Boyette

Marion County
2025

Marion COUNTY SOUTH CAROLINA | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Boyette Strategic Advisors (Boyette) team would like to thank all who participated in the development of the Marion County 2025 Plan. A special thank you to the Marion County Economic Development Commission (Marion County EDC) members and staff, the Core Team, the Steering Committee, and all participants who provided their insight, expertise and guidance throughout this process. The Core Team is listed below and the Steering Committee members on the next page.

CORE TEAM

- Luke Gasque, Economic Development Commission
- John Humler, Marion County Progress
- Tim Harper, Marion County

- Pete Mazzaroni, Marion County Healthcare Foundation
- Julie Norman, Marion County EDC
- Ken Werner, Marion County Progress

STEERING COMMITTEE

- John Q. Atkinson, Jr., Marion County Council
- Bishop Michael Blue, The Door of Hope Christian Church
- James Chavez, SC Power Team
- Allen Floyd, Marion County Council
- Luke Gasque, Economic Development Commission(Vice Chairman)
- Bradley George, The George Agency
- Dianne Herrington, Pee Dee Workforce Investment Board
- Tim Harper, Marion County
- John Humler, Marion County Progress (Chairman)
- Hillary Johnson, Marion County EDC

- Pete Mazzaroni, Marion County Progress
- Jeff McKay, North Eastern Strategic Alliance
- Maceo Nance, SC Department of Commerce
- Julie Norman, Marion County EDC
- Stephanie Rizzo, Historic Marion Revitalization Association
- Michele Rogers, Mullins Chamber of Commerce
- Elista Smith, Marion County Council
- Rob Squicciarini, Mobile Fleet, Inc.
- Lonnie Thompson, SOPAKCO
- Ken Werner, Marion County Progress
- Edsel Williams, EDC (Chairman)

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INTRODUCTION

Marion County 2025 is a five-year economic development strategic plan for the county meant to result in the creation of new jobs and investment. Marion County has already been very successful in recent years from an economic development perspective. This success must be applauded by the community and economic development efforts must continue to receive focus and support by county and city leadership, as well as by the community at large.

This plan was developed during a difficult time in U.S. history, a global pandemic. However, Marion County stakeholders participated in the process through either carefully planned in-person meetings, Zoom interviews and group discussions, as well as online surveys. Participants included the members of the Core Team and Steering Committee, previously mentioned, other members of the Marion County Economic Development Commission (EDC), city and county leadership, legislative leadership, utility partners, representatives from the public schools, faith-based community, major employers, small business, and other partners such as the area Chambers of Commerce, Historic Marion Revitalization Association and many others. Other representatives of Marion County Progress and Millennial/GenZ audiences were engaged separately by online surveys. Marion County 2025 was developed with the input and assistance of a diverse audience in the county.

The Marion County 2025 plan includes four sector focuses and five strategic focuses and tactics meant to ensure the county can successfully, recruit, attract and retain the types of business and industry it wants and needs, and that the amenities and other attributes needed to support businesses and residents are in place. Note that a **Communications Plan** was delivered separately from the Marion County 2025 Plan.

Marion County 2025 is built around the idea that there is *"one Marion County,"* with everyone working together and supporting the ultimate goal of providing future opportunities to its residents.

Target Sectors

OVERVIEW

In order to identify the targeted business sectors that present the best opportunity for Marion County, Boyette completed quantitative and qualitative research that included reviewing the existing targets of the South Carolina Department of Commerce (SCDOC), the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA), the SC Power Team, and other surrounding counties, as well as employment, past and projected growth and wages, among other factors of those targets and others. Boyette also reviewed Marion County's existing industry base and recent new project locations/expansions and considered the business base in nearby markets.

AGRIBUSINESS ➤ **AUTOMOTIVE SUPPLIERS** ➤ **DISTRIBUTION/ WAREHOUSING** ➤ **MANUFACTURING**

With its strong history in agriculture, a focus on agribusiness makes perfect sense with areas of focus including more traditional ones like food and beverage manufacturing and packaging, as well as less traditional ones such as hemp processing. Along with the State of South Carolina and the NESA region, Marion County has already had success with the automotive supplier industry. With the close proximity to the Inland Port Dillion, distribution/logistics presents a significant opportunity, especially with cold storage, which may also tie in with food manufacturing. While there are several areas of manufacturing that have been highlighted, having a broader focus on manufacturing should also continue. Note that these are not the only business sectors in which Marion County will have success but are the top opportunities to focus its efforts at this time.

AGRIBUSINESS

Agribusiness encompasses farming and farming-related commercial activities and includes all aspects of food production. It involves all steps required to send an agricultural good to market including production, processing and distribution.

MARION COUNTY, S.C.

RAW MATERIALS

200

Marion County is home to nearly 200 farms

Top crops in acreage include:

- Soybeans
- Corn
- Peanuts
- Forage (hay/haylage)
- Cotton

Livestock include:

- Broilers and other meat-type chickens
- Cattle and calves
- Goats
- Hogs and pigs

FOCUSES

Food and Beverage Manufacturing
Includes companies that transform livestock and other agricultural products for intermediate or final consumption, as well as companies manufacturing beverages

Food Packaging
Containers, packaging and packaging materials utilized for processed and raw food, as well as beverages

Hemp Processing
Industrial hemp used globally to produce a variety of industrial and consumer products such as rope, clothes, food, paper, textiles, plastics, insulation, supplements, oils, cosmetics and biofuels

PROXIMITY TO MARKETS

- S.C. located **halfway between Miami and New York**
- **15 minutes east of Florence**, and less than two hours to capital city of **Columbia** via Interstate 20
- **Intersection of I-95 and I-20** within 20-minute drive time
- **Proposed Interstate 73** will go directly through county connecting Myrtle Beach with Detroit, Michigan
- Marion within a **short distance** of:
    - Charleston, S.C. – 101 miles
    - Charlotte, N.C. – 109 miles
    - Savannah, GA – 175 miles
    - Greenville, S.C. – 177 miles
    - Atlanta, GA – 288 miles

AGRIBUSINESS REGIONAL BASE

Marion County

Marion County

Dillon County

Florence & Horry Counties

Florence County

Florence County

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to robust transportation infrastructure as follows:

Highways
- Highways 41, 76 (4-lane), 301, 378, 501 (4-lane) and 576 (4-lane)
- Close proximity to Interstate 95 and Interstate 20

Air Service
- Marion County Airport
- Commercial airports within 2.5 hours of county:
    - Myrtle Beach International Airport – 45 minutes
    - Columbia Metropolitan Airport – 2 hours
    - Charleston International Airport – 2 hours
    - Charlotte Douglas International Airport – 2.5 hours

Rail Service
- CSX maintains an intermodal yard in nearby Florence
- RJ Corman Railroad has rail lines in county

Port
- **Inland Port Dillon** 15 minutes from Marion
- Four deep water ports within two to four hours:
    - Port of Charleston – 2 hours
    - Port of Georgetown – 1.5 hours
    - Port of Wilmington – 1.5 hours
    - Port of Savannah – 4 hours

AGRIBUSINESS

AVAILABLE AND AFFORDABLE WORKFORCE WITH MANUFACTURING SKILLS

- Labor force of nearly **255,000** within 45-minute drive time and over **372,00**0 within 60-minute drive time
- Competitive average wages of **$43,361** in the sector
- Regional labor force of more than **12,200** in sector with **16% growth** over past five years (2014 – 2019)
- **Two technical colleges** within 30 miles that offer manufacturing skills training
- **Francis Marion University**
  - Industrial and mechanical engineering programs
- **Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology**
  - Provides support needed by area manufacturers to train a highly skilled workforce
  - Offers an Advanced Manufacturing Center, 3-D/Virtual Reality Center and National Robotics Center
- **ManuFirst SC**
  - A 62-hour program that provides an accelerated pathway into entry level industry careers for individuals with no previous manufacturing experience
- **Work-Ready Community**

PRODUCT (REAL ESTATE)

- 13 industrial sites and four industrial buildings available
- Sites range in size from 11.89 to **2,600 acres**
- Building range from 25,000 to **210,000 square feet**
- One **spec building** remaining and in planning stage for new spec building
- **Marion County Industrial Park** has 200 plus acres remaining, including a **shovel-ready site certified for food manufacturing**
- Tobacco farming land prevalent, which is conducive to growing hemp

FOOD & BEVERAGE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Marion County Cooperative Extension Office
- Part of the Clemson University's College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences
- Provides expertise in agribusiness, agronomy, food safety and nutrition, horticulture, livestock and forages, forestry and wildlife resources, water resources, and 4-H and youth development

Clemson Pee Dee Research and Education Center (PDREC)
- One of six Research and Education Centers (RECs) in state located in nearby Florence
- Focused on agricultural and natural resources research to support state's agribusiness and forestry economies
- Home to Clemson's Advanced Plant Technology Program

UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Water Supply
- MARCO Rural Water Supply has excess capacity

Electricity Supply and Reliability
- Duke/Progress Energy and Pee Dee Electric Cooperative provide electricity in county
- Industrial power rates 12% lower than national average

Wastewater Treatment Capacity
- Two wastewater treatment facilities with excess capacity provided by Grand Strand Water & Sewer Authority

Natural Gas Supply
- Dominion Energy can provide natural gas

COST OF DOING BUSINESS

State of South Carolina
- #3 on *Area Development* magazine's 2020 Best States for Business list
- #4 for corporate tax rates on *Tax Foundation* 2020 State Business Tax Climate Index
- #9 *Chief Executive* magazine's 2020 Best States for Business
- South Carolina is a right to work state

Competitive Incentive Programs
- Corporate Income Tax Credits
- Sales Tax Exemptions
  - Machinery and Equipment
  - Materials
  - Industrial Electricity and Other Fuels
- Property Tax Exemptions

Other Discretionary Incentives
- **Tax Credit for Increases in Purchases of South Carolina Agricultural Products**
- Economic Development Set-Aside Program
- Governor's Closing Fund
- Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF)
- Job Development Credits

Training
- readySC
- SC Works
- Apprenticeship Carolina Program
- Incumbent Worker Training

Local
- Reduced land costs
- Fee-in-lieu of Property Taxes (FILOT)
- Special Source Revenue Credit (SSRC)

CONTACT US

For more information and assistance, please contact Julie Norman, Marion County Economic Development Commission Executive Director at jnorman@marionsc.org or at 843-423-8235.

https://marioncountysc.com/

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AUTOMOTIVE SUPPLIERS

Automotive suppliers include companies engaged in manufacturing of parts utilized in an automobile such as engines and related parts, electrical and electronic equipment, steering and suspension components, brake systems, transmission and power train parts, seating and interior trip, metal stampings and other motor vehicle parts and accessories.

MARION COUNTY, S.C.

AVAILABLE WORKFORCE

372,000
Labor force within 60-minute drive time

330+
Automotive jobs in Marion County (2020)

29%
Automotive sector growth over past 5 years (2014-2019)

$65,317
Marion County automotive sector wages
12% less than state average

FOCUSES

Tier 1 Automotive Suppliers *Provide parts directly to Automotive Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs)*	**Tier 2 Automotive Suppliers** *Provide parts to Tier 1 suppliers and others, rather than directly to OEMs*	**Tier 3 Automotive Suppliers** *Suppliers of raw, or close-to-raw materials like metal or plastics to all levels of suppliers and others*	**Aftermarket Suppliers** *Automotive industries after sale market that includes companies in manufacturing, re-manufacturing, distribution, retailing and installation of replacement vehicle parts, equipment, service repair and automotive accessories*

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  - Charlotte, N.C. – 109 miles
  - Savannah, GA – 175 miles
  - Greenville, S.C. – 177 miles
  - Atlanta, GA – 288 miles
- S.C.. home to **BMW, Volvo and Mercedes-Benz Vans**
- **Honda** makes ATVs in nearby Florence

AUTOMOTIVE BASE
(Marion County)

Other major automotive companies that have a presence in South Carolina include BMW, Continental, Michelin, & Volvo

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to robust transportation infrastructure as follows:

Highways
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Air Service
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- CSX maintains an intermodal yard in nearby Florence
- RJ Corman Railroad has rail lines in county

Port
- **Inland Port Dillon** 15 minutes from Marion
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AUTOMOTIVE SUPPLIERS

HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- **Two technical colleges within 30 miles** that offer programs to support manufacturers:
  - Florence-Darlington Technical College
    - Degree programs in Industrial Maintenance, Machine Tool and Mechanical Engineering Technology
  - Horry-Georgetown Technical College
    - Advanced Manufacturing and Industrial Technologies Program
    - Engineering Technology Program
    - Advanced Manufacturing Center
- **Two colleges/universities within 45 miles** that offer programs to support manufacturers:
  - Francis Marion University (Florence)
    - Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering
    - Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering
  - Coastal Carolina University (Conway)
    - Engineering Science Degree
- Marion County Academy for Careers & Technology (ACT)
  - Works to train high school students and offers training services to business and industry
  - Includes a Mechatronics program
- Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SIMT)
  - Provides support needed by area manufacturers to train a highly skilled workforce
  - Offers Advanced Manufacturing Center, 3-D/Virtual Reality Center and National Robotics Center
- **ManuFirst SC**
  - A 62-hour program that provides an accelerated pathway into entry level industry careers for individuals with no previous manufacturing experience
- Work Ready Community

PRODUCT (REAL ESTATE)

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- One **spec building** remaining and in planning stage for new spec building
- **Marion County Industrial Park** has 200 plus acres remaining

UTILITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Electricity Supply and Reliability
- Duke/Progress Energy and Pee Dee Electric Cooperative provide electricity in county
- Industrial power rates 12% lower than national average

COST OF DOING BUSINESS

State of South Carolina
- #3 on *Area Development* magazine's 2020 Best States for Business list
- #4 for corporate tax rates on Tax Foundation 2020 State Business Tax Climate Index
- #9 Chief Executive magazine's 2020 Best States for Business
- South Carolina is a right to work state

Competitive Incentive Programs
- Corporate Income Tax Credits
- Sales Tax Exemptions
  - Machinery and Equipment
  - Materials
  - Industrial Electricity and Other Fuels
- Property Tax Exemptions

Other Discretionary Incentives
- Economic Development Set-Aside Program
- Governor's Closing Fund
- Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF)
- Job Development Credits

Training
- readySC
- SCWorks
- Apprenticeship Carolina Program
- Incumbent Worker Training

Local
- Reduced land costs
- Fee-in-lieu of Property Taxes (FILOT)
- Special Source Revenue Credit (SSRC)

CONTACT US

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DISTRIBUTION/WAREHOUSING

Companies primarily engaged in operating warehousing and storage facilities for general merchandise, refrigerated goods, and other warehouse products. Provide facilities to store goods but do not sell goods they handle. May provide logistics services related to the distribution of goods, which can include labeling, breaking bulk, inventory control and management, light assembly, order entry and fulfillment, packaging, pick and pack, price marking and ticketing, and transportation arrangement.

MARION COUNTY, S.C.

FOCUSES

Distribution Centers	**Warehouses**	**Cold Storage**
Stores products for a short-time period but also offers value-added services like product mixing, order fulfillment, cross docking, packaging and other	*Used for storing products for longer periods of time with primary role to store products efficiently*	*Warehouse used to store fresh and/or frozen perishable fruits or vegetables, meat, seafood, dairy products or other at a desired temperature to maintain product quality*

WORKFORCE

500+
Distribution/warehousing jobs in Marion County (2020)

121%
Distribution/warehousing sector growth over past 5 years (2014-2019)

14%
Distribution/warehousing sector projected growth over next 5 years (2020-2025)

$48,365
Marion County distribution/warehousing sector wages
19% less than state average

MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to robust transportation infrastructure as follows:

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Air Service
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REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION/WAREHOUSING BASE

Coca-Cola
Marion County

MaxWood
Marion County

DMA Sales, LLC
Marion County

HARBOR FREIGHT
QUALITY TOOLS AT RIDICULOUSLY LOW PRICES
Dillon County

QVC
Florence County

DISTRIBUTION/WAREHOUSING

AVAILABLE WORKFORCE AND TRAINING

Labor Force
- Labor force of nearly **255,000 within 45-minute drive time** and **over 372,000 within a 60-minute drive time** in county

Sector Employment
- North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA) region employs **over 9,200** in distribution/warehousing sector with **37.5 percent growth** over past five years (2014 – 2019) and **10.2 percent growth projected** over next five years (2020 – 2025)
  - *NESA region includes counties of: Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Marion, Marlboro, and Williamsburg*
- South Carolina employs **63,672** in distribution/warehousing sector with **23 percent growth** over past five years (2014 – 2019) and **6 percent growth projected** over next five years (2020 – 2025)

Higher Education and Training
- Three colleges/universities within 30 to 45 minutes have **supply chain management or transportation-related programs**:
  - Francis Marion University (Florence)
    - **Supply Chain Management** – Undergraduate Major
  - Coastal Carolina University (Conway)
    - Concentration in **Operations and Supply Chain Management** through Management Major in Business School
  - Florence-Darlington Technical College
    - Largest **Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program** in S.C. technical college system
    - **Diesel Technology** Program
- Marion County Academy for Careers & Technology (ACT)
  - Works to train high school students and offers training services to business and industry
- Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SIMT)
  - Located on campus of Florence-Darlington Technical College
  - Provides support needed by area manufacturers to train a highly skilled workforce
  - Offers Advanced Manufacturing Center, 3-D/Virtual Reality Center and National Robotics Center
- Work Ready Community

PRODUCT (REAL ESTATE)

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Competitive Incentive Programs
- Corporate Income Tax Credits
- Sales Tax Exemptions
  - **Material handling equipment for manufacturing or distribution projects investing $35 million or more**
  - **Packaging materials**
- Property Tax Exemptions

Other Discretionary Incentives
- Economic Development Set-Aside Program
- Governor's Closing Fund
- Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF)
- Job Development Credits

Training
- readySC
- SCWorks
- Apprenticeship Carolina Program
- Incumbent Worker Training

Local
- Reduced land costs
- Fee-in-lieu of Property Taxes (FILOT)
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MANUFACTURING

The manufacturing sector comprises establishments engaged in mechanical, physical, or chemical transformation of materials, substances, or components into new products.

MARION COUNTY, S.C.

WORKFORCE

372,000
Labor force within 60-minute drive time

264,000
Manufacturing jobs in South Carolina (2020)

28,835
Manufacturing jobs in NESA region (2020)

$53,991
Marion County manufacturing sector wages
28% less than state average

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(Marion County)

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HIGHER EDUCATION

MANUFACTURING

OTHER WORKFORCE TRAINING

- **Florence-Darlington Technical College**
  - Offers manufacturing certificate programs in Industrial Maintenance Technology, Machine Tool Technology and Welding
  - Offers **degree programs** in I**ndustrial Maintenance, Machine Tool and Mechanical Engineering Technology**
- **Horry-Georgetown Technical College**
  - Offers an **Advanced Manufacturing and Industrial Technologies Program**
  - Also offers an **Engineering** Technology Program
- **Francis Marion University (Florence)**
  - Bachelor of Science in **Industrial Engineering degree program** is a four-year program
  - Bachelor of Science in **Mechanical Engineering degree program** is a four-year program
- **Coastal Carolina University** (Conway)
  - **Engineering science** offered as an undergraduate engineering degree through **Gupta College of Science**
- **Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SIMT)**
  - Provides support needed by area manufacturers to train a highly skilled workforce
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Water Supply
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Electricity Supply and Reliability
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Wastewater Treatment Capacity
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it's just right!

Strategic Focuses

OVERVIEW

The five strategic focuses for the **Marion County 2025** Plan are focused on ensuring that all identified assets are capitalized on and any challenges identified during this process are addressed. These strategic focuses provide Marion County with an actionable guide to ensure that it continues to be competitive from an economic development perspective. The strategic focuses are ordered somewhat in importance although there will be a need to cross over among the various tactics. Note that a **Communications Plan** was delivered separately from the Marion County 2025 Plan.

Product and infrastructure are critical as Marion County is beginning to run low on available and marketable sites and buildings that are needed to attract new business and industry. Related to **education and workforce**, ensuring a pipeline of talent is available long-term to meet the needs of existing and new industry is also vital, starting with the public education system and extending to higher education. **Livability** means working to beautify the county, addressing housing challenges, investing in and recruiting needed amenities and focusing on recreational opportunities. **Business recruitment and retention** will always be a critical component of economic development and an important focus of the Marion County EDC. From an **organization/alignment** perspective, the implementation of Marion County 2025 will require the dedication of many partner organizations in the county and ensuring there is the appropriate structure and support for economic development over the next five years will be critical.

STRATEGIC FOCUSES

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE → **EDUCATION & WORKFORCE** → **LIVABILITY** → **BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/ RETENTION** → **ORGANIZATION/ ALIGNMENT**

Product & Infrastructure

Assuring that there is available product, defined as sites and buildings, and that infrastructure that supports new development is in place, will be critical for Marion County's economic development efforts.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

OVERVIEW

A location must have marketable sites and buildings in order to attract new business and industry, as well as to support the expansion of existing industry. The success of Marion County in the past few years can be partially attributed to available product (sites and buildings). In order to continue this trajectory of success, investment must be made in product, as well as any infrastructure needed to support it. This strategic focus is first on the list as it is critical to ensuring that Marion County continues to attract new business and industry now and into the future.

STRATEGIC FOCUSES AND TACTICS

Invest in More Product	Address Infrastructure Challenges
▪ **TACTIC:** Continue the spec building program	▪ **TACTIC:** Continue collaboration with wastewater provider
▪ **TACTIC:** Seek partner funding for needed site infrastructure improvements and spec buildings	▪ **TACTIC:** Continue to explore potential challenges with natural gas availability
▪ **TACTIC:** Complete Palmetto Sites Program for sites in progress and consider other sites in future	▪ **TACTIC:** Work with legislative delegation to ensure I-73 expansion happens
▪ **TACTIC:** Continue to market availability of Opportunity Zones	▪ **TACTIC**: Ensure challenges with broadband are addressed
▪ **TACTIC:** Continue to explore viability of the 2,600-acre Sellers site	▪ **TACTIC:** Work with partners to address other infrastructure issues countywide
	▪ **TACTIC:** Explore new public transportation options

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Invest in More Product

Tactic: Continue the spec building program

Marion County has completed the construction of at least two spec buildings, both in the Marion County Industrial Park, one of which has been sold and another that may be unavailable soon. The Marion County EDC is already exploring the construction of an additional spec building and this should continue to be pursued.   As spec buildings have been a primary area of success for Marion County, the need for spec buildings should be evaluated annually.

Tactic: Seek partner funding for needed site infrastructure improvements and spec buildings

The Marion County EDC has several partners in the state and region that have provided and can provide funding for competitive industrial sites for infrastructure upgrades, land acquisition, water and wastewater upgrades, and general site improvements, as well as speculative building development. The Marion County EDC should continue to work with these partners to seek funding that can assist in paying for new spec buildings and/or for any infrastructure upgrades needed to any existing or proposed sites.   Assistance with the purchase of property should also be explored.
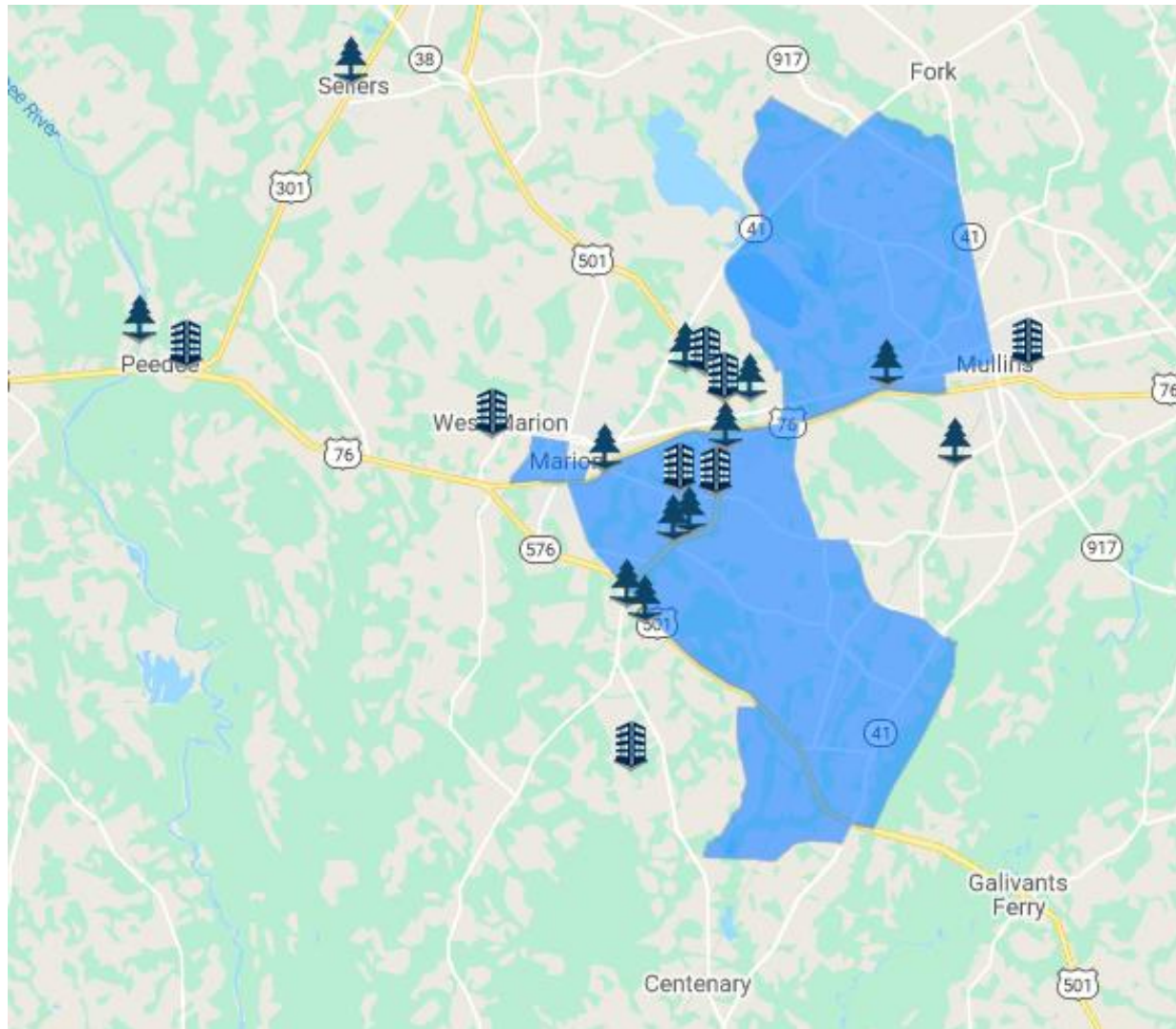
PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Tactic: Complete Palmetto Sites Program for sites in progress and consider other sites in future

Marion County currently has 13 industrial sites of which three are a SC Certified Site through the SCDOC Palmetto Sites program, and one is in the process of completing the process with another completing an update. Below is a list of the 13 industrial sites in Marion County, indicating the ones that have been certified or are in the process of being certified. A map of all sites may be found on the following page.

Sites	Acres	Price	Certified
Sellers Site	2,600	$9,615/acre	In Process
Howard B. Smith Industrial Site	250.00	$5,000 - $20,000/acre	SC Certified Site
Marion County Industrial Park	221.60	$10,000/acre	SC Certified Site
Coleman Site	180.00	$13,000 - $15,000/acre	No
Capps II Industrial Site	168.00	$5,000/acre	SC Certified Site
Wu Site Tracts 1 & 2	53.85	$300,000	No
Ten Mile Industrial Site	51.82	$495,000	No
Wellman Site	45.58	$10,000/acre	No
Manna Site	32.65	$570,000	No
Corner of Bluff St/Hwy 76	32.10	$395,000	No
Jolly Site	31.00	$39,900/acre	No
Foxworth Site	23	$2,000 - $5,000/acre	No
Foster Site	11.89	$249,500	No

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

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PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

The SCDOC Palmetto Sites Program designates sites as a Palmetto Site, indicating it has been vetted by an outside consultant. The process to finalize the designation or recertification of these sites as a Palmetto Site should be completed and other potential sites should be identified that could be future Palmetto Sites. The SCDOC will pay for a significant percentage of the infrastructure improvements needed for the site once the process is complete, and Palmetto Sites are also more prominently featured on the SCDOC website. Continue to pursue the Palmetto Site designation for those in process, maintain it for the ones already certified and consider for other sites in the future.

Some property in Marion County is also located in Duke Energy service territory, so the possibility of continuing to qualify sites under its Site Readiness Program should also be explored, as relevant.

Tactic: Continue to market availability of Opportunity Zones

Opportunity Zones (Ozs) are a new community development program established at the federal level designed to encourage long-term private investments in low-income communities. It provides a federal tax incentive for taxpayers who reinvest unrealized capital gains into "Opportunity Funds," which are specialized vehicles dedicated to investing in low-income areas called "Opportunity Zones." Marion County has a number of designated OZs that should continue to be marketed to potential corporate prospects and developers.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Tactic: Continue to explore viability of the 2,600-acre Sellers site

The Tri-County Gateway Industrial Park in Dillion County is jointly owned by Dillon, Marlboro and Marion counties, and Marion County has been identified as the potential location for the next partnership investment. Marion County is home to a 2,600-acre site with rail and river access (Sellers site) that has been explored as a potential site for the next Tri-County park to be developed.

The Sellers site is currently going through the SCDOC Palmetto Sites program. It has been estimated that it will cost $3.5 million to extend the wastewater to the site. If this site is designated a Palmetto Site, the SCDOC will pay for 75 percent of the costs of improvements and Marion County and the other counties will contribute the rest.

The Marion County EDC needs to continue to push through with the completion of the Palmetto Sites Program and also bring together the other partner counties for further discussion on next steps related to the partnership around the purchase of this site, as well as needed infrastructure investments, to ensure all are on board.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Address Infrastructure Challenges

Tactic: Continue collaboration with wastewater provider

In the report related to the Palmetto Sites Program, for the remaining 200 plus acres at the Marion County Industrial Park, it was indicated that there could be some issue with wastewater capacity long-term. The Marion County EDC must continue to collaborate with the wastewater provider in the county to ensure that long-term capacity needs can be met for this and other future sites and buildings identified.

Tactic: Continue to explore potential challenges with natural gas availability

Dominion Energy is the natural gas provider in the area but there was concern expressed during the stakeholder engagement component of this process that Dominion Energy may not be able to meet future customer natural gas needs. This should be explored further to understand the natural gas available and any limitations so that the Marion County EDC is prepared to respond to any Request for Information or Request for Proposals that inquire as to natural gas availability.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Tactic: Work with legislative delegation to ensure I-73 expansion happens

If it comes to fruition, Interstate 73 would go directly through Marion County connecting Myrtle Beach with Detroit, Michigan. This could be a game changer for Marion County. According to information on the S.C. Department of Transportation website, the last activity related to this proposed interstate was in 2016.

The Marion County EDC should work with its legislative delegation at the state and federal level, NESA and other partners to understand the status of Interstate 73 and what can be done to push it along in the process.

Tactic: Ensure challenges with broadband are addressed

Having access to broadband is critical in today's digital world, and COVID-19 brought this importance even more in the spotlight. According to Broadband Now, 71.3 percent of Marion County residents have broadband coverage compared to 93.9 percent in nearby Florence County and 99.9 percent in nearby Horry County.

In the survey targeted to millennial/GenZ audiences in Marion County launched as part of this process, a question was asked about broadband access/providers. Over 42 percent responded that broadband access/providers were a major or significant barrier to Marion County's current and future economic development success.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Horry Telephone Cooperative (HTC) announced in November 2020 it is now serving parts of Marion County made possible through a $1.5 million grant from the South Carolina Broadband Infrastructure Program, which was funded by the CARES Act. The expansion will support the Gresham and Britton's Neck communities. Work with HTC to determine if there are other parts of the county lacking service that it can support.

Also, in September 2020, state lawmakers passed a bill that would allow electric co-ops to lease out space on existing power poles to broadband providers interested in expanding internet access into communities that need it. It appears the Governor signed this bill (HB3780) on September 29, 2020. This could be a major deal for rural communities like Marion County to improve broadband service countywide. Begin discussions with local broadband providers, as well as the Pee Dee Electric Cooperative, to determine how viable this is as a solution to serve other areas of Marion County that are lacking in service.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Tactic: Work with partners to address other infrastructure issues countywide

The Town of Nichols in Marion County suffered from severe flooding in 2016 and 2018 due to hurricanes. The town has applied for assistance from the state to demolish homes that were abandoned even before the storms and is waiting on the federal government for grants to elevate 32 homes. A study by a hydrology firm found options to avoid future flooding may involve raising the Highway 76 bridge or consider constructing levees but both options are costly and would take time.

Work with Nichols leadership and the state and federal legislative delegation to identify potential state and local funding options for infrastructure to help prevent flooding in the future.

In addition, during the stakeholder engagement process, it was mentioned that the southern part of Marion County is lacking in infrastructure. Continue to identify these and other infrastructure challenges countywide and work with city, county and state partners to address, including seeking additional grants from the S.C. Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA).

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Tactic: Explore new public transportation options

It was mentioned many times during the stakeholder engagement process that there is a need for more public transportation services in Marion County, mainly related to ensuring workers can get to work.

Rural public transportation systems include demand–response public transportation (dial-a-ride), traditional and deviated fixed route services such as shuttles, vanpool, or reimbursement programs. The need for rural public transportation has historically been linked with providing mobility and accessibility to essential employment, goods, and services for older adults, persons with disabilities, low-income persons, and others.

The Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority (PDRTA) already offers a bus route from Marion County to Myrtle Beach. In 1997, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) began contracting with the Regional Councils of Government (COGs) to conduct planning activities for rural transportation improvements. The COGs serve as a liaison between local governments, SCDOT and federal agencies to coordinate transportation priorities, with the rural regions program receiving between $2 million to $7 million in funding per year. The Transportation Alternatives Program provides a source of funds for local governments to access to meet mobility needs. The COGs work with applicants to develop project applications and define project scope.

PRODUCT & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Federal Transportation Authority (FTA) offers funds to states through Section 5311 for providing public transportation to the general public in rural areas with funds being used for project administration, operating and capital. Section 5311(b)(3) provides funding for public transportation related training, technical assistance and research. Section 5339 provides funding for the purchase and rehab of transit assets to ensure transit assets remain in a state of good repair. Section 5311(f) provides funding for Intercity bus projects. Section 5310 makes FTA funding available to states for transporting elderly adults and people with disabilities.

The Marion County EDC should first conduct an analysis working with local major employers to identify the need for employees related to public transportation within Marion County. A resident survey may be another mechanism to help Identify other countywide transportation needs.

The Marion County EDC should then work with the Pee Dee Region COG, which is the liaison to the SCDOT, to further assess the public transportation needs in Marion County, put a plan in place to address and apply for appropriate federal and other funding that may be available through the COG to address the need. The PDRTA should also be engaged to determine if there is any appetite for adding more needed identified routes from, to and within Marion County.

Education & Workforce

Marion County must continuously work with educational partners and others to ensure that the workforce talent needs of existing business and industry and future new company locations can be met.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

OVERVIEW

Being able to attract, develop, and maintain workforce talent is critical for the retention and recruitment of business and industry. It all starts at the public education system and continues through the higher education system and workforce training.

It is also critical that an understanding of the workforce and training needs of existing business/industry and the targeted business sectors be obtained. An understanding of existing programs at the high school level and at each regional institution of higher education is needed to ensure the talent needs of existing industry and the targeted business sectors can be met.

The workforce of today and tomorrow, also known as millennials, and in the future Gen Z, must also be engaged in the hopes they will return to or remain in Marion County.

The strategic priorities below are meant to ensure that Marion County is able to attract, develop and retain the workforce talent it needs now and into the future.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

STRATEGIC FOCUSES AND TACTICS

Focus on Public Education

- **TACTIC:** Consider salary increases for public school teachers in Marion County
- **TACTIC:** Explore viability of consolidation of high schools
- **TACTIC:** Enhance soft skills training in public schools
- **TACTIC:** Explore new programs for Marion County Academy for Careers & Technology (ACT)
- **TACTIC:** Encourage participation in the Youth Apprenticeship Carolina program
- **TACTIC:** Revisit the creation of a Partners in Education Program
- **TACTIC:** Revisit the iMagine Work Job Shadowing Program

Continue to Partner with Regional Higher Educational Institutions

- **TACTIC:** Explore further partnership with Florence-Darlington Technical College
- **TACTIC:** Ensure the Marion County/FDTC Workforce Development Training Center comes to fruition
- **TACTIC:** Encourage local employers to develop apprenticeship programs

Attract New Talent

- **TACTIC:** Create the *Move to Marion* County Program

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Focus on Public Education

Tactic: Consider salary increases for public school teachers in Marion County

To quote a stakeholder engaged during this process, "The school system should be raised to a higher standard." The K-12 education data for Marion County and the State of South Carolina can be seen in the table below. This data is for the 2018-2019 school year which was the most recent data available. As shown, Marion County has a lower graduation rate than the state average, a higher dropout rate, lower ACT composite scores, a much higher percentage of students in poverty, and a much lower average teacher salary. The spend per pupil is actually slightly higher than the state amount, which is good.

	Marion County	South Carolina
Total Enrollment	4,364	778,047
Graduation Rate	78.1%	81.1%
Dropout Rate	2.0%	1.5%
ACT Composite Score	15.5	18.6
Students in Poverty	91.4%	61.7%
Spending Per Pupil	$10,612	$10,513
Average Teacher Salary	$43,787	$49,737

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

The average teacher salary is 12.7 percent lower in Marion County that in the State of South Carolina. This is going to present a major issue for being able to attract and retain quality teachers now and into the future. This problem is further exacerbated when you compare Marion County to some of the surrounding county school districts per the chart below. Marion County has the lowest teacher salary, which must be addressed.

	Marion County School District	Horry County Schools	Dillon County District 3	Dillon County District 4	Florence District 1	Florence District 2	Florence District 3	Florence District 4	Florence District 5
Total Enrollment	4,364	44,000	1,622	4,116	16,102	1,157	3,406	668	1,233
Graduation Rate	78.1%	83.4%	81.5%	84.8%	83.7%	76.3%	72.4%	83.3%	77.9%
Dropout Rate	2.0%	1.4%	1.4%	0.7%	1.2%	0.6%	3.4%	1.5%	2.6%
ACT Composite Score	15.5	19	17.3	15.8	17.3	15.7	15.8	14.6	17.4
Students in Poverty	91.4%	65.7%	71.4%	93.3%	67.9%	71.9%	88.8%	92.6%	69.9%
Spending Per Pupil	$10,612	$10,393	$8,540	$9,066	$8,393	$9,862	$10,662	$10,957	$10,586
Average Teacher Salary	$43,787	$53,796	$46,403	$46,162	$49,193	$48,195	$47,241	$46,618	$49,374

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Explore viability of consolidation of high schools

Marion County consisted of four school districts until 2000. A single school district was formed in April 2012. The district currently consist of two high schools, two middle schools, and five elementary schools, plus one K-8 STEM Academy, the Success Academy at Palmetto Education Center, the Academy for Careers and Technology and Marion County Adult Education.

The fact that the schools were consolidated was a great step in the right direction for Marion County. Today, Marion High School is home to approximately 700 students, while Mullins High School is home to around 400 students, but the Mullins student population has declined by 14 percent in the past five years. In order to further improve the school system and eliminate duplication of resources, the idea of consolidation of the two high schools into a new state of the art high school for the county should be explored. This may also have the positive impact of eliminating some of the competition between the two cities as well that was referenced throughout the stakeholder engagement process.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Enhance soft skills training in public schools

Studies have shown that more than 80 percent of employers struggle to find graduates with soft skills to do their jobs. This was also mentioned many times by employers and others during the stakeholder engagement process.

There is apparently some soft skills training in the public schools but there may be a need for a more structured program. As identified through the benchmark research conducted for this project, the Microburst EmployABILITY Soft Skill program is used to teach soft skills to students at every high school in Lancaster County, South Carolina with teaching modules focused on interpersonal skills, employability skills, conflict resolution, dependability, productivity, and teamwork.

Marion County School District should evaluate and consider this program at the high school level to ensure students have the soft skills needed for future employment.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Explore new programs for Marion County Academy for Careers & Technology (ACT)

ACT is a program of the Marion County School District that is the location for nine high school career pathways and one post-secondary career pathway. The program offers county high school students career path options in areas such as: Auto Collision Repair Technology, Auto Technology, Computer Assisted Drafting and Design, Cosmetology, Culinary Arts Management, Entertainment Technology, Mechatroincs, Nail Technology, or Sports Medicine. ACT also works closely with business and industry to train workers and has a partnership with Florence-Darlington Technical College.

The programs at ACT should be further evaluated to determine that they meet the needs of existing business and industry, as well as the new target sectors. There is already a Mechatronics program, which could support the Automotive Supplier or Manufacturing sector but there may be a need for more specific automotive manufacturing courses or logistics and supply chain management to support the distribution/logistics sector.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Encourage participation in the Youth Apprenticeship Carolina program

The South Carolina Youth Apprenticeship program combines high school curriculum and career and technology training with critical on-the-job training performed at a local business. Students can earn a paycheck through part-time work while earning a national credential in a high-demand occupations. This program helps to build a workforce pipeline for the future for local businesses while providing high school students with potential job opportunities.

In addition, a company registering a Youth Apprenticeship program in cooperation with the local school district also makes the company eligible to receive a $1,000 per apprentice South Carolina state income tax credit.

This program should be introduced to all local larger manufacturing and distribution employers and the Marion County EDC should provide connections with the Marion County School District and contacts at the South Carolina Youth Apprenticeship Program.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Revisit the creation of a Partners in Education Program

The Greater Columbus "Partners in Education" (PIE) was established in 1987 as a joint venture of the Muscogee County School District and the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce in Georgia. This program was created to engage the business community more with the public education system and involved a partnership between a school or schools and businesses that support the schools and students. The parties commit to specific activities intended to benefit students, improve student achievement and accomplish school improvement goals.

A partnership may be initiated either by the school or school district recruiting a partner from the business community, or a prospective partner contacting the school district or an individual school. The partner may be a business, service organization, governmental agency, association, church, community group or institution of higher education. Partnerships may involve business employees as tutors, mentors, coaches, or guest lecturers in the partner schools, as well as possible monetary contributions targeted to specific programs.

The Marion County EDC has implemented a similar program to this before working with the Marion County School District. The idea of revisiting the creation of this program in Marion County should be explored with the Marion County School District.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Revisit the iMagine Work Job Shadowing Program

The Marion County School District, in partnership with local business and industry, the Marion Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Mullins Chamber of Commerce, and the Marion County EDC, sponsored the iMagine Work Job Shadowing Program. This program allowed students to experience various career options to learn about workplace expectations and skills required for different occupations.

This program should be revisited with the Marion County School District.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Continue to Partner with Regional Higher Educational Institutions

Tactic: Explore further partnership with Florence-Darlington Technical College

The Florence-Darlington Technical College (FDTC) was established in 1963 and presently serves Florence, Darlington, and Marion counties. The college serves 6,000 students and its primary campus in Florence now consists of nearly 240 acres with a complex of eight major buildings totaling approximately 350,000 square feet.

FDTC has an off-campus site in Mullins, which provides post-secondary public education in various disciplines, including technical education and continuing education courses. In addition, the Marion County School District partners with FDTC on its Dual Enrollment Program.

Marion County had an opportunity many years ago to invest in the FDTC partnership with the other two counties it serves but opted not to at the time and with an estimated price tag of $3 million to invest now, it is most likely cost prohibitive. However, discussions of a potentially reduced investment amount should be discussed with FDTC, and/or the option of having more classes in Marion County to meet the needs of existing business and industry, as well as the target sectors, should be pursued.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Tactic: Ensure the Marion County/FDTC Workforce Development Training Center comes to fruition

A new workforce development training center has been proposed for Marion County in partnership with FDTC and a grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is being pursued. This should continue to be pursued, as it could be a game changer for Marion County and its workforce development and training efforts in the future.

Tactic: Encourage local employers to develop apprenticeship programs

Apprenticeship Carolina™ is a division of the SC Technical College System that works to ensure all employers in South Carolina have access to the information and technical assistance they need to create demand-driven registered apprenticeship programs. At no cost to the employer, apprenticeship consultants can guide companies through the registered apprenticeship development process from initial information to full recognition in the national Registered Apprenticeship System. There is also a $1,000 per apprentice South Carolina state income tax credit available.

Local employers should be introduced to this program and encouraged to participate.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

Attract New Talent

Tactic: Create the *Move to Marion County* Program

A 2018 Washington Post article focused on a Gallup Poll which found many urban residents would like to make a move to rural America with 27 percent saying a rural area would be their ideal community, while only 12 percent responded that they prefer a big city.

It is also estimated that approximately 17 percent of U.S. employees worked from home five days per week pre-pandemic, and that share has increased to nearly 45 percent during the pandemic. That percentage is pretty high considering an estimated 55 to 60 percent of workers in the U.S. cannot work remotely as their job requires an in-person service of some kind (retail, restaurants, hotels, etc.).

With major companies such as Twitter, Nationwide Insurance, Nielson, Shopify, Slack and Zillow saying their workers can stay remote forever, it is projected that although the current percentage of remote workers will decline post-COVID, there will still be a major increase in remote workers. Some are estimating that approximately 25 to 30 percent of the workforce will be working from home multiple days per week once the crisis is over.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

There is also the prediction that the longer people work from home, a greater adoption of remote working will be seen. Before COVID, surveys repeatedly showed that around 80 percent of employees want to work from home at least some of the time.

Many cities have implemented remote worker incentive programs. Under the Tulsa Remote Program, qualifying remote workers are paid **$10,000** to relocate to the city, some of which is paid upfront, some of which is paid in monthly stipends and the rest at completion of one year of living in the city. For the Remote Shoals program, remote workers locating to The Shoals area of Alabama are eligible for an incentive reimbursement from **$6,000 to $10,000** depending upon their average wage. Under the **Savannah Remote Technology Worker Incentive**, a relocation reimbursement of **$2,000** is paid to qualified remote technology workers.

A *Move to Marion County* program should be created, which will be a talent or people recruitment program that incents people to move to Marion County. This program will provide relocation reimbursement to people moving to Marion County that commit to remaining in the county for at least one year. An application process will need to be developed for the program.

Livability

For Marion County, becoming more livable means working to beautify the county, addressing housing challenges, investing in and recruiting needed amenities and focusing on recreational opportunities.

LIVABILITY

OVERVIEW

Small and rural communities must create, embrace, and promote their quality of place or livability, which can be one of its strongest attractors from an economic development perspective. People and companies want to locate, live and work in a place that is clean and attractive, offers culture, entertainment, recreation, access to quality healthcare, and provides a safe environment, among other factors. Creating a livable community is a critical aspect of both attracting new and retaining existing business and industry, as it is a driving force in the ability to attract and retain the workforce talent needed.

LIVABILITY

STRATEGIC FOCUSES AND TACTICS

Engage in a Countywide Beautification Campaign

- **TACTIC:** Create Marion County Beautiful
- **TACTIC:** Continue to participate in the Great American Cleanup
- **TACTIC:** Explore participation in the Adopt-a-Highway Program
- **TACTIC:** Seek grants to cover costs of beautification projects
- **TACTIC:** Develop a plan for clean-up of dilapidated buildings and homes
- TACTIC: Explore potential federal programs related to blighted properties
- **TACTIC:** Market availability of the SC Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act to regional developers
- **TACTIC:** Ensure that local ordinances related to vacant or abandoned properties are in place
- **TACTIC:** Explore land banking as another potential solution to vacant or abandoned properties
- **TACTIC:** Continue to support efforts to improve downtown areas

Address Housing Challenges

- **TACTIC:** Assess current availability and need for more workforce housing
- **TACTIC:** Work with HMRA to attract development of more downtown
- apartments
- **TACTIC:** Work to identify and attract spec housing developers
- **TACTIC:** Consider spec housing development incentives for developers
- **TACTIC:** Market state housing programs for potential homebuyers
- **TACTIC:** Market state program and create local program to encourage revitalization of historic homes

Invest in and Recruit Needed Amenities

- **TACTIC:** Continue to explore feasibility of recruiting a reputable franchised hotel with meeting space
- **TACTIC:** Consider incentives targeted to a hotel chain
- **TACTIC:** Develop a restaurant recruitment strategy
- **TACTIC:** Attract a local craft brewery
- **TACTIC:** Focus on attraction of other entertainment amenities in downtowns and surrounding areas
- **TACTIC:** Continue to explore development of a community recreational center

Focus on Outdoor Recreation as an Economic Driver

- **TACTIC:** Focus on development of tourism opportunities around rivers
- **TACTIC:** Expand walking and biking trails throughout the county
- **TACTIC:** Explore further expansion of Green Street Complex

LIVABILITY

Engage in a Countywide Beautification Campaign

Tactic: Create Marion County Beautiful

Keep South Carolina Beautiful (KSCB) is the state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful (KAB), which assist local communities with education, training, and program development. KAB affiliates in South Carolina are key partners of PalmettoPride. PalmettoPride is South Carolina's anti-litter and beautification organization that was created by the legislature to fight litter and keep the state clean, green and beautiful. Every year, KSCB and PalmettoPride provide grants, awards and training/education to affiliate communities.

Marion County does not appear to be an affiliate community of KAB and should seek this designation. This program should probably be set up in partnership with the chambers of commerce in the county. There are grant programs available through KSCB to help fund the program.

Tactic: Continue to Participate in the Great American Cleanup

Every spring, PalmettoPride and KSCB, in partnership with KAB, coordinate the Great American Cleanup™, a localized cleanup, beautification and community improvement program. Marion County has participated in this in the past and should continue to participate in this program each year.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Explore participation in the Adopt-a-Highway Program

Since 1988, Adopt-A-Highway volunteers have been cleaning up litter along South Carolina highways through the PalmettoPride program. Explore participation in this program in Marion County.

Tactic: Seek grants to cover costs of beautification projects

In addition to seeking grants from the KSBC to create Marion County Beautiful, there are also Hometown Economic Development Grants available from the Municipal Association of South Carolina up to $25,000 that support economic development projects that will make a positive impact on the quality of life in a community. Projects can range from community master plans and farmers' markets to downtown facade grants and building renovations and cleanup.

Tactic: Develop a plan for clean up of dilapidated buildings and homes

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, the need to clean up the dilapidated homes and buildings found throughout the community was a common theme. Maintaining property values and fostering economic development opportunities is more difficult in blighted areas. In addition, vacant and abandoned structures are unsightly, attract criminal activity, and are a potential threat to public safety.

LIVABILITY

A plan must be developed to clean up these dilapidated buildings and homes, which do not send a positive message to those visiting Marion County and considering locating in the county.

Tactic: Explore potential federal programs related to blighted properties

Programs of the South Carolina State Housing Finance and Development Authority such as the Neighborhood Initiative Program, which works to stabilize property values through the removal of blighted properties, and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, which provides grants to purchase foreclosed or abandoned properties and to rehabilitate, resell, or redevelop these properties, should be monitored in case they start accepting new applications next year.

The existing Opportunity Zones in Marion County may be another tool that can be used to attract developers who may be interested in purchasing dilapidated buildings and homes in the community.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Market availability of the SC Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act to regional developers

The SC Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act, which was extended by the General Assembly through 2021, offers income or property tax credits to promote the rehabilitation of eligible empty or underutilized buildings. The taxpayer who rehabilitates an eligible building may apply for one of the tax credits, and the credit may be passed through to tenants or subsequent purchasers of the property.

Combining this credit with state and federal historic rehabilitation credits can dramatically increase the total tax credit available to up to 55 percent of qualified rehabilitation expenses with 20 percent federal historic preservation, 10 percent state historic preservation and 25 percent abandoned building credit. This should be marketed to identified regional developers who may be willing to make an investment in Marion County.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Ensure that local ordinances related to vacant or abandoned properties are in place

Ensure that Marion County and its cities have the power to act through local codes and ordinances when vacant or abandoned properties are determined to pose a public safety risk. In addition, consider passing an Unfit Dwelling Ordinance.

Horry County passed an Unfit Dwelling Ordinance in 2017, which has allowed the county to demolish a number of unfit dwellings. Once a property has five complaints, it goes to the county council and then each property has six months to bring their property into compliance before the demolition will occur. Marion County should impose such an ordinance that will apply to both unfit homes and buildings.

Tactic: Explore land banking as another potential solution to vacant or abandoned properties

Land banking involves a city or county acquiring property by using federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that must be held for future affordable and workforce housing. In practice, it typically involves a city or county purchasing empty lots and/or taking over dilapidated buildings or available space, then finding a private developer or non-profit to work on affordable housing plans. The City of Greenville, South Carolina has used land banking as a tool to address the affordable housing issue and vacant or abandoned properties. This should be explored by Marion County.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Continue to support efforts to improve downtown areas

The Historic Marion Revitalization Association (HMRA) is a volunteer organization funded by the City of Marion, grants and private contributions. Pursuant to a Master Plan and under direction of the HMRA, downtown Marion has realized a renovated streetscape with new paving and streetlamps, as well as improvements to cross walks. Wayfinding signage was also added. The HMRA also focuses on attracting new businesses to downtown Marion and awards grants up to $2,000 for work on commercial facades located in the Historic Business District. The HMRA's Exterior Paint & Sign Campaign program reimburses businesses for up to 75 percent of the cost of their signage or paint projects. Mullins has also recently formed a similar organization.

Programs such as these should be implemented countywide as having vibrant downtown areas is a sign of economic vitality.

The Marion County EDC should also continue to support the HMRA in marketing the available properties in the downtown Marion area, as well as properties in other cities in the county.

LIVABILITY

Address Housing Challenges

Tactic: Assess current availability and need for more workforce housing

Workforce housing can be thought of as housing that is available, accessible and affordable to the moderate and middle-income residents of a community. An area must have housing for the workforce it is trying to retain and the business and industry it is trying to attract.

According to a number of Marion County stakeholders who participated in this process, there is a need for more affordable and quality housing in the county. People specifically mentioned executive housing, speculative (spec) housing and downtown apartments.

One of the first steps in addressing this challenge is to conduct a housing assessment or feasibility analysis to understand where the actual gaps are in the housing market. This study will assess the need for workforce housing in Marion County, provide an understanding of what kind of workforce housing is needed, identify the target or potential homebuyer, explore financial feasibility and create next steps.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Work with HMRA to attract development of more downtown apartments

The percentage of renter occupied housing units in Marion County is over 27 percent, which means that around 73 percent of housing units are owner occupied. In the State of South Carolina, approximately 31 percent of housing is renter occupied and 36 percent of housing in the U.S. is renter occupied housing. Therefore, Marion County is lacking in renter occupied housing. This could potentially be driven by the low median home value in Marion County of $90,920, compared to South Carolina at $178,921 and the U.S. at $235,127. However, there is an indication that single-family homes are lacking in the county as well.

The Loft at 109 located in downtown Marion is a fully furnished three-bedroom apartment housed in a historic building that is available for rental via Airbnb. The HMRA and other organizations should explore potential incentives to encourage more entrepreneurs and developers to invest in downtown properties on the second or third floor of buildings that could easily be converted to apartments for both long and short-term rentals.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Work to identify and attract spec housing developers

Spec builders start building homes even before they have a viable buyer. They generally buy lots one at a time and start building. These homes are typically marketed to the first-time homebuyer. Develop a list of spec housing developers in the region that can be targeted and begin marketing to them with data that shows there is a need and the buying power in the county.

Tactic: Consider spec housing development incentives for developers

A spec housing development incentive may be a good way to entice identified regional developers to consider projects in Marion County.   This incentive could include: expedited permitting; refund of building permit fees; or cash reimbursement to the developer per home at maybe $5,000 per home.

For larger housing developments, the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) should be explored. TIF is a public finance tool that cities in South Carolina can use to help revitalize an area that has become, or is in danger of becoming, run down or blighted. A TIF allows cities to incur debt for the redevelopment of a project area and use the additional property tax revenue generated by the redevelopment projects to pay off that debt.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Market state housing programs for potential homebuyers

The South Carolina State Housing Finance and Development Authority *County First Program* is a rural initiative designed to provide potential homebuyers in underserved communities with additional resources. Funding is available for both first-time or move-up borrowers and includes up to an $8,000 forgivable down payment assistance and special fixed rate financing.

This program should be marketed to potential homebuyers in the community and to the developers that the county is trying to attract, as this may make the spec home purchase more viable for many first time and other homebuyers.

Tactic: Market state program and create local program to encourage revitalization of historic homes

There are a number of beautiful historic homes in Marion County. At the state level, homeowners who rehabilitate their owner-occupied residence may be eligible for a state Historic Rehabilitation Income Tax Credit equal to 25 percent of the cost of repairs and renovations. Ensure that residents in Marion County are aware of this state incentive and also consider a program through the city or county where there is an incentive at the local level to encourage investment in these historic homes, which could be equal to the $2,000 façade grant provided for commercial businesses in downtown Marion.

LIVABILITY

Invest in and Recruit Needed Amenities

Tactic: Continue to explore feasibility of recruiting a reputable franchised hotel with meeting space

A feasibility study was conducted in late 2019 for a proposed dual-branded hotel in Marion. The study recommended the hotel be located on a site in downtown that is owned by the city. Currently that site has been proposed for a boutique hotel by a private developer, but that project has not yet come to fruition. The study concluded that the hotel property should include 80 rooms, a breakfast dining room, 1,000 square feet of meeting space, an indoor or outdoor pool, a fitness room, a business center or lobby workstation, two market pantries, a guest laundry room and an outdoor patio, and should be a dual-branded, limited and extended stay lodging facility although no specific brand or franchise was determined. The Quality Inn Mullins is the only nationally branded hotel currently, and there are also some bed and breakfast inns and rental properties. Marion County has a need for another nationally branded hotel and downtown Marion is most likely the best location.

The most successful hotel markets are those that can provide balanced sources of demand, including strong commercial demand from area businesses on a year-round basis, a strong tourism demand, and significant shoulder and off-season weekend leisure demand. Since 70 to 75 percent annual occupancy is often a required target, markets not demonstrating demand from each of these sources will likely fall short.

LIVABILITY

The feasibility study does address some of these factors but there may be a need to conduct additional due diligence to really be able to show that Marion County can definitely support a new hotel. This may include:

- Continuing to survey major employers to determine the level of hotel business they expect to generate (average number of hotel stays per month post COVID)
- Continuing to survey representatives of existing tourist attractions, annual festivals and events such as the FoxTrot and Golden Leaf Festival, wedding venues and the Green Street Sports Complex to assess average number of visitors they project each month in a normal year

Using this and other information from the Feasibility Study, create a one-to-two-page summary of the positive aspects of Marion County for attraction of a franchised hotel.

Noting that there could be delays in actually locating a new hotel due to COVID-19, the Marion County EDC should begin direct solicitation of local/regional development interests and inquiries with the major chains. As the City of Marion owns the proposed identified site, a formal Request for Proposal process could also be instigated. The feasibility study recommends Candlewood Suites and Holiday Inn Express, or a TownePlace Suites or Fairfield Inn by Marriott. Boyette believes a Hampton Inn or Hilton Garden Inn should be added to this list.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Consider incentives targeted to a hotel chain

The Marion County EDC must also consider incentives to entice a hotel chain to downtown Marion. In 2015, the City of Hartsville, South Carolina was able to attract two hotels to its downtown, including a Hampton Inn and a boutique hotel with a spa. The Hampton Inn was offered $450,000 in incentives, consisting primarily of the land on which the hotel was built, and the boutique hotel received a grant under the local Economic Development Incentive Program, which includes reimbursement of fees and taxes.

Identify city or county-owned land that could be a location for a hotel that could be provided as an incentive or consider fee or other waivers as an incentive.

Tactic: Develop a restaurant recruitment strategy

Marion County is already lacking in restaurants and with COVID-19 some existing restaurants have closed. Restaurants are a key component of creating more vibrant downtown areas, and Marion County must develop a plan that involves supporting this sector.   Part of this plan should include creative ideas to attract restaurants to Marion County, supporting existing restaurants through grants from the HMRA and potentially other county and city funds and creating a new incentive program to attract new restaurant businesses.

LIVABILITY

In September 2019, the City of Rainwater, South Carolina launched a plan to bring food trucks to the downtown area on the fourth Friday of each month in the hopes of attracting more brick-and-mortar restaurants to the city. The first Fourth Friday event was a major success with the dozen food trucks running out of offerings two hours early.

Post-COVID, the Marion County EDC in partnership with the chambers of commerce and the HMRA should work to organize a monthly food truck event which may switch off between downtown Marion and Mullins. The idea would be if some of these food truck businesses are successful enough at these events, they may eventually set up a brick-and-mortar restaurant in Marion County.

Marion County must also ensure that its existing restaurants continue to thrive and work with them to meet their needs through HMRA grants and other city and county resources. In order to attract new restaurants, Marion County should consider incentives such as a low-interest loan program in partnership with a local bank, discounted fees and permits and reduced costs ad rates or other free press for the new business.

A marketing campaign to encourage local residents to support existing and new restaurants should also be implemented.

The Marion County EDC engaged Retail Strategies to conduct a Retail Gap Analysis. A next step could be to engage Retail Strategies to pursue certain identified retail targets, including restaurants.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Attract a local craft brewery

Attraction of a local craft brewery to Marion County would provide an amenity that is attractive to visitors, increases the quality of life for residents and can support local farmers. A craft brewery often includes a tasting room, a restaurant and can include space for entertainment for a local singer or band to play on Friday and Saturday nights.

Many cities across the U.S. have utilized creative mechanisms to attract craft breweries. Chicago utilized a TIF to create a brewery district in the Motor Row District, an industrial area once known for car dealerships. Duquesne, Pennsylvania, a town located near Pittsburgh, revised their zoning plan to make it easier to attract microbreweries, and even bought up old abandoned buildings to sell to potential brewers. Mesa, Arizona, promoted its downtown specifically as a magnet for local brewers.

There are several breweries located in Florence including Seminar Brewing, Southern Hops Brewing Company, Sumter Original Brewing, Local Motive Brewing and others. Representatives of the Marion County EDC should visit these breweries and meet with the owners to get thoughts on how Marion County can attract such an operation.

Incentives such as a free building (county or cities should consider buying old abandoned buildings), property tax abatement, low-interest loan program in partnership with a local bank, discounted fees and permits and reduced cost ad rates or other free press for the new business will need to be considered.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Focus on attraction of other entertainment amenities in downtowns and surrounding areas

There is a definite need for additional entertainment amenities in Marion County that are attractive to both families and younger people. This could include a movie theater, a bowling alley, a combination of the two, or some other similar type of entertainment facility. A movie theater development that includes a drinking and dining option may be the best focus for Marion County. With that said, it should be noted that the movie theater business has been hit hard by COVID-19 and this sector may take some time to bounce back.

The Marion County EDC should identify potential property in the county that is ideally owned by one of the cities or the county that would be a good and central location for some type of entertainment facility. Ideally such land would be located in or near one of the downtown areas. The possibility of offering the land to entice this type of development should be considered. Developers should then be identified and contacted.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Continue to explore development of a community recreational center

A community recreation facility is an important quality of life amenity that affects individuals, families, and neighborhoods. It can serve to enhance the lives of residents by offering opportunities to improve overall health and wellness. A community recreational facility can also serve as a tool to bring the community together.

The idea of a community recreational center is already being explored. A plan is already in place that includes desired amenities.   Costs and funding mechanisms for the community recreation center are often either publicly funded, supported by a private organization, or more likely a public-private effort. Possible local organizations that may be willing to invest in this effort are the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) Health Marion Medical Center or the Marion County Healthcare Foundation.

LIVABILITY

Focus on Outdoor Recreation as an Economic Driver

Tactic: Focus on development of tourism opportunities around rivers

Marion County is situated between the Little and Great Pee Dee Rivers, and the Town of Nichols is located on the Lumber River, creating a major tourism opportunity for the county that has not been officially tapped.

Identify potential outdoor adventure outlets that either currently host or may be willing to host expeditions and tours on these local rivers. There are several companies that have conducted these tours in the past including: Betwixt the Rivers, Coastal Expeditions and Blackwater Adventures.
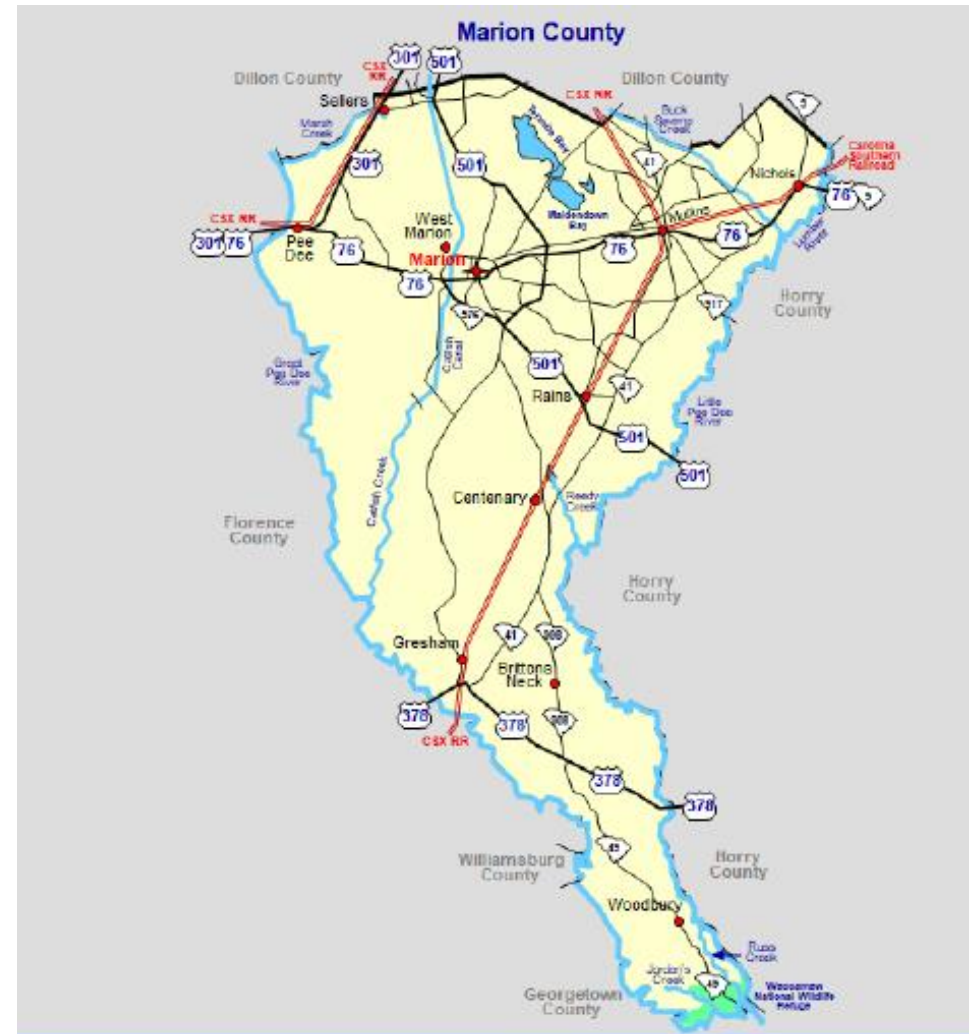
LIVABILITY

Also, work with these and other outlets to pursue the possible establishment of an actual outdoor adventure center with a physical presence on or near the river that could offer canoe and kayak rentals, small boat charters for fishing and other activities.   The possibility of a campground somewhere along the river should also be explored.

The Marion County EDC may want to engage Wildlife Action, Inc. in these efforts.

Tactic: Expand walking and biking trails throughout the county

The Marion Hike and Bike Trail is a two-mile landscaped paved trail that begins at the city's Train Depot and goes to the Catfish Creek Canal that is west of town. The trail traces a portion of an abandoned railroad line that originally extended from Mullins in the east to Sumter in the west.   The county, working with the Marion SC Recreation Department, should develop a greenways plan that may involve a possible extension of the Marion Hike and Bike Trail throughout the county, potentially extending the original Rails to Trails program.   The development of hiking trails to and along the rivers should also be explored.

LIVABILITY

Tactic: Explore further expansion of Green Street Sports Complex

The Green Street Sports Complex currently features four baseball and softball fields with plans announced in October 2019 to add two soccer fields, two more baseball and softball fields and two football fields. Over the past few years, the complex has hosted several baseball tournaments that range in total visitation from 100 for smaller ones to 500 for larger ones, such as the Dixie Youth Sports Tournament.   These tournaments present both a tourism and economic development opportunity for the city/county that should be further explored.

Business Recruitment/ Retention

Continuing to attract new business and industry is always going to be an important component of the economic development efforts in Marion County but supporting existing business and industry, as well as entrepreneurs, must also receive a similar level of focus.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

OVERVIEW

Business recruitment and retention are two of the most important focuses of economic development and must continue to be a key concentration of the Marion County EDC. The Marion County EDC has been very successful with new business locations with many significant project wins in 2019 and 2020 including: Maxwood Furniture, Mobile Fleet, NARENCO, Pee Dee Extractors, Leisure Pools Group, Tie & Timber Technologies, and Rivers Plumbing & Electric, with other projects are still in the pipeline. There have also been several expansion projects including SOPAKO, DMA Holdings and Maxwood Furniture, which announced in 2019 and expanded in 2020.

The Marion County EDC needs to continue to focus on attracting new business and industry, especially in its target sectors, but it must also continue to have a focused Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) program to ensure that the needs of all existing business are met. In addition to all of its new and existing industrial companies, another important existing business that must be supported is the MUSC Health Marion Medical Center, which is a crucial economic development asset of Marion County. The Marion County EDC must also support entrepreneurs in the county, who can be a source of job creation and investment now and in the future.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

STRATEGIC FOCUSES AND TACTICS

Expand Business Recruitment Activities

- **TACTIC:** Participate in sales/marketing events with partners
- **TACTIC:** Engage lead generation firm to arrange for remote prospect visits
- **TACTIC:** Initiate a targeted effort for Honda and Volvo suppliers

Continue to Expand Upon the BR&E Program

- **TACTIC:** Use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool to track visits and information
- **TACTIC:** Create a Business/Industry Roundtable

Develop an Entrepreneurial Support Program

- **TACTIC:** Determine entrepreneurial responsibilities
- **TACTIC:** Understand the existing entrepreneurial environment
- **TACTIC:** Inventory and publicize available entrepreneurial support services
- **TACTIC:** Add a section on entrepreneurship to the Marion County EDC website
- **TACTIC:** Explore local incentive programs to support entrepreneurs
- **TACTIC:** Organize networking events for entrepreneurs
- **TACTIC:** Develop entrepreneurial education programs at the middle/high school level
- **TACTIC:** Create the Marion County Entrepreneurial Center

Support MUSC Health Marion Medical Center

- **TACTIC:** Plan regular visits with hospital representatives
- **TACTIC:** Focus on healthcare/retirement services in partnership with the hospital

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Expand Business Recruitment Activities

Tactic: Participate in sales/marketing events with partners

The Marion County EDC should participate in sales/marketing events sponsored by the SCDOC, NESA, the SC Power Team, Duke Energy and others focused on opportunities around its target sectors.

Tactic: Engage lead generation firm to arrange for remote prospect visits

The Marion County EDC should explore the engagement of a lead generation firm that can focus specifically on arranging for remote prospect visits with potential companies within the targeted business sectors identified.

Tactic: Initiate a targeted effort for Honda and Volvo suppliers

Marion County is located approximately 30 minutes from the Honda plant in Florence that makes ATVs and is less than two hours from Volvo in Ridgeville, near Charleston. A targeted effort focused on identifying potential Tier 2 and 3 suppliers of both Honda and Volvo should be completed, and the Marion County EDC should attend any trade shows that the SCDOC and other partners attend that could involve such identified suppliers.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Continue to expand upon the BR&E program

Tactic: Use a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool to track visits and information

The Marion County EDC already has an aggressive BR&E program and recently announced it is partnering with NESA to further expand its program. The use of a CRM tool to track company visits and employer input is very important to ensure there is a record of the visit, and a way to easily share information moving forward. A CRM tool that is designed specifically for EDOs such as SalesForce, or another program, should be explored and considered for tracking BR&E activity in the future.

Tactic: Create a Business/Industry Roundtable

The Marion County EDC and Marion County Progress already host an Industry Appreciation event on an annual basis. The EDC should consider creation of a Business/Industry Roundtable that would meet at least twice annually to discuss any issues they are having in Marion County, and brainstorm potential solutions with the EDC team. This meeting could also be used to update members of the Roundtable of any recent economic development activity in the county.

The Business/Industry Roundtable should be comprised of identified companies that are key to future development of Marion County, and representatives should include key leadership of such companies such as the CEO, President or Plant Manager. Members of the Roundtable should also be engaged in prospect visits to assist with selling the county.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Develop an Entrepreneurial Support Program

Tactic: Determine entrepreneurial responsibilities

The Marion County EDC should work with both chambers of commerce and the HMRA to determine who should have the primary responsibility of supporting entrepreneurs/small businesses in the community, and how they can work together.

Tactic: Understand the existing entrepreneurial environment

The Marion County EDC, both chambers of commerce and the HMRA should work together to develop a contact list of local entrepreneurs/small businesses in the community.

Tactic: Inventory and publicize available entrepreneurial support services

An inventory of all current activities in the community/region/state that support entrepreneurs should be completed and shared by email with the contact list of local entrepreneurs/small business that is developed. The South Carolina Business Resource Guide is a great place to start to access this information:

https://www.sccommerce.com/sites/default/files/2019-07/SCBusinessResources.pdf

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

A regional resource is the Francis Marion University (FMU) Kelley Center for Economic Development in nearby Florence, which provides small business assistance and planning, professional development training, and business incubation to start-up and existing businesses. The FMU Kelley Center has locations in Florence and in Lake City. More information can be found here: https://www.fmarion.edu/kelleycenter/

In addition, the Gould Business Incubator was established as an extension of the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology in 2012 to help ensure the success of new business ventures in the Florence-Darlington area.

All of these resources should be documented and publicized throughout the community, as well as to the targeted list of entrepreneurs developed.

Tactic: Add a section on entrepreneurship to the Marion County EDC website

A section on entrepreneurship should be added to the Marion County EDC website that includes information on the programs available at the state/regional level, upcoming entrepreneurial events in the county and region, and the contact information for entrepreneurial/small business support in the county. The website must be updated to include new events and other information.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Tactic: Explore local incentive programs to support entrepreneurs

Explore potential local programs to support local entrepreneurs, which may include assistance with up front costs such as rent over a certain time period and a low interest revolving loan program.

Tactic: Organize networking events for entrepreneurs

Organize and coordinate networking events at least once annually where entrepreneurs/small businesses in the county are invited to network, be presented with information on local, regional and state support programs and to discuss potential solutions to any challenges.   The initial speakers at these events should represent the different entrepreneurial support programs identified such as representatives of the Kelley Center for Economic Development. Note that the chambers of commerce already offer a monthly Business After Hours event for their members.

Tactic: Develop entrepreneurial education programs at the middle/high school level

A culture of entrepreneurship in the county should be developed starting at a young age. The Marion County School District should establish a program at the middle and high school level that provides students with an understanding of how to start and run a small business. The FMU Kelley Center for Economic Development may be a resource related to development of such a program.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Students should also be made aware of the SC Young Entrepreneur Award that was established in 2004 by SC Economics as a way to recognize outstanding elementary, middle or high school students for their accomplishments in entrepreneurship.

Tactic: Create The Marion County Entrepreneurial Center

Explore the creation of The Marion County Entrepreneurial Center that includes incubator space and a contact that provides information and other assistance to small businesses/entrepreneurs in the county. Ideally this facility would be housed with the Marion County EDC.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Support MUSC Health Marion Medical Center

Tactic: Plan regular visits with hospital representatives

MUSC Health Marion Medical Center is an extremely important asset for the county that can continue to support existing residents and businesses, as well as be an attractive asset to future residents and businesses. Hospitals located in rural areas across the county continue to struggle and many eventually close. As such, MUSC Health Marion Medical Center must be treated as the critical existing business that it is for the county with regular visits with representatives to determine how the county can better support and be a partner with the hospital.

Tactic: Focus on healthcare/retirement services in partnership with the hospital

With the presence of the hospital in Marion County and an aging population with over 41 percent of the population 50 and over, a focus on healthcare/retirement service type businesses, which refers to companies offering long-term skilled nursing care both in residential facilities and patient homes, and includes nursing homes, assisted living facilities, continuing care communities and home healthcare services.

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

MUSC Health Marion Medical Center includes Mullins Nursing Center, a 92-bed, long-term care facility, and there are a few other similar operations in Marion County. There appears to be a need for additional assisted living facilities and possibly a need for a continuing care or retirement community in the county, which has been considered by a private developer. Home healthcare services in Marion County grew by 526 percent from 2014 to 2019 increasing from 34 jobs to 213 jobs and is projected to grow by 51 percent over the next five years.

Companies in the retirement services sector seek areas with a demand for their services, which means an aging population, as well as an available, affordable workforce since labor accounts for approximately 50 percent of operating costs. Available healthcare, low cost of living and recreational amenities are also location considerations.

The Marion County EDC should work with MUSC Health Marion Medical Center to further identify the need and opportunity with retirement services in the county, and partner with them to grow this sector if a need is identified. This may include identifying and targeting developers of these types of facilities.

Organization/ Alignment

The implementation of Marion County 2025 will require the dedication of many partner organizations in the county, region and state, and ensuring there is the appropriate structure and support for economic development over the next five years will be critical.

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

OVERVIEW

Although the Marion County EDC is the lead organization for economic development in Marion County, economic development crosses many different facets that impact the success of a location. As such, in order to ensure maximization of resources, the Marion County EDC should continue to seek methods to partner and collaborate across different governmental and organizational boundaries in its daily work and in the implementation of this plan. The recommendations in this section also recommend some organizational alignment changes meant to further maximize resources and improve efficiencies, as well as ensure a future pipeline of leadership talent.

It is also important that the Marion County EDC continues to receive the support and investment it needs to fully support economic development in the county long-term related to the implementation of this plan and otherwise.

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

STRATEGIC FOCUSES AND TACTICS

Explore Better Coordination and Consolidation	Enhance Support for Economic Development
- **TACTIC:** Continue to work closely with all partners - **TACTIC:** Explore creation of the Marion County Chamber of Commerce - **TACTIC:** Create the Marion County Downtown Revitalization Association - **TACTIC:** Expand the Marion County Junior Leadership Program - **TACTIC:** Establish Visit Marion County	- **TACTIC:** Increase the operating budget of the Marion County EDC - **TACTIC:** Earmark funding for implementation of Marion County 2025 - **TACTIC:** Establish an Economic Development Incentives Fund and Guidelines

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

Explore Better Coordination and Consolidation

Tactic: Continue to work closely with all partner organizations

The Marion County EDC has many governmental partners and agencies that it must work with on different economic development initiatives. This includes the Marion County Council, the different City Councils, as well as organizations such as the Marion Chamber of Commerce; the Greater Mullins Chamber of Commerce; the HMRA; Marion County Progress; and many others, including state, regional and utility partners.

All of these partners should be engaged in the implementation process of Marion County 2025 and other economic development efforts moving forward.

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

Tactic: Create the Marion County Chamber of Commerce

Currently there are two chambers of commerce in Marion County, one representing the City of Marion and the other the City of Mullins.   The possibility of combining these two organizations into one Marion County Chamber of Commerce that represents the entire county should be considered. It may be possible to model this new organization where there is still a representative of the City of Marion and the City of Mullins but there is only one Chamber facility that represents the entire county. The Marion County EDC office, which is located between both cities, should be considered for this new consolidated location in order to encourage more collaboration among the organizations.

Tactic: Create the Marion County Downtown Revitalization Association

The efforts of the HMRA and the new effort in Mullins to support downtown revitalization should be combined to form the Marion County Downtown Revitalization Association. This organization, which would be an effort under the newly formed Marion County Chamber of Commerce, would represent the efforts of downtown areas in the county.

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

Tactic: Expand the Marion County Junior Leadership Program

There is an existing Marion County Junior Leadership Program that is currently sponsored by the Greater Mullins Chamber of Commerce. Due to the importance of ensuring that Marion County has a future pipeline of leaders, that program should be relaunched, expanded and housed under the combined Marion County Chamber of Commerce.

Tactic: Establish Visit Marion County

Consider creating Visit Marion County and a related website that focuses on all tourism opportunities in Marion County. This organization would ideally be housed under the newly consolidated Marion County Chamber of Commerce.

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

Enhance Support for Economic Development

Tactic: Increase the operating budget of the Marion County EDC

The Marion County EDC has an operating budget of $167,000.   Note that this does not include funding for infrastructure and capital budget expenditures.   This is much less than the operating budgets of other economic development organizations reviewed as part of the benchmark research.

To ensure that the salaries of the economic development team remain competitive for retention purposes, the salaries should be increased, and additional funding allocated for marketing, travel and other expenses, including potentially the creation of the Marion County Entrepreneurial Center, which would be housed with the Marion County EDC.   This additional funding could either come from the capital sales tax or the new ordinance that provides 10 percent of the Fee-in-Lieu of Taxes (FILOT) fees to economic development.

Tactic: Earmark funding for implementation of Marion County 2025

Some of funding from the capital sales tax and the FILOT fees that are already earmarked for economic development purposes should be set aside over the next five years to fund the implementation of this plan.

ORGANIZATION/ALIGNMENT

Tactic: Establish an Economic Development Incentives Fund and guidelines

Throughout this plan, it is referenced that incentives will need to be considered to entice developers to locate projects in Marion County, to support entrepreneurs and small businesses and other activities. Funding from the capital sales tax and the FILOT fees should be set aside for an Economic Development Incentives Fund that can be utilized to support these and other projects.

Guidelines for this fund should also be established and focused around the identified areas in this plan.

Endnotes

Endnotes

Product and Infrastructure

SC Power Team - Funding for Site Infrastructure Improvements:

https://www.scpowerteam.com/what-we-do/financial-programs/

https://www.scpowerteam.com/featured-sites/

SCDOC - Site and Building Identification and Infrastructure:

https://www.sccommerce.com/buildings-sites

Duke Energy Site Readiness Program:

https://www.duke-energy.com/partner-with-us/economic-development/the-carolinas/sites-and-buildings/site-readiness-program

Interstate 73:

http://www.i73insc.com

https://marioncountysc.com/doing-business-here/transportation/

Broadband:
https://broadbandnow.com/South-Carolina
https://www.wmbfnews.com/2020/11/17/htc-expanding-broadband-internet-access-into-parts-marion-county-help-students-families/
https://ors.sc.gov/broadband/south-carolina-broadband-infrastructure-program
https://www.thestate.com/news/politics-government/article245959505.html
https://www.ncsl.org/research/telecommunications-and-information-technology/broadband-2020-legislation.aspx

Other Infrastructure Challenges:
https://www.postandcourier.com/news/after-2-major-floods-in-3-years-half-of-the-residents-of-this-sc-town/article_6924111c-c823-11e9-b098-1bc79ec41762.html
https://ria.sc.gov/grants/

Public Transportation:
https://www.pdrta.org/our-service/fixed-route-service/routes.aspx
https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Rural-Public-Transportation-Systems
http://ruraltransportation.org/about-rtpos/rtpo-states/south-carolina/
https://www.scdot.org/Multimodal/pdf/SC_MTP_Transit_Plan_FINAL.pdf
https://www.scdot.org/inside/PublicTransit-Programs.aspx
http://peedeecog.org

Endnotes

Education and Workforce

Public Education:
https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/overview/?q=eT0yMDE5JnQ9RCZzaWQ9MzQxMDAwMA
[https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/overview/?q=eT0yMDE5JnQ9UyZzaWQ9MDAwMA
https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/overview/?q=eT0yMDE5JnQ9UyZzaWQ9MDAwMA
[https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/overview/?q=eT0yMDE5JnQ9RCZzaWQ9MzQxMDAwMA
https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/overview/?q=eT0yMDE5JnQ9RCZzaWQ9MTcwMzAwMA
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