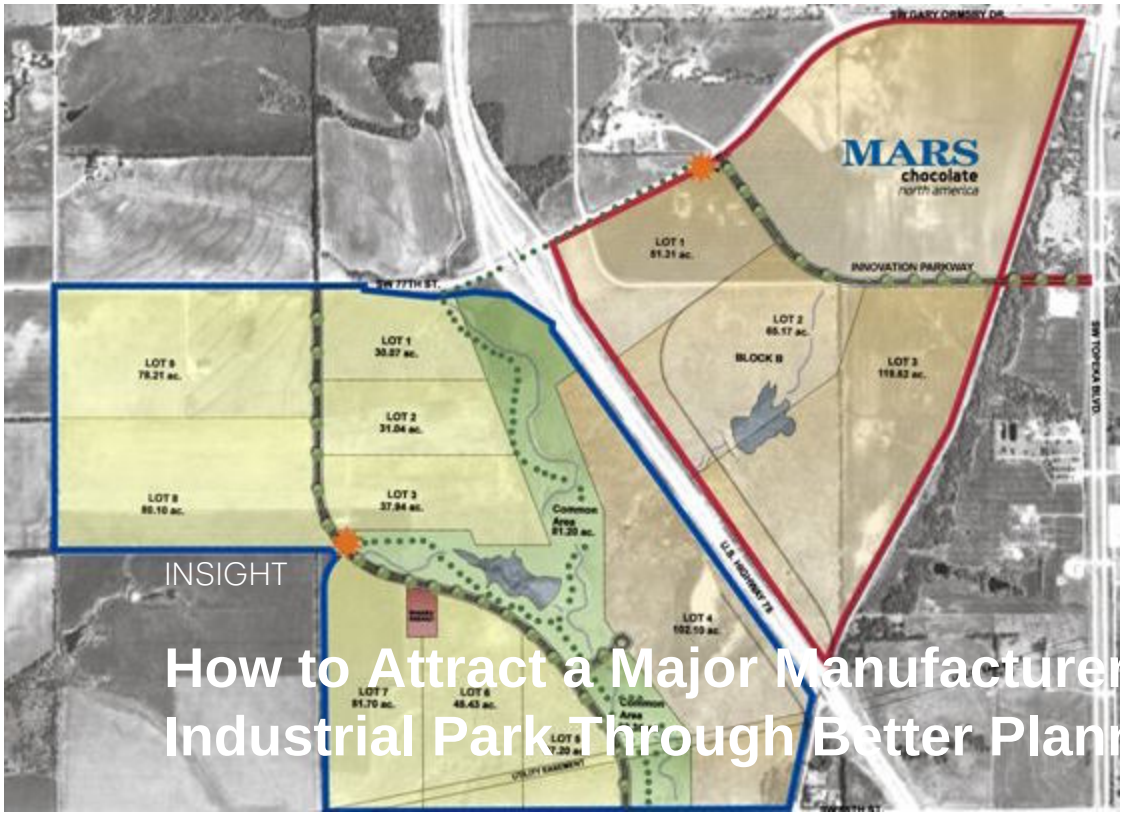


Cities, counties, chambers and developers dream of headlines like this one from *Fortune*: "Mars makes $100 million investment in Topeka, Kansas." Yet, anyone involved in economic development knows the path to 'Open' is much more complicated than any headline celebrating success depicts. Looking at the process that convinced Mars Chocolate North America to build its first North American plant in the past 35 years in Topeka, Kansas, starts to illustrate how a headline like this one comes about.

It all starts with a shared vision and a well-planned site

In 2009, GO Topeka, the economic development arm for the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce, hired Bartlett & West to complete a site investigation of three potential locations of 500-1,000 acres for the development of a leading industrial and technology park. Upon selection of the 1,000-acre location recommended in the investigation, GO Topeka hired Bartlett & West to complete the annexation, platting and zoning for the first phase of the park. This phase included many public meetings with stake holders and public hearings with the City and County governing bodies to gain approvals.

"Getting all the various stakeholders on the same page is critical to the success of an industrial park project like this. Everyone needs to share the same vision," said Bartlett & West's Joe Caldwell.

“Our team at Bartlett & West also did a lot of work on the site master planning and infrastructure in this initial stage. We later heard that effort and the quality of the site planning was an important factor in attracting Mars to this particular location,” he said.

Unique planning considerations make a site stand out

LEED certification of buildings, natural vegetation, pedestrian linkages, and renewable energy were among the measures written into the master plan documents for future development of the Topeka industrial park, which is named the Kanza Fire Commerce Park. Thanks to these measures, Kanza Fire established itself as a benchmark for sustainable planning and is the first of its kind in the region.

These unique considerations were also capitalized upon when Mars Chocolate North America selected the park for its manufacturing plant. Mars Chocolate North America had a goal of achieving LEED certification with the new facility. They opted to use native or xeriscape plantings to reduce the need for irrigation, herbicide and continued maintenance. The use of the prairie grasses significantly reduces the amount of maintenance costs associated with managing such a large site.

Utility and intermodal infrastructure lays the groundwork for future development

To meet both the short-term and projected long-term needs of the occupants of the Kanza Fire Commerce Park, significant improvements were designed by Bartlett & West for the City of Topeka water distribution system, sanitary sewer collection system and Kansas Gas Service high-pressure gas mains.

In addition, intermodal planning and access are critical for large manufacturers like Mars Chocolate North America. The site ultimately selected for the Kanza Fire park is served by 6,000 feet of BNSF main rail railway and an interchange for U.S. Highway 75, with quick interstate access to I-335 and I-70. It is also adjacent to a 2,000-acre foreign trade zone at the Topeka Regional Airport, which offers heavy air freight access.

All the planning ultimately creates a more successful site.

Caldwell said, “The key takeaway from this project was the importance of excellent site planning and collaboration. Bartlett & West was fortunate to work on the Kanza Fire Commerce Park from the beginning through to completion of site work on the Mars plant. Therefore, we saw how the decisions made in the planning stage directly related to and affected the facility

that eventually was built."

"It was a real pleasure to be a part of the project and see everyone from City and County officials to the residents come together to make this economic development opportunity a reality," he said.