

Harris County Economic Development Strategy Final Report September 2018

Business, Industry, Retail, and Commercial Recruitment

In order to diversify our local economy, create employment opportunities for our citizens, and enhance the quality of life for our residents, we will pursue an economic development strategy in conjunction with our regional partners to recruit new business, industry, retail, and commercial development to Harris County. We will keep the sustainability of our natural resources at the forefront as we seek economic growth for our county.

- Using general funds from the County Budget, we will pursue Georgia Ready for Accelerated Development (GRAD) certification from the Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) for Site “A” in the Northwest Harris Business Park.
- Using a portion of the revenue from a future Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), we will invest in the Northwest Harris Business Park to make it more attractive for new industries to relocate and existing industries to expand in Harris County.
- Because infrastructure is critical to development, we will seek public/private partnerships with other local governments, economic development organizations, utilities, and private industry to deliver utilities, such as sewer, water, and broadband, to areas with the greatest potential for growth.
- Because sales tax remains an important source of revenue for county government, municipalities, and the Board of Education, we will support near-term efforts to grow current and recruit new retail establishments in Harris County. Where practical, we will encourage development on existing infrastructure and brownfield sites to preserve the county’s natural environment.
- Because the Northwest Harris Business Park is in an ideal location for regional partnerships, we will continue to work on an agreement with cities and counties in the region to define the organizational structure, roles, and accountability to market the property to the GDEcD, site selection consultants, utility economic development teams, and others involved in economic development.
- We will establish a public/private partnership to fund activities such as branding, retail recruitment feasibility studies, and other economic and community development services that will strengthen the economic and community development efforts of Harris County.
- Realizing that tourism is the backbone of our economy, we will invest in assets that attract more visitors to our area and provide county residents more amenities.
- Working with our tourism partners in and around our county, we will define a much needed unifying brand for our county to promote Harris County as a destination for travel.

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Business Retention & Expansion Program for Existing Industry**

Representing both the Harris County Board of Commissioners and the Harris County Development Authority, the Harris County Chamber of Commerce will lead the Business Retention & Expansion Program (BREP) by conducting in-person and electronic surveys of businesses and industries currently operating in Harris County. Membership in the Harris County Chamber of Commerce is not required to participate in BREP.

In the first six months of BREP, the Chamber will conduct fifty (50) surveys and will conduct fifty (50) surveys annually thereafter. The Chamber will report the results of the survey to the Harris County Development Authority quarterly. The Development Authority will make recommendations to the Harris County Board of Commissioners regarding any changes in ordinances, policies, or incentives needed to ensure that Harris County builds business-friendly environment.

The Chamber will work with the Regional Project Manager with the Georgia Department of Economic Development to connect existing businesses and industries to resources and programs available from the State of Georgia for which they may be eligible to invest in jobs and capital equipment.

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Workforce Development

In order to support growth in our local economy, we must develop a well-trained workforce to fulfill the needs of existing employers and to attract new business and industry to Harris County. We will ensure our effort is holistic and encompasses our existing workforce, traditional learners, returning citizens, adult learners, future workforce, and veterans.

- To develop and retain homegrown talent, we will support the efforts of the Harris County School District to establish a College & Career Academy by 2022.
- We will work with Columbus State University, Columbus Technical College, and other regional educational institutions to bring programs to Harris County residents in need of training to upgrade current skills or learn new skills to be competitive in the job market.
- We will support the Business Retention & Expansion program of the Harris County Chamber of Commerce to connect existing employers in Harris County to regional employment resources, such as Georgia Department of Labor, Columbus State University, Columbus Technical College, and Goodwill Industries of the Southern Rivers.