

For Immediate Release

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Celebrating Growth in Davie County and Building a Bright Future

After five years of successfully attracting manufacturing companies that created thousands of new jobs and millions of dollars in investments, Davie County had a problem -- no more buildings and no more workers.

“All of our working inventory had been absorbed into the system, and our unemployment rate had dropped to 3.7 percent which is almost fully employed,” said Terry Bralley, the president of the Davie County Economic Development Commission.

But rather than resting on its laurels, Bralley says the Economic Development Commission treated 2017 as a “building year” and worked to replenish Davie County’s supply of buildings and sought ways to provide companies with qualified employees.

“We know that 85% of industries that are looking today want an existing structure.

We are helping the private sector to develop industrial parks so that we have new buildings and building sites available. We are also concerned about the workforce and are seeking ways to add value moving forward by developing apprenticeship programs and working with the high school, the community college, and industry to facilitate engagement. We do realize that we have full employment here and we are working on ways to connect the schools and industry in a way they have not been connected in the past and to show our young people opportunities they may not have known existed,” he said.

Rural infrastructure grants allowed the Hollingsworth Companies to expand the SouthPoint Business Park which now has a 108,000 sq ft. speculative building ready and three graded, pad-ready sites which would allow a building to be built in 6 to 8 months. The commission is also in conversation with Windsor Commercial of Greensboro to provide additional speculative buildings.

Bralley said that economic development involves periods of growth and periods of preparation. Last year’s lull in development allowed the commission to analyze its process and focus on the future.

“We are always looking for ways to get better which is why we are currently working on a new five-year strategic plan to determine where we need to be, where the jobs are going to be, and what we need to do to take advantage of those opportunities,” Bralley said. “The plan paves the way for the future for the next five to ten years and gives our leadership a comprehensive roadmap to follow.”

Ted Abernathy, an economic development & strategic planning consultant with 35 years of experience in directing economic development and workforce development programs, was hired to prepare a five-year economic development strategic plan for Davie County. The report provides a comprehensive review of all existing economic development strategies, an evaluation of the current economic state of the county, an assessment of trends impacting Davie County’s economic competitiveness, and a cluster analysis for Davie County with recommendations for future targets.

Abernathy presented his report to around 150 local leaders and federal, state, and local elected officials at the State of Davie meeting on March 9th.

During his presentation, he shared statistics comparing Davie County to both rural and metro counties as well as to the state of North Carolina as a whole. Those areas included job growth, percentage of jobs by sector, and the number of housing units,

Davie County has outpaced its neighbors in job growth, and is up 29.7 percent since 2010 compared to a state average of 12.5 percent. Davie County’s percentage of manufacturing jobs is more than double the state average while the combined percentage of white collar jobs in the financial, business, and professional sector and health and education is significantly lower.

Conversely, the county has had a relatively flat housing market with only a one percent increase from 2010-2016. The number of housing units has increased in North Carolina by 4.8 percent in the same time. To attract young professionals to Davie County, there is a need for modern updated rental housing.

Abernathy indicated that by understanding Davie County’s competitive position, leadership can better allocate the community’s resources. He added that the economic development goal of successful places requires a mix of factors including the depth of workforce talent, the business climate including costs and regulatory issues, the connective infrastructure (roads, air service, water & sewer, broadband), currently available buildings and shovel-ready sites, and the quality of life factors that appeal to current and potential workers.

His recommendations for continued economic growth included:

- Maintaining an inventory of zoned shovel-ready sites with existing utilities, that are competitively priced and located at appropriate places
- Increasing the availability of skilled labor
- Analyzing the county’s incentive policies and prioritizing companies that offer wages that exceed the county average
- Offering positive quality of life factors like low crime rate, quality public schools, health care facilities, housing availability, housing costs, colleges & universities in the area, recreational opportunities, cultural opportunities

- Attracting new housing and new younger residents

Download Abernathy's entire [Davie County EDC 2018 Strategic Plan](#) report.

In addition to Abernathy's recommendations, Bralley considers leadership development critical to Davie County's long-term growth, and alignment key to its continued success.

"We've had a great group of people here who have worked together on a lot of projects. The next generation needs to know how that was done and how to do it even better. We need to ensure that our future is in the hands of people who are informed and understand where we have been and are equipped to take us where we need to go in the future," he said.

"We need to align all of our energy -- the towns, the county, the schools, the community college -- and make sure we are all aimed in the right direction and aligned with the region and the state in terms of the types of companies and clusters we are trying to attract," Bralley said. "We are learning from what we've done and looking at new and better ways of creating opportunities for business and industry to come to Davie County."