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Economic Development Element

Overview

This element examines historic trends and projections concerning Oconee County's labor force, commuting patterns, employment characteristics and trends, infrastructure, and other matters impacting the economic growth of Oconee County. In addition, the latest census data and employment trend information will be used to analyze the county's economic base. This element will also include statements of goals and policy recommendations based on the expressed wishes of the citizens of Oconee County.

Labor Force

Population

Oconee County's labor force is primarily drawn from a local population that has grown steadily during the last several decades. According to the 2000 Census, the number of county residents rose 15.2% between 1990 and 2000, reaching a total of 66,215 residents at the time of the count. Population projections for 2008 show an estimated 71,274 residents, a 7.1% increase from the 2000 count. See Table ED-1 for a historical view of the growth of Oconee County's population.

Table ED-1

Oconee County Population 1950-2000, w/2008 Projections						
1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2008
39,050	40,204	40,728	48,611	57,494	66,215	71,274

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table ED-2

Comparison of Population Change Upstate South Carolina Counties: 1990-2000, 2000-2008 Projections		
County	1990-2000 Percent Change	2000-2008 Percent Change
Oconee	15.2%	7.6%
Abbeville	9.7%	-2.9%
Anderson	14.2%	10.3%
Cherokee	18.0%	3.5%
Greenville	18.6%	15.4%
Greenwood	11.3%	3.4%
Laurens	19.7%	0.2%
Pickens	18.0%	5.6%
Spartanburg	11.9%	10.6%
Union	-1.5%	-7.4%
Total South Carolina	15.1%	11.7%

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table ED-2 shows that in the 2000 Census South Carolina was one of the fastest growing states in the nation. Oconee County was ranked near the middle of the upstate region, and slightly ahead of the state as a whole. This trend continues as indicated by the 7.6% change as listed in the 2007 projection. .

It should be noted that changes in population totals are affected by a number of factors, including births, deaths, and migration. As such, Oconee County's growth results from a combination of variables. See Table ED-3 for a comparison of the components of change that impact Oconee and other upstate South Carolina counties.

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Table ED-3

Components of Population Change in Upstate South Carolina, 1990-2000 and 2000-2007 Estimate								
County	Total Change	Number of Births	Number of Deaths	Total Natural Increase (Births - Deaths)	Percent of Total Change Due to Natural Increase (%)	Net Migration	Percent of Total Change Due to Migration (%)	
Oconee	2000	8,721	7,629	5,716	1,913	21.9	6,808	78.1
	2007	4,538	5,816	4,965	851	---	3,950	---
Abbeville	2000	2,305	3,262	2,349	913	39.6	1,392	60.3
	2007	-710	2,244	1,805	439	---	-1,025	---
Anderson	2000	20,563	20,815	15,173	5,642	27.4	14,921	72.6
	2007	14,241	16,231	13,228	3,003	---	11,965	---
Cherokee	2000	8,031	6,889	4,602	2,287	28.5	5,744	71.5
	2007	1,478	5,130	4,163	967	---	738	---
Greenville	2000	59,489	49,278	29,017	20,261	34.1	39,228	65.9
	2007	48,631	40,833	24,502	16,331	---	34,076	---
Greenwood	2000	6,704	9,158	6,377	2,781	41.5	3,923	58.5
	2007	1,987	6,447	4,991	1,456	---	840	---
Laurens	2000	11,435	8,258	6,660	1,598	14.0	9,837	86.0
	2007	29	5,826	5,341	485	---	-155	---
Pickens	2000	16,861	12,660	8,082	4,578	27.2	12,283	72.8
	2007	5,246	9,378	6,687	2,691	---	3,031	---
Spartanburg	2000	26,998	33,040	23,536	9,504	35.2	17,494	64.8
	2007	21,752	24,996	18,946	6,050	---	16,859	---
Union	2000	-456	3,897	3,566	331	---	-787	---
	2007	-2,111	2,447	2,683	-236	---	-1,746	---

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As the labor force in this region is somewhat transient, with a number of individuals who reside in a different area than their employment, the Oconee County Economic Development Commission tracks labor statistics from a number of neighboring counties to best determine the level of the available work force. According to the South Carolina Employment Security Commission, in December of 2008, Oconee County's labor force numbered 30,120, with 2,323 (or 10.6%) listed as unemployed. However, considering the reported number of unemployed from surrounding counties (Anderson, Greenville and Pickens Counties CSA), the regional total topped 44,000.

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At the time the 2000 Census was taken, approximately 20,500 Oconee County residents worked within their home county's borders, with another 8,900 leaving to work elsewhere. Of this group, adjoining Pickens County drew the largest portion (approximately 4,200), with Anderson and Greenville Counties each attracting less than 2,000. At the same time, however, only a little more than 5,000 people from other counties were employed within Oconee County's borders. Again, neighboring Pickens County ranked first, sending Oconee County over 2,300 of its citizens, followed next by Anderson County (approximately 1,200) and Greenville County (approximately 400). Other counties furnishing significant groups included Laurens, Spartanburg, and Richland Counties in South Carolina; and Stephens and Hart Counties in Georgia. See Table ED-5 for more detailed information.

Table ED-4

Oconee County Commuting Patterns: Selected Counties			
County	Commuting To Oconee	Commuting From Oconee	Net Commuting
Pickens (SC)	2,331	4,192	-1,861
Anderson (SC)	1,274	1,770	-496
Greenville (SC)	396	1,442	-1,046
Laurens (SC)	164	12	+152
Spartanburg (SC)	112	305	-193
Richland (SC)	107	27	+80
Stephens (GA)	144	262	-118
Hart (GA)	93	15	+78

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Age Distribution

One potential key challenge facing future economic development in Oconee County will be maintaining a sufficiently youthful workforce. Oconee County, like many other regions across the nation, is already beginning to experience the effects of the aging of the "baby boomers", those born immediately following World War II between 1946 and 1964. Unlike most other areas, however, Oconee County has become a lure to a large number of retirees from other regions. As a result, the median age of Oconee's population (the age at which half of the population is older and half is younger) is increasing faster than most areas. The 2000 Census revealed that the median age of the United States is the highest that it has ever been, rising 2.4 years over the previous decade to 35.3 years of age; during the same period, the median age of Oconee's population rose from 35.6 years in 1990 to 39.5 years in 2000. Therefore, while the aging of the "baby boomers" is expected to continue driving the nation's population upward at

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least through the year 2015, Oconee County continues to feel the impact of added retirees as noted by 2007 projections. (U.S. Census Bureau) See Table ED-6.

Table ED-5

Profile of Age Groups in Oconee County in 1990, 2000 and 2007 (Estimate)								
Age Group (years)	1990		2000		Percent Change 1990	2007		Percent Change 2000
	Number	Percent of Population	Number	Percent of Population		Number	Percent of Population	
Under 5	3,571	6.2	3,996	6.0	-.2	4,144	5.9	-.1
5-9	*		4,247	6.4	---	4,102	5.8	-.6
10-14	*		4,338	6.6	---	4,345	6.1	-.5
15-19	*		4,090	6.2	---	4,194	5.9	-.3
20-24	*		3,752	5.7	---	3,877	5.5	-.2
25-34	**		8,487	12.8	---	8,940	12.6	-.2
35-44	**17,237	30.0	9,625	14.5	---	9,207	13.0	-1.5
45-54	6,817	11.9	9,310	14.1	2.2	9,927	14.0	-.1
55-59	3,120	5.5	4,254	6.4	.9	4,746	6.7	.3
60-64	2,937	5.1	3,805	5.7	.6	4,454	6.3	.6
65-74	4,967	8.6	6,237	9.4	.8	7,225	10.2	.8
75-84	2,353	4.1	3,225	4.9	.8	4,269	6.0	1.1
85 and over	585	1.0	849	1.3	.3	1,323	1.9	.6
Total population	57,494	100	66,215	100	---	70,753	100	---

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Racial Mix

While 89.1% percent of Oconee County residents were counted in the white racial group in the 2000 Census (down from 90.5% in 1990), statewide the percentage was much lower at just over 67%. Also, Oconee County's African American/Black population decreased slightly, being measured at 8.4%. As a result, it is easy to see that the makeup of the area's work force is slowly becoming more diversified. Indeed, one of the most noticeable changes among Oconee County's residents is the growth in the number of Hispanics, which by 2000 had come to represent almost 2.5% of the county's total population. (U.S. Census Bureau)

It should be pointed out that, although there is currently no data available to either confirm or deny the belief, many local officials feel that the Hispanic population was significantly undercounted during the 2000 Census. The actual number, therefore, is likely to be significantly higher than what is reflected in most official documents. And though some non-Hispanics see this growth as a potential problem, many in Oconee County's manufacturing community see the

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influx of Hispanic workers to be a positive factor. In spite of many being limited in formal education and advanced technical training, the Hispanic employee is generally regarded as being bright, hard working, and conscientious; getting to work everyday on time is extremely important to most. Of course, there are some real challenges facing this group, not the least of which is a widespread weakness in comprehension of the English language, and the well-known problem of obtaining legal documentation to obtain work. Still, there is no question this group will continue to increase in number in coming years, likely becoming a very important portion of Oconee County's work force.

See Table ED-7 for a more detailed breakdown of Oconee County's racial composition.

Table ED-6

Racial Composition of Oconee County's Population in 2000, w/ 2007 Projections									
	Total Population	Race							Hispanic or Latino (of any race)
		One Race							
		Total (One Race)	White	Black or African American	Am. Indian & Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	
2000 Estimate Base	66,215	65,793	59,796	5,577	159	247	14	422	1,562
2007 Estimate	70,753	70,161	63,890	5,739	194	322	16	592	2,500
Population Growth 2000-2007	6.9%	6.6%	6.8%	2.9%	22.0%	30.4%	14.3%	40.3%	60.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Education

Education level is one of the most important factors in measuring the potential of any work force. In the past, given that Oconee County's work force was primarily employed in textiles and agricultural pursuits, technical demands were relatively low. Today, however, employers must hire individuals possessing the academic skills that will enable them to complete a broad spectrum of technical training. Therefore, as the region continues to attract more and more high-tech industries, it will be critical to upgrade the overall education level of Oconee County's work force.

According to information from the South Carolina Office of Research and Statistics, in 2000, over 11% of Oconee County adults older than 25 years of age had less than a 9th grade education. In addition, another 15% of this age group had attended high school but failed to attain a diploma. Of the rest of those 25 years of age and up, 16.2% had some college; 6.3% had an Associate's Degree; 11.0% had a Bachelor's Degree; and 7.1% had a graduate or professional degree.

Table ED-8 compares Oconee County's high school attendance (2007-2008 school year) with other upstate South Carolina counties.

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Table ED-7

SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILES, 2008					
Upstate School Districts					
SCHOOL DISTRICT	ENROLLMENT	ATTENDANCE RATE (%)	% END-OF-COURSE PASSAGE RATE	GRADUATION RATE (%)	DROPOUT RATE (%)
Abbeville	3,533	95.6%	63.7%	79.0%	1.8%
Anderson 1	9,173	95.8%	83.6%	81.0%	1.7%
Anderson 2	3,768	95.8%	76.8%	74.1%	4.8%
Anderson 3	2,647	94.9%	67.1%	67.3%	2.7%
Anderson 4	2,849	96.2%	77.6%	74.4%	5.0%
Anderson 5	12,390	95.0%	70.1%	72.7%	4.6%
Cherokee	9,362	96.0%	63.3%	78.7%	8.3%
Greenville	69,443	96.2%	71.2%	73.3%	3.8%
Greenwood 50	9,354	96.6%	71.1%	77.0%	5.2%
Greenwood 51	1,121	96.0%	58.5%	86.7%	5.9%
Greenwood 52	1,641	96.4%	83.1%	89.9%	1.2%
Laurens 55	6,068	97.0%	73.1%	67.0%	7.5%
Laurens 56	3,314	95.2%	61.3%	75.9%	0.9%
Oconee	10,716	95.8%	71.6%	76.2%	4.2%
Pickens	16,658	95.4%	74.6%	66.7%	6.2%
Spartanburg 1	5,100	95.6%	67.3%	78.6%	0.8%
Spartanburg 2	9,804	96.6%	68.3%	79.6%	4.0%
Spartanburg 3	3,086	95.2%	76.0%	74.7%	1.5%
Spartanburg 4	3,013	95.2%	75.9%	88.4%	0.2%
Spartanburg 5	7,197	96.1%	74.8%	71.8%	4.8%
Spartanburg 6	10,238	97.1%	70.5%	78.0%	2.7%
Spartanburg 7	7,619	94.4%	58.3%	68.5%	7.5%
Union	4,701	94.4%	62.9%	73.2%	0.6%

Source: 2008 Annual District Report Cards; South Carolina Department of Education

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Although Oconee County must continue to work hard to improve some aspects of educating its work force, there are bright spots. One of these can be found in Average Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) scores, a key measure used by colleges and universities in their admissions process. Oconee County students typically rank high in the state, establishing the School District of Oconee County as one of the leading public school districts in the region. Table ED-9 compares Oconee County SAT scores with both state and national results from 2008.

Table ED-8

Average Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) Results: 2008				
	Writing	Verbal	Math	Composite
Oconee County	501	516	488	1017
South Carolina	484	496	471	980
National	497	510	488	1007

Source: School District of Oconee County

Personal Income

Oconee County's per capita personal income typically ranks among the highest in upstate South Carolina, in 2008 reaching \$31,675. This figure reflects an increase of 13.6% since 2000, and is second only in the upstate region to Greenville County. Table ED-10 compares 2008 per capita personal income levels throughout upstate South Carolina.

Table ED-9

Per Capita Personal Income in Selected Upstate South Carolina Counties: 2008		
County	Amount (in dollars)	Rank
Oconee	31,675	2
Abbeville	23,829	10
Anderson	29,084	3
Cherokee	24,794	9
Greenville	35,076	1
Greenwood	27,297	5
Laurens	26,237	7
Pickens	26,624	6
Spartanburg	28,971	4
Union	26,230	8

Source: South Carolina Department of Revenue

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Union Membership- In 2003, only one unionized facility was located in Oconee County, accounting for a total of just 35 members of organized labor. (Appalachian Council of Governments) When compared to the total size of the workforce, this extremely small percentage proves to be extremely attractive to industrial prospects interested in locating in Oconee County.

Major Employment Sectors

Manufacturing

Oconee County is recognized as one of the six Upstate counties that comprise South Carolina's most progressive industrialized region. In 2008, this area announced capital investments of approximately \$720 million, amounting to 17.8 percent of the state total. Also, during this same period the six-county region announced the creation of more than ¼ of the state's new jobs.

Table ED-11 illustrates the amount of capital investment reported in Oconee County between 2000 and 2008.

Table ED-10

Capital Investment in Oconee County: 2000-2008	
Year	Dollars Invested (Millions)
2000	24.0
2001	26.9
2002	28.0
2003	37.8
2004	63.1
2005	44.0
2006	19.2
2007	72.9
2008	67.5

Source: Appalachian Council of Governments

According to information from the Oconee County Economic Development Commission, 2007-2008 saw a significant increase in capital investment, growing to over \$140 million.

Oconee County is centrally located between Atlanta and Charlotte on South Carolina's I-85 corridor, a fact that has proven to be one of the county's greatest assets in both recruiting new industry, and strengthening an increasingly diverse business base. Having already attracted corporate headquarters, high-tech manufacturers, and automobile-related suppliers, Oconee

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County's leaders strive to maintain a pro-business attitude that insures businesses can compete and thrive.

In past decades, Oconee County has at times sought its own path in creating a track record of successful economic development. Recent economic and political changes, however, have necessitated the county seek partners in maintaining its growing prosperity; in today's economy, many challenges can only be overcome by taking a regional approach. Therefore, Oconee County has joined the Upstate Alliance, a 10-county partnership of community leaders, economic developers, and private companies. Working together, these various individuals and entities are committed to promoting economic development and to solving common problems across the entire region.

The potential benefits of taking a regional approach to economic development were evidenced early on when, in September 2003, the Upstate Alliance helped bring about one of the most significant economic development announcements in the history of South Carolina, Clemson University's International Center for Automotive Research (ICAR). Though it will take years to bring to fruition, this joint venture between the university and BMW Automotive is expected to lure a wide range of automobile-related businesses into the region, placing the Upstate firmly at the forefront of automotive research. As such, the investment brought into the region by the facility is destined to positively impact the economic makeup of not only Oconee County and its Upstate Alliance partners, but the rest of the state as well.

Tourism

Based on reports provided by SC Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT), the tourism industry is the second largest employer in the state. In Oconee County, there are aver 1,800 people employed in the tourism industry with more than \$20,000,000 in payroll. Among the revenues received through tourism-related activities are retail sales taxes, accommodations taxes, excise taxes, admissions taxes, income taxes, local option sales taxes, hospitality taxes, property taxes, and business license fees. While the data for 2008 is not yet available, SCPRT also reports that in 2007 Oconee County was fourth fastest growing tourism industry in the state.

In 2007, the state contracted the consulting services of the McNulty Group to research and develop a comprehensive tourism plan for each region of the state. Oconee County is bundled in the same region as Greenville, Anderson, Pickens, Spartanburg and Cherokee counties. The first draft of this study places significant emphasis on the natural resources of Oconee County. In fact, both the Greenville and Anderson CVBs have a picture of an Oconee County waterfall on the cover of their visitors guides. Additionally, both of our neighboring CVBs promote our area to their tourists.

As a result of the growing tourism market in Oconee County, a new Convention & Visitors Bureau was established in September of 2008. The Mountain Lakes CVB is solely funded by local and state accommodations taxes which means that the primary objective and focus of the CVB is to put “heads in beds”. It has been statistically proven by the Smith Travel Industry that on average, every tourist that stays overnight will spend \$120 in addition to the cost of the room. So for every 100 room nights sold, the additional economic impact to the county will be \$12,000.

Using existing data and statistics as provided by the SCPRT, it is quite clear that tourism is rapidly becoming, if it isn’t already, the state and county’s leading industry.

Table ED-11

Accommodations Tax Collections by Fiscal Year* 2004 - 2007			
County/ MSA / ACOG Region/ Upstate Region / State			
COUNTY	FISCAL YEAR 2004-05	FISCAL YEAR 2005-06	FISCAL YEAR 2006-07
Oconee	132,431	137,974	128,996

Source: SC Department of Revenue

* The fiscal year covers a the period beginning July 1 and ending June 30

As table ED-11 shows, Oconee County’s accommodations taxes increased by almost 9% during the time period; at the same time, the South Carolina Office of Research & Statistics reports that the statewide average increased only 4.2%.

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Agriculture

As in so many other areas of the South, Oconee County's economic history is closely tied to agriculture. In recent decades, however, the area's economy has become much more diverse, with today only a small percentage of area residents relying on farming for their primary source of income. Still, in spite of the fact that many have abandoned agriculture for other pursuits, the overall amount of income generated by farming-related activities in Oconee County remains significant. Table ED-11 shows information regarding farms and farm size in Oconee County.

Table ED-12

Farm Data	
2002	
Number of Farms	878
Land in Farms	78,349 acres
Avg. Size of Farm	89 acres

Source: Clemson University Agriculture Extension

In 2002 (the latest available to date) Oconee County was home to 878 farms, totaling 78,349 acres of land. This equates to an average farm size of approximately 89 acres. The vast majority of Oconee County's agricultural production is focused on livestock (which includes poultry), with field crops accounting for only 5% of the total yield. Table ED-11 illustrates the proportion of agricultural sales in Oconee County for 2005.

Table ED-13

Agricultural Sales in Oconee County: 2005		
	Dollars	Rank in State
Crops	4,209,000	--
Livestock	77,812,000	--
Total	82,021,000	5

Source: Clemson University Agriculture Extension

It is commonly known that Oconee County's poultry industry ranks near the top of the state. Table ED-12 compares the county's 2005 production in livestock and livestock products, egg production and broilers.

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Table ED-14

Livestock Production/Sales in Oconee County: 2005	
Reported Livestock and Livestock Products	Number
Cattle and Calves	18,300
Egg Production	23,800,000
Broilers	25,936,000

Source: Clemson University Agriculture Extension

Table ED-13 lists Oconee County's major cash crops, acres harvested in 2002, yield per acre, total reported production, and the county's ranking within South Carolina.

Table ED-15

Major Oconee County Crops: 2005				
Crop	Acres Harvested	Reported Yield per Acre	Total Production	Rank
Corn for Grain	500	62 bushels	31,200 bushels	26
Hay	12,500	2.1 tons	26,000 tons	13
Soybeans	600	20 bushels	12,000 bushels	28
Winter Wheat	900	52 bushels	46,800 bushels	26
Apples	250	5,755 pounds	1,438,750 pounds	2

Source: Clemson University Agriculture Extension

Perhaps no other crop is more associated with Oconee County than apples, traditionally a major cash crop grown primarily in the county's western foothills. In recent years, however, pressure from imports, rising production costs, and losses from various weather-related events have led many Oconee County producers to curtail or abandon the crop. Still, Oconee County remains ranked near the top of apple-producing counties in South Carolina.

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Timber

Oconee County's abundant forestlands have served as a source of wealth for a large number of local residents throughout the county's history. And though, as with agriculture, the proportion of Oconeeans who make their living in forestry has diminished in recent decades, the industry continues to bring considerable revenue into the area. See Table ED-15 for more information.

Table ED-16

2005 Oconee County Timber Harvests		
Stumpage Value Paid to All Owners	Delivered Value of Timber	Local Value to Harvest and Transport
\$6,384,971	\$10,273,200	\$3,888,229

Source: Clemson University Agriculture Extension

Infrastructure

The development and expansion of infrastructure may very well prove to be one of the greatest challenges to future economic development in Oconee County. Regardless of the difficulty, however, such issues must be dealt with, for without sufficient roads, water, sewer treatment, and other critical infrastructure items, modern businesses cannot survive. And, as operations looking to locate or expand in an area need to be functioning as soon as possible, having immediate access to pre-existing infrastructure is vital. For example, it is unlikely that any major project offering to bring needed jobs into a community will be willing to delay months for the installation of a water line or sewer line, especially as other areas offer everything needed for immediate connection. Therefore, in today's economy, time is an expensive commodity, with successful economic development hinging on planning for future development and having critical infrastructure in place, ready to serve businesses when they need it.

Master Plan

Oconee County is currently in the process of completing an Infrastructure Master Plan that will chart a course to greater economic prosperity in coming years. Drafted by Goldie & Associates under the direction of County Council, the plan provides various proposals for developing key growth regions of the county. Chief among these areas is the I-85 corridor in southern Oconee County, an area that, with the proper planning and investment by the local government, will provide tremendous benefits to the entire county. With the installation of adequate wastewater treatment capacity and water supplies, the area is expected to become home to a number of industrial and business operations, enhancing the county's tax base and providing high-quality employment opportunities for generations to come.

Industrial Parks

The identification of prime industrial property is a vital component of planning for future economic development. Until it is known what areas have the greatest potential for meeting the needs of businesses, crucial infrastructure cannot be put in place to attract investors. And given that most businesses scouting for potential locations are looking for sites that offer quick start-up

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times, the best tool for attracting new investment is an industrial park. To date, Oconee County has developed only one such property, the Oconee County Commerce Center, located near the intersection of Highways S.C. 11 and U.S. 123. Although a relatively small project, the short time spent in developing it greatly expanded the county's attractiveness to potential investors. Also, the Commerce Center provided county leaders invaluable experience, for future parks in areas like the I-85 corridor (ideally much larger projects that encompass from 250-500 acres) will be a key part of developing Oconee County's full economic potential.

The cost of not having sufficient infrastructure serving prime industrial properties can be easily seen in lost opportunities. According to the Oconee County Economic Development Commission, in fiscal year 2003-2004 alone, Oconee County was unable to compete for three major businesses looking to locate in the region due to insufficient water supply and sewer treatment in the I-85 area. In total, these projects offered over \$440 million in investment, and would have created approximately 1,100 jobs.

Airport

The Oconee County Airport, owned and operated by the county, is a tremendous asset in both serving existing businesses, and recruiting new investment dollars. In fact, a series of upgrades in recent years has placed it into the top ranks of similar operations in the region. Still, efforts are currently underway to further expand on this success, including expanding the runway to 5,000 feet to accommodate larger business jets, a modern aircraft instrument landing system, and additional hanger space. These improvements are expected to produce a number of results, including the possible development of a nearby world-class business park, and joint ventures between the county and nearby Clemson University.

Water

Oconee County's future success in economic development is directly tied to the guarantee of an adequate water supply. Currently, there are 5 major water suppliers in Oconee County, including the municipalities of Salem, Seneca, Walhalla, Westminster; and the Pioneer Rural Water District. In addition, there are a number of smaller suppliers that primarily serve individual communities scattered across the county. Still, a number of areas in Oconee County remain reliant on personal wells, which greatly restricts the number of suitable areas for industrial development. Therefore, expansion of a properly planned water supply system is a issue in planning for future economic development.

Sewer System

Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority's existing wastewater collection, transportation, and treatment system is primarily focused on serving the areas in and near the towns of Seneca, Walhalla, and Westminster. As a result, many areas of the county offer little in the way of attractive sites for businesses dependent on sewer. The I-85 area of southern Oconee County, for example, in spite of having a number of sites with easy access to the transportation artery, lacks access to a sewer system. Other areas, as well, are similarly restricted, making the availability of wastewater facilities one of the main priorities in Oconee County's near-term economic development efforts.

Transportation

As Oconee County's road system has long been able to provide easy access to most areas of the county, the main focus of local roadwork is on maintenance of the existing routes. Given the

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current rate of population growth and development, however, this will likely have to change in the near future, for main thoroughfares are already becoming seriously overtaxed during peak periods. Such is the case of the U.S. 76/123 corridor, which in recent years has become the primary transportation artery for a large portion of the area's development. Other areas, as well, are either currently experiencing the side effects of development, or will soon be. Among these are:

S.C. 183- from Walhalla to the S.C. 130 intersection

U.S. 76- from Westminster to the Georgia state line

Sheep Farm Road- from U.S. 76/123 to S.C. 28

S.C. 130- from S.C. 28/U.S. 76/123 to S.C. 183

S.C. 28- from Walhalla north to the Georgia state line

Old Clemson Highway- from U.S. 76/123 to S.C. 130

Of course, it should be noted that many of the roads are owned and maintained by the State of South Carolina, leaving Oconee County with only limited input in the way that they improved. Still, counties are able to influence the state's prioritization of projects, particularly if such projects impact adopted development plans. Therefore, though the state may have the final say in the manner in which the construction and maintenance of its roads, plans for expanding Oconee County's economic prosperity should include consideration of all road-related issues.

Solid Waste

Oconee County currently lacks a municipal landfill to handle the solid waste produced within the county; instead, it is disposed of in a Homer, Georgia facility, a fact that worries a number of county leaders. However, the county does have a current construction and demolition landfill with an expected life of 20-25 years with an additional area to expand on an older landfill that could add an estimated 10 more years of life. As the cost of transporting the waste out of the county will certainly rise in coming years, dealing with solid waste is likely to be a growing challenge to future economic development. Still, as state rules prevent the establishment of a new landfill within the county, there are currently few options. However, given that disposal of solid waste is the subject of much research across the world, the future is likely to bring a number of new technologies that will not only enable Oconee County to dispose of its own solid waste, but also possibly even profit from it. For now, however, it is an issue that must not be forgotten when planning for Oconee County's future.

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Analysis

As the preceding paragraphs have shown, Oconee County possesses the necessary assets to insure a very prosperous economic future. Its workforce has proven itself to be bright, hardworking, and able to meet the requirements of a wide variety of businesses; any existing or developing industry should have little difficulty in meeting its labor needs in the county. And, with the support of the region's world-class educational and technical training system, virtually any type of operation should be able to choose from an large pool of well-qualified employees. Already, the county is home to a diversified business base, evidencing the presence of a supportive environment for operations looking to locate in the region. There is little doubt, therefore, that Oconee County has many of the basic tools in place to insure its future economic prosperity. Still, there are some challenges that will have to be overcome before the county's economic potential can be achieved.

There is no doubt that the effort to expand and develop the infrastructure necessary to insure continued prosperity in Oconee County will require a tremendous effort. And, given existing political realities, this will only be accomplished with the cooperation of a number of entities; chief among these, of course, are the area municipalities. Too often in the past, infrastructure projects have been isolated efforts, typically a single party upgrading their individual system with little or no thought given to the impact on the rest of the county. Such attitudes, however, must become a thing of the past if the county is to succeed in an ever-changing modern economy. Today, the cost of development necessitates the sharing of burdens whenever possible, in the end not only both reducing redundancy of effort and the price paid by individual partners, but also magnifying the end results far beyond what could have been achieved singly. It is imperative, therefore, for all Oconee County governmental entities to look beyond their own immediate interests and cooperate with others around them.

Of all of the potential challenges to Oconee County's future economic prosperity, perhaps the greatest will prove to be the ability of its leaders to identify, evaluate, and plan for every eventuality that may impact the growth or decay of the county. Such planning should guide all aspects of economic development- land use, infrastructure, labor force, relationships with municipalities and other governmental entities. Perhaps most critically, adopted plans should be adhered to, even when faced with options that may seem to be more politically expedient. The establishment and maintenance of a successful economic development program involves focusing the efforts of all aspects of county government on the goal; and as such, each action taken by local leaders impacts the progress made, either positively or negatively. There are no isolated decisions. Yet, with the proper commitment in place, all other hurdles become much smaller obstacles. The power to insure Oconee County's future success in economic development therefore lies within its grasp- provided sufficient focus and back-bone is found to do the job.

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Economic Development Objectives for the Future

1. **Complete and adopt the Infrastructure Master Plan currently being developed by County Council.**
 - **Completed but never adopted.**
2. **Identify, secure and develop additional property for county-owned industrial park(s) in prime industrial areas.**
 - **The second park area was identified and purchased. The Golden Corner Commerce Park is a SC Certified Industrial Site and a waste water treatment facility is in the permitting stage; assuming approval of the plant, in mid-2009 the construction could be completed by late 2010.**
3. **Continue upgrades to the Oconee County Airport, including expansion of the runway length to 5000 feet, installation of modern aircraft instrument landing system, and construction of additional hanger space.**

Strategies	Timeframe
Complete Expansion of Runway Length to 5000 ft	2010
Install Modern Instrument Landing System	2011
Construct Additional Hanger Space as Needed	Ongoing
Utilize Capital Improvements Plan to Continue to Upgrade Facility as Allowed by FAA, SC and County Budgets	Ongoing

4. **Improve communication and cooperation between county government and local municipalities; work to develop coordinated 5 and 10-Year capital improvement plans.**
5. **Work to guarantee adequate water treatment and distribution systems for present and future economic development in Oconee County. This effort may include:**
 - **Creating a partnership with the municipal water providers and the Pioneer Rural Water District to develop a mechanism that would allow the extension of services into unincorporated areas of the county and the collection of water revenues from the users in these areas.**
 - **Coordinating efforts to extend water service to the I-85 corridor to increase economic development potential for the corridor and the total county.**
 - **Planning for the extension of water services to additional areas of the county, such as the US Highway 123 and SC Highway 28 corridors.**
 - **Identification and establishment of revenue sources such as special tax districts and local option sales taxes to fund water system extension .**

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- **Request municipalities inventory the current conditions of their water infrastructure systems to accommodate residential, commercial and industrial growth and offer solutions to correct challenges as well as define future needs.**
- **Encourage water providers to coordinate their efforts with other utility providers in planning for future growth for Oconee County.**

6. Improve and expand wastewater treatment within the county. This effort may include:

Strategy	Timeframe
Establishing partnership(s) with the municipal sewer system providers and the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority to develop a plan to extend service into unincorporated areas of the county.	2009
Establishing partnership(s) with the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority and the municipal sewer providers to coordinate efforts to provide sewer to the I-85 corridor within 10 years; included in this effort will be the construction of a wastewater treatment facility capable of expansion to serve both present and future needs of the surrounding region, including the South Carolina Welcome Center area, Oconee County Exits 1-4, and areas in Anderson County that may be the focus of projects developed jointly by Oconee and Anderson Counties.	2009
Planning the extension of sewer service to additional areas of the Highways U.S. 123, SC 28, and the Oconee County Airport to encourage development of these areas.	2009
Establishing partnership(s) with local, regional, state, and federal agencies to find funding sources for wastewater treatment needs. This effort may include the establishment of revenue sources such as special tax districts and local option sales taxes.	Ongoing

7. Work to establish plans to meet the transportation needs of Oconee County for the next 30 Years.

Strategies	Timeframe
These plans should inventory all roads and bridges in the county;	2006
Identify potential high-growth areas and the best approach to serving them;	Ongoing
Examine the possibility of a southern bypass of Seneca;	2012
Develop methods of encouraging more travel through Oconee County on the route from Atlanta, Ga. to Ashville, N.C.	Ongoing

8. Upgrade solid waste services in key industrial areas of Oconee County. This effort may include working to establish a future regional landfill; the development of a solid waste research facility at a regional landfill; and identifying and constructing additional construction and demolition landfill sites within the county.

9. Work to develop a planning process focused on establishing an efficient, equitable, and mutually compatible distribution of land uses that supports economic development while providing for future changes. This efforts may include:

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- **Continued support of a comprehensive planning process that accurately inventories and analyzes existing county conditions.**
- **Consideration of a countywide zoning process that includes public education and opportunities for a wide range of public input.**

10. Expand efforts to increase tourism revenues. This effort may include:

Strategies	Time Frame
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with state and federal agencies to access additional grant funding as available. 	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and hosting regionally and nationally promoted sporting and recreational events. 	2010-12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and support local festivals, entertainment events, and other activities that attract tourists to the county. 	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Southern Appalachian Farmstead Project 	Approval in process

11. Work to renew and expand local agribusiness opportunities. These efforts may include:

- **Working with state and federal agencies to attract agribusiness-related grants and other revenue sources.**
- **Supporting efforts to establish pilot-programs related to new agricultural methods, technologies, and products.**
- **Providing appropriate assistance to efforts to expand non-traditional and specialty agribusiness opportunities.**