

Editorial: Get it together

If Santa Rosa County commissioners want to make a real change with TEAM Santa Rosa, they should look no further than the consultant's recommendation that the county's economic development agency collaborate more closely with the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

But it's time to go past collaboration, and straight to full partnership.

TEAM officials know they lack the marketing muscle the county needs to take economic development to the next step. That's behind the request for \$100,000 in new funding to hire a chief marketing officer.

Why? The Pensacola chamber has stepped up its game and is eager for Santa Rosa to come on board. The chamber has a dynamic new leader in Jim Hizer and a staff of proven development pros he has brought in, and it has the fattest economic development war chest in its history.

Hizer also brings a proven commitment to regional development that is exactly what is needed here. Santa Rosa's efforts need to be blended with Escambia's, with a combined assets and a marketing program that sees the two counties as one.

The consultant also told Santa Rosa that if it wanted to get into the big leagues on

economic development it needed to spend more. But doing so in isolation seems inefficient; putting money into a wider two-county effort would leverage those funds with the Pensacola chamber's deeper pockets.

Yes, Santa Rosa officials still worry that they will be treated as second-class citizens. But we believe Hizer and the new blood he has brought in are ready to get beyond that.

Santa Rosa officials could demand a separate in-county office and representation, but at some point both they and Escambia County will be better off with a truly united, single voice on economic development.

It seems likely that Santa Rosa, with a more complete roster of development-ready sites, would profit first from a true partnership. Hizer has openly praised Santa Rosa's development assets as something he wants to market.

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In a few years Escambia, spending its war chest, is likely to equal or even surpass Santa Rosa's offerings. But to use an old word, an EscaRosa development effort could take the local economic development effort to a new level.

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