



# David Broden, defense consultant, and member of the Civic Caucus interview group

An Interview with The Civic Caucus

8301 Creekside Circle #920, Bloomington, MN 55437

*April 13, 2012*

## **Notes of the Discussion**

**Present :** Verne Johnson (chair), Audrey Clay, Janis Clay, Sallie Kemper, Paul Gilje (coordinator), Tom Gillespy, Jim Hetland (phone), Dan Loritz (vice-chair), Tim McDonald

**Summary of discussion - David Broden**, defense consultant, speaks of the need for a single, integrated state vision toward which the priorities of both the private sector (business and non-profits, etc.) and government can be targeted. He reflects on Civic Caucus interviews of recent years calling for a unified, shared sense of direction. He suggests a process for establishing a joint public-private effort to work toward consensus on a vision for the state. Such a state vision, he contends, must evolve by building on the visions crafted by individual organizations to provide an integrated focus benefiting greater Minnesota and having "ownership" by all citizens. Broden summarized by encouraging organizations that have worked to define such visions to seek to link common vision themes to this objective at the state level.

**A. Introduction of speakers** - Dave Broden is president of Broden Resource Solutions LLC, an aerospace and defense consulting firm specializing in program management, systems engineering, and advanced technological solutions for a wide array of defense projects. He is also chairman of the Armament Division of the National Defense Industrial Association and a member of a Department of Defense Consortium executive committee. Broden was a program manager and technical director with Honeywell and Alliant TechSystems for over 38 years. He graduated from St. Olaf College and earned a master's degree in Physics and Mathematics from the University of Minnesota.

## **B. Discussion -**

Over the past few years the Civic Caucus has frequently discussed the topic of a vision for the state of Minnesota. We have questioned both whether there is a well-defined, generally agreed upon state vision and whether we need one.

In this discussion David Broden, a member of the regular interview team of the Civic Caucus, sought to describe his impression of the thoughts both of past speakers and Caucus members who have actively participated in the talks that have touched on this topic.

Broden outlined his thoughts on a vision for the state in a document that may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/c37rsdx>.

### **THE PROBLEM: The state does not have a vision.**

Minnesota does not have an official single statement expressing "Minnesota's Vision" which is shared by public and private organizations to focus actions and to "sell" the state, Broden said.

There is today no public expression by state leadership of a state vision or branding message or advocacy of the need for one. Nor has there been any apparent action toward conscientiously moving the state in a particular, clearly defined direction. There is at present no specific effort toward developing a state vision being undertaken by any entity of the state government. Broden noted that some state departments do have departmental objectives or visions and that the private sector is well on the way to shape independent visions. However, without such an integrated vision, the state appears to some to have become rudderless in an increasingly tumultuous time.

### **THE GOAL: The state needs a framework for planning that ensures action to achieve specific milestones.**

What is viewed as a strategic plan by management gurus today is different from what it was as recently as 10 years ago. Planning once involved professional facilitation of a group charged with creating a plan and producing a document, he said. Then the document would go into a drawer until it was retrieved the next year and updated.

This kind of static planning is no longer accepted, Broden told the group. Technological changes have caused the way the world interacts to change substantially. "The world today is both collaborative and dynamic. You may still have hierarchical leadership, but if the leadership isn't collaborative you won't have a plan that works." A strategic plan needs ownership on the part of those who work together to create it and it must connect to those on whom the plan impacts. The dynamics of change requires a plan with a core focus but which can be readily adapted to changes in the economy or other factors.

### **What a vision should do.**

Broden argued that a vision statement must be "owned", that is, accepted in principle, by stakeholders. This is critical because if the stakeholders cannot see the value in the vision then there is no value. Note "stakeholders" includes those implementing the vision and those affected.

A vision should be a clear branding statement, Broden said, from which strategic plans can be derived. It should have capacity to serve as a basis for action, a statement from which actionable and measurable directives can arise.

"Any vision should have "hooks" that you can track." The vision should be defined in a way that allows each related organization (public and private) to apply the objectives to define specific actions that support achieving elements of the vision. To be effective those defined actions, when in process or

completed, must have a measurable output that can be understood by the "owners' and those affected. Achieving this suggests the need for well thought-out metrics that can be simply tracked and communicated. "We have to consider both the public vision and the private vision, and they should be linked in an integral way for optimal results."

Finally a vision statement must be adaptable to today's dynamic public and private sectors and to the organizations within them.

### **Minnesota's need for a vision is evolving.**

Minnesota does not have a focused, integrated vision expressed by either the state government or the private sector. Neither the Governor nor the legislature has proposed or expressed interest in an effort to establish an official state vision. And the State Planning Agency, which had once served a dynamic planning function and might have been a guiding force in such an effort, was abolished some years ago.

In its discussions with civic leaders, policy experts and business leaders over the past two years, the Civic Caucus has observed a growing interest in the need for a unified public-private integrated state vision, Broden said. Some have argued that the vision must be specific to an industry ("To be the technical leader") or aspirational to an area of competence ("The Brain Power State"). Some believe that the state has and has always had an implicit vision ("To be the best in the nation and the world.").

As different organizations in Minnesota think about the need to redesign work for the "new normal," many organizations and agencies are evolving visions and strategic plans independent of a central state focus. But to remain competitive, we must assure that all with an interest in the state's future are joining forces in working toward a common purpose. Further, the vision must convey messages both internal to the state and outward to the nation and to the rest of the world as globalization and connectivity is a key driver to future competitiveness.

### **Minnesota has had visions and branding statements in the past.**

Minnesota has had multiple visions or branding statements that have been established either formally or informally by the public sector, private sector or media.

Some examples of past Minnesota "brands" include:

- The best state in the nation
- The North Star state
- Land of 10,000 lakes
- The state that works
- The brainpower state
- A major league state
- The state with the most Fortune 500 headquarters

Certainly, these labels have been useful to some degree in the past, but the time has come, Broden believes, to take a purposeful, analytical approach to determining how a state vision can best serve to move the state forward.

## **What a vision should be.**

A vision should project a positive view of Minnesota's future (and of its government, business, and citizens), Broden said. It should be easily understood and "owned" by all Minnesotans. It should be equivalent to a brand. It should enable linking between public and private organizations, and be adaptable to rapidly changing circumstances.

## **Why do we need a vision?**

"Redesign" has become a popular focus of state and local government. Similarly "redesign" is being frequently addressed in the private sector (business and non-profits). But for redesign efforts to evolve most productively there must be a common sense of direction.

Business groups are establishing visions of segments of the economy, and foundations are adjusting their missions with attention to economic and demographic changes. The state could benefit from the same type of thoughtful focus. Establishing a vision and key goals may eventually facilitate more effective communication, stimulate citizen buy-in, and help to identify specific actions needed to achieve objectives.

## **THE STRATEGY: Form an integrated, joint public-private commission to develop a vision and measurable action plan.**

Minnesota needs to inspire public and private leaders to commit to a state vision and related action plan and then work to build citizen support.

"Some of this effort will be branding, and some will be more accurately categorized as vision," Broden said. "But hopefully if we succeed in tying together effective branding and vision, we can get rid of the moniker 'the cold north country.'"

### **Develop a public/private partnership commission.**

The first step Broden proposed is to confirm both the needs for and benefits of a public-private state vision and communicate these findings to both public and private organizations through a "vision organization" endorsed and supported by the Governor, legislature, local/county/regional government units, non-profits, and business. The leadership and sponsorship of such an effort does not need to be from the public sector.

This group would establish the commitment of Minnesota leadership to a common vision, one that encourages innovative public and private partnerships for the advancement of state competitiveness. A key component of this effort would be to utilize the visions that have evolved in various private and public sectors-it is important to build on the previous work of organizations, not to begin an entirely new effort.

The vision organization would begin and evolve from an initiative to link multiple organizations from throughout the state to consider a path forward.

Keeping in mind that government sponsorship is not required for establishing a commission, Broden suggested the following avenues be considered:

1. Leadership by the Governor
2. Joint leadership by the Governor and Legislature
3. Non-profit leadership
4. Business or business association leadership
5. Broad-based citizen involvement and participation
6. Involvement of public and private colleges and universities

Funding for the effort could come from a number of sources, Broden added, including allocation from the legislature or private donations.

**Visions focus attention on the long-term.**

The use of vision, strategy and goals changes the nature of the debate so policymakers cannot ignore the long-run issues. The short-run issues become almost trivial in that process. "You are compelled to start doing something about the problems that are obstacles to the vision. The issues we face today we would not have faced if we'd had an effective planning and related action process in place."

Broden added that if the public and private sectors of the state return to talking about vision then it might make it easier to get the conversation back onto good government. This approach will benefit both the public and private sectors by providing common objectives and links that will support economic development, education, and overall quality of life.

"If you have no idea where you're going, if the top levels of government appear to be wandering, then it's natural for people to begin to focus narrowly on self-interests. The value of an integrated vision linking the public-private sectors is to provide a sense of direction and confidence to the citizens of Minnesota, a sense that Minnesota has a focus on opportunities for the future. This can reach to all who "sell" Minnesota across the US and internationally. Without this vision focus and well-defined, closely related actions that support that vision, our random or arbitrary actions send messages of no leadership, no lack of thought for the future and as a result economic growth becomes considerably more uncertain."

**C. Conclusion—** The benefits of an integrated vision for Minnesota that offers connections to public-private stakeholders across the state can be significant if effectively evolved by a statewide effort. The need for a vision is driven in many ways, but perhaps most significantly by the dynamics of change in all aspects of public and private organizations. The Minnesota Legislature and several organizations have recognized the need for "Redesign" of how government delivers services and obtains necessary revenue. The private sector is adapting business operations in response to changes in its world. A common vision offers the opportunity to ensure that both public and private sectors move in a positive direction. Realizing this capability through a purposeful coordination of ongoing efforts would be an opportunity for Minnesota to demonstrate a forward thinking approach that has distinguished this state in times past.

Based on his experience in the defense industry Broden contends that when people get people together they can come up with better insights and ideas that any individuals could come up with on their own. It's time, he believes, to do that for the state.

**The chair thanked Mr. Broden for the visit.**

