



Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012

About the Gaston County EDC

The Gaston County Economic Development Commission (GCEDC) is dedicated to attracting and retaining desirable businesses and employers to continue improving and diversifying economic opportunities in Gaston County.

The GCEDC's main functions are:

- Attracting new, quality industry and commerce
- Helping existing industry and businesses grow
- Stimulating development of appropriate land and buildings
- Improving area infrastructure, especially water, sewer and transportation
- Improving the general business climate, including conditions for new industry
- Informing citizens of the advantages of economic development
- Increasing commercial development and job growth

The elected Gaston County Board of Commissioners, one for each major township, appoints GCEDC members, to serve three-year staggered terms, and the Gaston Regional Chamber Economic Development Division (EDD) receives two appointments to the GCEDC Board.

The Economic Development Division (EDD) of the Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce provides financial support for the Gaston EDC Marketing Program. This public/private partnership is a significant enhancement to operations, providing services to clients and other potential industry.

The Planning Process

On January 12, 2010, the Gaston County EDC brought community leaders together to discuss the challenges and opportunities for Gaston County economic development. Participants heard presentations from Ed McCallum, Senior Principal with McCallum Sweeney Consulting, a site selection and economic development consulting firm; David Swenson, Vice President of the Charlotte Regional Partnership; and Donny Hicks, Executive Director of the Gaston County EDC. Each discussed current economic development trends, regional marketing efforts and projections, and strategic issues to consider locally.

Following the presentations, participants were divided into discussion groups. From these groups the facilitator drew concerns and suggestions for priorities for economic development activities in Gaston County for the next two years. This information was

summarized and forwarded to Mr. Hicks and Duane McCallister, the Chairman of the Gaston County EDC Board.

Mr. McCallister and Mr. Hicks formed a Strategic Planning Committee to review the information and draft a strategic plan to be presented to the full Board of Directors for adoption at the June meeting. Serving on that committee in addition to Mr. McCallister and Mr. Hicks were Dick Cromlish, Alex Hall, Heath Jenkins, Rusty Harris, Neil Styers, and Jan Winters.

2010 – 2012 Strategic Plan for Economic Development

This plan outlines the goals and strategies that will define the priorities and activities for the Gaston County Economic Development Commission over the next two and one-half years. This plan communicates our commitment to advance Gaston County and to create diverse economic opportunities for our citizens.

Gaston County has a number of distinct advantages in attracting economic development opportunities and we recognize that there is much being done right currently. This plan seeks to build upon that rather than make wholesale changes.

There also are several areas that create disadvantages. This plan is constructed to minimize the barriers and leverage advantages. It recognizes that the Gaston County EDC is not in a position to address or drive solutions in some critical areas. For this reason, this plan contains strategies to lead and implement, as well as the more indirect role to influence and advocate. There will be a stronger, proactive role for the EDC Board and the EDD in influencing and advocating for economic development.

We will apply the recommendations from numerous studies that suggest business and industry clusters to focus our recruitment and development activities. We recognize that there is considerable opportunity for synergy around regional economic development efforts; therefore, we will align our efforts with Charlotte Mecklenburg and the region. When opportunities come to us that do not fit our clusters we will continue to evaluate those and respond proactively.

Experience continues to underscore the need for site development and infrastructure expansion, particularly water and sewer. We will continue to drive that expansion and work to ensure local funding. In addition, we will add the construction of buildings beginning with a call center, followed by an industrial building. Our ability to accomplish this is dependent on funding from the County Commissioners.

Workforce development and quality of life issues continue to be a concern for both our long term and short term needs in transforming the economic environment. The pool of

technically skilled candidates is not adequate to meet the growing need of current and potential employers. Within this plan there will be an emphasis on raising the awareness of these needs and creating a system that connects both current employees and students to training opportunities.

Vision

To be a proactive leader in the transformation of the current economic environment to one that supports and attracts diverse business and industry offering opportunity for all citizens.

Planning Assumptions

This plan is based upon the following assumptions determined through market trends and experience. Should we experience significant market changes, unforeseen opportunities, or future catastrophic events these assumptions would change and our plan will be modified accordingly.

1. We believe economic development – job creation, is necessary for the health of our community and the soundness of our tax base. Few communities can afford to be bedroom communities, and the ones who can are the more affluent ones. The tax rate that would be associated with a bedroom community of starter homes is would not be desirable.
2. We believe it will take a temporary increase in public spending to achieve the economic development vision we are supporting. Without that investment we will not be able to acquire and develop industrial parks, provide countywide water and sewer, improve the schools, and positively address quality of life issues to become more attractive to upper end housing. Goals without a commitment to funding are generally meaningless.
3. We acknowledge that Charlotte is the economic driver for this region. We must recognize their role and their importance while leveraging the advantages we have in comparison to other counties in the region.
4. The economy is in flux and none of us can predict the future; however, we are open to and should prepare for as many different opportunities as we can reasonably accommodate.
5. Goals and strategies for education/workforce development, entrepreneurial development and quality of life improvements are long term and without great prospect of immediate return. These, however, are necessary steps to position the community for a better long term future because the skill level of the current and emerging workforce does not meet the need of existing and future employers and the overall quality of life is a critical factor in economic development decisions.
6. In any given year, there are limited opportunities for transformative projects- larger firms with well-paid advanced manufacturing jobs that can make a material difference in a community. Diversification allows us to attract the smaller projects like warehouse/distribution centers which will keep our name on the list of successful counties and provide some return until the transformative projects come.
7. Today we are a leader in North Carolina with our preparation, the quality of staff responses and industrial site development. However, others are catching up. It will take funding and courage to continue to acquire new sites for industrial development. This

also means that we must strategically prioritize projects within our limited funding to remain a contender in a highly competitive market.

8. Monitoring and advocacy are important new dimensions to EDC process. We believe we must be a strong influencer in the decisions that shape our economic future.

Core Operating Strategies

This plan is founded upon the following five core operational strategies:

- Build on Gaston County strengths which offer a distinct advantage
- Advocate for action on critical initiatives
- Proactively influence economic development decisions
- Position Gaston County to take advantage of economic development opportunities
- Support workforce development and quality of life initiatives

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Define and promote Gaston County's current and future economic development products to position Gaston County as a lead candidate for expansion, site selection and relocation projects

Goal 2: Develop diversified business parks and infrastructure to ensure Gaston County is a competitive location for target industries

Goal 3: Promote entrepreneurial and small business development

Goal 4: Maximize the success potential of the P&N Rail Line project

Goal 5: Monitor and seek to shape decisions, policies and regulations for economic development

Goal 6: Advocate for positive action to address quality of life issues impacting economic development

Strategic Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Define and promote Gaston County's current and future economic development products to position Gaston County as a lead candidate for expansion, site selection and relocation projects

- 1.1 Develop and implement a marketing plan by the end of third quarter 2010
- 1.2 Respond to opportunities that are well suited to areas of distinct advantage
- 1.3 Focus recruitment activities to automotive, defense, fabrication, machining, molding
- 1.4 Align development strategies with those in Charlotte and the region to include aerospace, defense, auto, transportation, eco-tourism and energy sectors
- 1.5 Promote the regional strategy and targets identified clusters
- 1.6 Communicate distinct advantages including transportation grid, international airport connections, etc.
- 1.7 Develop and implement a public relations strategy in Gaston County
- 1.8 Define and communicate the ROI on economic development initiatives
- 1.9 Engage and educate regional realtors and site selection consultants

Goal 2: Develop diversified business parks and infrastructure to ensure Gaston County is a competitive location for target industries

- 2.1 Develop/revise master plan for the development and diversification of business sites. Complete by 2nd quarter 2011.
- 2.2 Preserve, develop and diversify business and industrial sites and initiate office park development
- 2.3 Initiate plans for an industrial speculative building following the completion of the building for the call center project. Complete plan end of fiscal year 2012 and move to execute if project has an acceptable ROI
- 2.4 Intensify drive for county-wide water and sewer and high priority highway projects like the I85/US 321 intersection
 - 2.4.1 Engage the EDC Board and the EDD in an advocacy role for these items

Goal 3: Promote entrepreneurial and small business development

3.1 Form task force to outline needs and recommend strategies. Organize Small Business Council by 7/1/10.

3.2 Ensure top priorities of small businesses are being addressed by a local/state entity (e.g. one of the chambers, Gaston College, etc.). Priorities set and responsibilities determined by 10/31/10.

3.3 Develop and implement a plan to grow small business and entrepreneurial activity

Goal 4: Maximize success potential of the P&N Rail Line project

4.1 Clarify and set realistic expectations with all stakeholders. Complete by November 2010.

4.2 Identify sites and assist future development along the line. Sites identified by January 2011.

4.3 Establish good working relationship with the operator

4.4 Promote the potential of a short line rail

4.5 Explore possible opportunities with intermodal facility at Charlotte Douglas International Airport

Goal 5: Monitor and seek to shape decisions, policies and regulations for economic development

5.1 Follow regulatory reform activities and engage political representatives as needed

5.2 Promote improvements in graduation rates and standardized test scores

5.3 Support Chamber initiatives to ensure a business friendly environment

5.4 Actively engage the EDD and EDC Boards to influence decisions impacting economic development

5.5 Ensure continued local investment for economic development

5.6 Maintain uniform incentive plan with municipalities and county

5.7 Seek opportunities to inform and to influence legislative priorities

5.8 Proactively support the Garden Parkway

5.8.1 Meet with local political candidates to encourage support

5.9 Meet regularly with municipal government leaders and state representatives to share information of mutual interest

Goal 6: Advocate for positive action to address quality of life issues impacting economic development

6.1 Raise awareness of the need for an integrated system for workforce development including participation in technical skills training

6.2 Host a forum with business and industry leaders to identify and understand needs

6.3 Encourage higher quality executive housing in residential development plans

Performance Targets

1. Completion and implementation of marketing plan by end of 3rd qtr, 2010
2. Completion and leasing of call center office building by year end 2011
3. Continued investment by County in economic development needs at the committed level
4. Expansion of water and sewer
5. Successful completion of the P&N project
6. Understanding of business and industry needs
7. Increased pool of technical talent to meet workforce needs
8. Increased number (percent) of businesses and industries choosing to relocate to or expand in Gaston County
9. Competitive local incentives
10. Continued participation by all municipalities in the uniform incentive plan
11. Commitment and construction on Garden Parkway