted by the study has a different strategy, she said. However, the four also share certain practices as well, she said.

For example, they tend to use tax abatements for sunrise industries staffed by highly-skilled and well educated in professionals. "City leaders explained that they do not use abatements to lure firms from nearby cities, only to attract a business that is new to the area," says the UM-Dearborn report.

All four communities cited in the UM-Dearborn study also are externally oriented and have fostered good relations with non-governmental organizations and the local business community, she said.

"They're very externally oriented," she said.

Schatzel said the four communities operate with a minimum of bureaucracy.

"They have professional staffs that make regular visits to existing businesses to understand the changing needs of these firms and what the city can do to aid in the changing environment.

"And the staffs work closely with prospective firms to assist in the review and approval process of development projects," Schatzel said.

Mike McBroom, the community development director in Auburn Hills, said he was certainly pleased Auburn Hills was singled out in the report. "It's nice when an outside entity says you're doing a good job," he said.

Ever since the city was organized in 1983 out of what was then Pontiac Township, the Auburn Hills city council has followed consistent policies, he said. "That helps create certainty for business," McBroom said.

Mike Dornan, Wixom City Manager, said the City's development staff is small but focused on its mission.

"We've taken our lead from the private sector," added Dornan. The City also follows consistent policies, Dornan said. "You can count on what the City of Wixom tells you."

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