



Economic Development Strategic Plan  
for  
Martin County

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Williamston, Robersonville, Hamilton

Funded by



Martin County Committee of 100

Developed by



September 2011

## Executive Summary

The mission of the Economic Development Strategic Economic Development Plan for Martin County including Williamston, Robersonville, and Hamilton is to “outline a path to enhance Martin County’s position as a regional hub for business and tourism.” This mission supports the overall vision of Martin County as a “Regional Hub for Business and Tourism.” Led by the Town of Williamston, this strategic plan is a guide for Martin County’s economic future – it sets a course.



Sanford Holshouser Economic Development Consulting (Sanford Holshouser) was engaged by the Town of Williamston, through a Golden LEAF grant, to create an economic development strategic plan that was broader than the town limits. Understanding that economic development is a team sport, Williamston engaged Martin County EDC, Martin Community College, and the Towns of Robersonville and Hamilton. Strategy development for Robersonville and Hamilton were supported through grants from ElectriCities of N.C., Inc. Each organization is commended for its role in providing input to develop this economic development strategy.

This study includes a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) Analysis, an economic and demographic profile, a retail leakage review, and recommendations for the economic development program. The SWOT information was gathered from local leaders through interviews, community meetings, online survey, and from economic development allies outside the County. More than 100 Martin County citizens and external allies participated.

The SWOT reveals that the area’s greatest assets are location, Senator Bob Martin Eastern Agricultural Center, transportation network, and Martin Community College. Challenges cited include declining population, low education attainment, insufficient workforce skills, lack of amenities, and underdeveloped tourism assets. Martin County has created many opportunities in economic development. Local leaders would like to capitalize on the Roanoke River, tourism, downtown redevelopment, and business parks. Several of the threats identified are common to most rural counties, such as aging population, loss of young professionals, and maintaining natural resources.

The consulting team collaborated on recommendations to enhance the economic development efforts of the towns and County. The recommendations are founded on input from local leaders, quantitative and qualitative research, best practices in economic development, and the consulting team’s experience in economic development. Sanford Holshouser suggests an in-depth review of the recommendations section to fully understand the scope and context of the bulleted listing.

## Martin County Strategic Plan Recommendations Summary

### Product Development

- Areas identified in each town for commercial and industrial development
- Development recommendations
- Multi-jurisdictional park
- Business recruitment

### Martin County Target Industry Sectors

- Wood and forestry products
- Food
- Advanced manufacturing
- Green energy
- Value added agriculture
- Heritage tourism

### Marketing

- Branding Hamilton and Robersonville and Williamston reviewing its brand
- Community profiles
- Website updates
- Internal marketing & communications

### Business Retention and Expansion

- Martin EDC BRE Program
- Municipal support of existing business
- Communication with existing business

### Commercial & Retail Development

- Real estate information
- Marketing briefs on sites and buildings
- Market data

### Small Business Development – Williamston Opportunities

- Work with MCC Small Business Center on these opportunities:
  - Expand Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers
  - Expand Furniture & Home Furnishings Store
  - Expand Electronics & Appliance Store
  - Expand Clothing Store
  - Expand General Merchandise Store

### Small Business Development – Robersonville Opportunities

- Promote new development at the intersection of US 64/NC 903 to developers of fast-food, convenience store, small commercial center
- Work with Electricities Retail Recruitment Program and MCC Small Business Center on these opportunities:
  - Furniture & Home Furnishings
  - Limited-Service Eating Places
  - Expand Building Materials, Garden Equipment & Supply Stores

### Small Business Development – Hamilton Opportunities

- Work with ElectriCities Retail Recruitment Program and MCC Small Business Center on these opportunities:
  - Grocery or General Stores
  - Food Services & Drinking Places
  - Expand Building Materials, Garden Equipment & Supply Stores
- Businesses supporting river recreation

### Services to Regional Market

- Automotive dealers, parts, accessories, and tire stores
- Electronics and appliance stores
- Lawn and garden equipment and suppliers stores
- Health care services provided from regional centers

### Tourism

- One-room school in Williamston
- East Carolina Motor Speedway
- Historic district designation
- Roanoke River
- Deadwood
- Bear Grass
- Bob Martin Center
- Amenity development

### Workforce Development

- MCC training programs
- Agriculture-focused high school programs
- Community college scholarship program
- WorkKeys

### Equine Industry Development

- New programs at MCC
- Expansion of BMC
- Hotel and retail recruitment
- Expanding amenities
- Coordinated marketing
- Student housing

### Incentives

- Current policy is effective
- Municipal small business and downtown incentives

### Downtown

- Downtown building inventory
- Incentives for redevelopment

### Gateways

- Hamilton @ Hwy 125
- Robersonville @ US 64
- Williamston US 64 @ exit 514
- Appearance Advisory Committee

### Leadership Development

- Government academy
- Leadership program
- Youth leadership development

### Residential Development

- Market to residential developers
- Residential incentive examples

Sanford Holshouser recommends that the strategic plan be endorsed and fully supported by all town boards, County Board of Commissioners, and ally groups such as the EDC, TDA, Martin Community College, and Chamber of Commerce. Implementation should be led by an expanded Steering Committee. We recommend regular quarterly meetings. For the first year of implementation, Sanford Holshouser recommends the Town of Williamston lead the implementation process since the Town has been the driving force behind the strategic planning project. After the first year, a leadership structure should be developed.

The Steering Committee identified the following as top priorities for implementation:

#### **Product Development**

- Gather information on available sites (short term)
- Explore multi-jurisdictional park (long term)

#### **Retail/Small Bus. Development**

- Develop Community College program on retail business opportunities (short term)

#### **Marketing**

- Branding (mid-term)
- Website updates (short term)

#### **Downtown**

- Develop building inventory (short term)
- Create incentive program (mid-term)

#### **Tourism**

- Create destinations (long term)

#### **Gateway improvement**

- Identification of grants (long term)

Collaboration and partnerships will be the driving force behind Martin County's progress in economic development. Implementation of this economic development strategic action plan will require new and innovative collaborations. Given the resources devoted to the development of this plan, we trust that Martin County leaders will answer this call to action. One Steering Committee member reminded us that a take-away is important at every meeting – what is the take-away from this strategic plan? We believe that it is to get busy. The economic development strategic action plan needs dedicated, hard-working community leaders to make it a reality.

## **Sanford Holshouser Economic Development**

**Consulting** is an innovative and growing economic development consulting firm that provides site selection services, action planning, and unique, sustainable strategies to communities, organizations, and companies. Sanford Holshouser continues the visionary economic development ideas of the firm's founders, former US Senator and North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford (deceased) and former Governor James Holshouser, Jr. who is still active in the firm. The consulting firm is affiliated with Nexsen Pruet law firm, a leader in economic development law and public policy in the Carolinas. Ernie Pearson, a partner in Sanford Holshouser and an attorney with Nexsen Pruet, has been recognized by *Southern Business Magazine* as one of the top economic development attorneys in the 17 Southern states.



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Economic Prosperity.**

### **SITE SELECTION DIVISION**

Sanford Holshouser's Site Selection Division works with corporate clients to site new facilities and expansions, analyze workforce characteristics, negotiate incentives, and work through the many tasks involved in locating a new or expanded facility. We have also represented communities in the site selection process assisting with incentive negotiations and return on investment analysis. Our partners have site selection experience as consultants and as local, regional, and state level economic developers. Having both sets of experience gives us a unique perspective in site selection.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING DIVISION**

Since its founding in 1999, Sanford Holshouser has provided consulting services to more than 80 communities in South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Minnesota. Projects have included strategic planning and action planning for economic development, product development, competitive analysis, site certification, board development, organizational development, and coalition building for EDOs. We have worked for small towns, rural counties, high-tech large cities, and urban regions.

### **PUBLIC POLICY DIVISION**

The firm's Public Policy Division has completed projects such as the NC Motorsports Study which quantified the economic impact of the industry on the state's economy and formed state-level policy recommendations to retain and grow the industry. Sanford Holshouser partnered with UNC-Charlotte Urban Institute on the motorsports project. A similar study was recently completed for North Carolina's equine industry. Commissioned by the NC General Assembly, the equine study was done in partnership with NC State, East Carolina, and Western Carolina Universities.