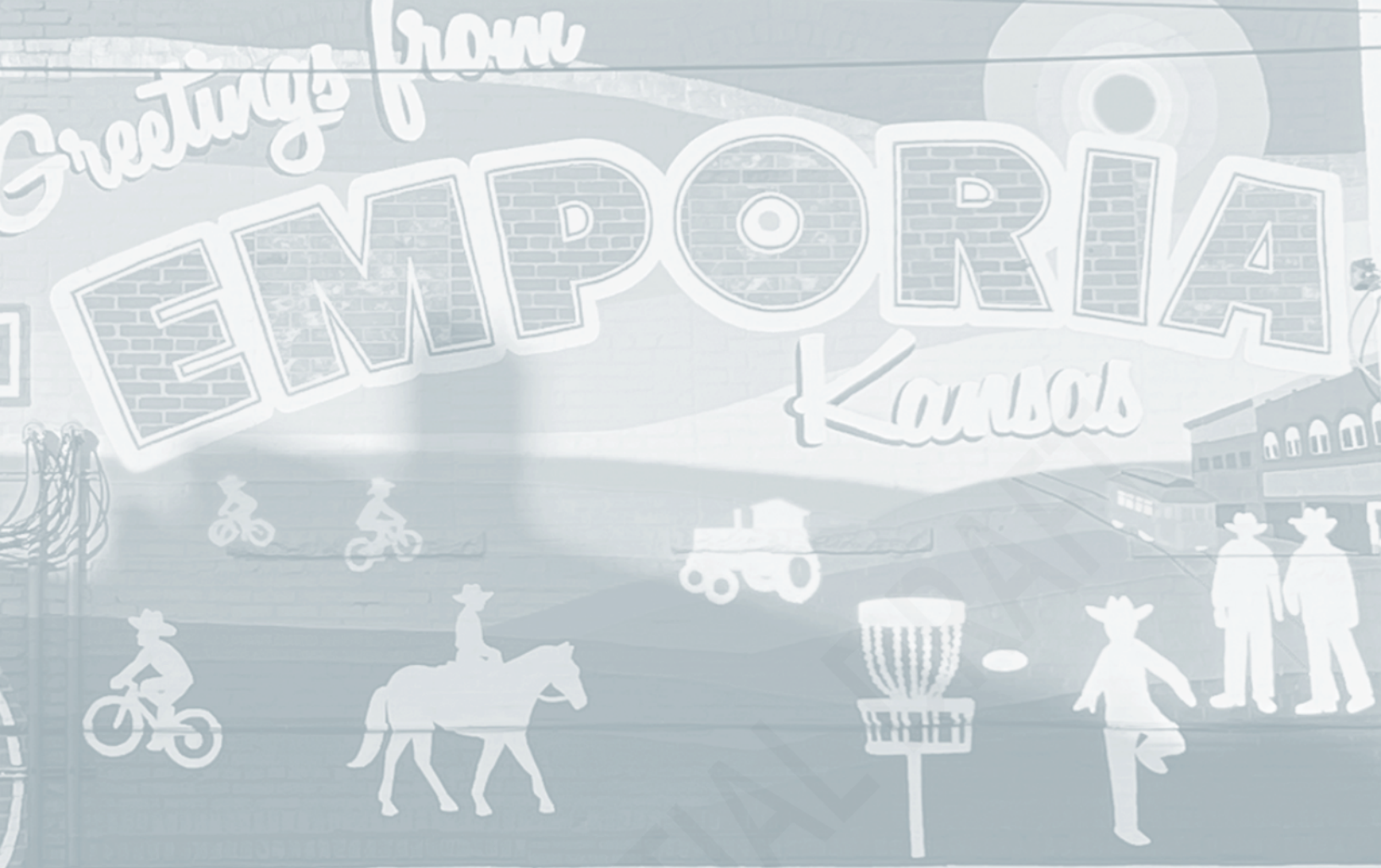




ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

EMPORIA, KANSAS

AUGUST 2024

Contents

Executive Summary ».....	2
Project Approach ».....	4
The First Impression The Data ».....	5
Stakeholder Engagement Themes & Takeaways ».....	9
The Second Impression What We Saw & Heard ».....	12
Emporia's Economic Development Ecosystem ».....	13
A Shared Vision for Economic Development //.....	14
A Pathway Forward Recommendations ».....	16
Short-Term Recommended Tactics //.....	17
Aspirational: Transition to an Umbrella Organization //.....	21
Appendix: Suggested Metrics ».....	25
Appendix: RDA Recruitment Profile.....	29
Appendix: Programmatic Best Practices.....	31

\

Executive Summary »

The City of Emporia is fortunate to have dedicated elected officials, staff and partners committed to driving the city's growth and prosperity. In 2017, the city achieved voter approval for a referendum that extended the half-percent sales tax, targeting two key objectives: promoting industrial and economic development, and reducing city-levied property taxes. While this illustrates strong community support and provides a stable financial foundation, these measures alone do not constitute a complete strategy.

The sales tax revenue has enabled the city to support the operating budgets of various economic development organizations. Recognizing the significance of these organizations, the city commission engaged VisionFirst Advisors to evaluate the potential and effectiveness of the economic development ecosystem. The commission understands that government alone cannot tackle every challenge—successful communities are built on strong partnerships.

Utilizing both data analytics and stakeholder engagement, VisionFirst evaluated the structure of system, which is made up of the city, the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce, Emporia Main Street, the Emporia Regional Development Association and Visit Emporia.

In meeting with more than 30 stakeholders, VisionFirst asked each why it was necessary to bring in a third-party consulting firm to recommend improvements in the city's economic development efforts. Responses fell into two themes:

1. "They are trying to fix a problem that does not exist."
2. "There is a lack of collaboration. Without partnerships, people and businesses will go somewhere else."

Ultimately, both can be true. The structure of having several organizations in addition to the city overseeing economic development activities is not flawed. What is flawed is the implementation of the activities. Critical elements such as meaningful collaboration, coordinated annual programs of work and contracted metrics to measure success are all currently missing.

It is critical to remember the referendum. The funds that are being utilized are taxpayer dollars. Dollars that demand accountability and transparency. Dollars that demand results. But achieving results requires breaking down silos, fostering collaboration and creating opportunities for open dialogue. By working together and actively listening to one another, these organizations can thrive both individually and collectively, and can set a new course for the city's future.

But it all begins with the city. Coordinated success will require selfless leadership that emphasizes metrics and fosters a holistic approach across various organizations. While structure provides the framework for implementation, leadership at the city and within each organization is the key to driving success.

A comprehensive vision and strategy are needed—one that encompasses business recruitment for competitive projects, business expansion and retention, entrepreneurship, small business formation, tourism and visitor attraction, retail development and downtown revitalization. The organizations responsible for these functions should be resourced based on proposed programs and services, with clear, measurable outcomes expected.

To drive meaningful outcomes, VisionFirst has developed a suite of recommendations and metrics for the city and its partner organizations, prioritizing alignment and accountability. These recommendations are grounded in research, best practices, stakeholder input and an understanding of community priorities. Each is designed to guide daily decision-making and shape the programs of work of the organizations, with the city government playing a pivotal role in ensuring success.

While the tactics provided do not suggest the need for an umbrella organization at this time, it is because understanding and collaboration must come first. Only after a deeper level of insight is achieved can the idea truly be considered – if and only if it serves the needs of the customer. If confidentiality is threatened, if resources are shifted based on personality rather than programming, if benefits to the taxpayers and businesses cannot be measured, then one organization is a detriment rather than an asset.

Regardless of the model, true success will only take place if both elected and private sector leadership create and share a unified vision, utilizing the existing organizations. This means holding each entity accountable for focusing on its core functions while collaborating within a well-aligned ecosystem.



Project Approach »

VisionFirst's approach incorporated a collection of local and regional data, a review of existing documentation and stakeholder feedback to offer recommendations to strategically align the city's economic development efforts. While each phase was unique, together the results provide the foundation for the recommendations.

01

Analyzed current economic factors and benchmarked the City of Emporia against the 60-minute drive time, the state and the nation.

02

Engaged leaders and staff, municipal officials and stakeholders about the city's priorities, values, strengths and challenges.

03

Assessed and evaluated organizational programs, practices and demographic data to identify how those factors support effectiveness and resident needs.

04

Synthesized key findings, themes along with best practices to develop the recommendations that meet community objectives.

05

Developed tactics and metrics for implementation across the ecosystem. The recommendations align resources to serve residents while ensuring fiscal accountability.



The First Impression | The Data »

To identify the best structure and strategies for the City of Emporia's economic development efforts, VisionFirst conducted high-level research on the county along with a 60-minute drive time (from the city center) and how those two regions compare to the state and the nation.

The figures on the following pages provide a snapshot of indicators that demonstrate the vitality of the community and region to residents, business and visitors alike. VisionFirst utilizes the data to provide insight into the community and offers the data as a benchmark for measuring the success of activities undertaken. Unless otherwise noted, the data is compiled from Chmura's JobsEQ as of Q4 in 2023 – the latest data available.

Figure 1: Demographic & Economic Overview

	Lyon County	60-Min Drive Time	Kansas	USA
Key Metrics				
Population (ACS)	32,182	614,191	2,935,922	331,097,593
Median Age	32.9	37.3	37.1	38.5
Under 18 Years	22.1%	22.7%	23.9%	22.1%
Population (Pop Estimates)	32,172	614,984	2,940,546	334,914,895
Population Annual Average Growth	-0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%
Labor Force Participation Rate (<i>civilian population 16 years and over</i>)	68.1%	64.8%	65.9%	63.3%
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate (<i>civilian population 25-54</i>)	85.1%	84.9%	84.7%	82.8%
Median Household Income	\$56,415	\$66,712	\$69,747	\$75,149
Per Capita Income	\$29,425	\$35,002	\$38,108	\$41,261
Mean Commute Time (minutes)	14.9	21.1	19.7	26.7
Diversity & Race				
Race: White	79.80%	82.7%	79.80%	65.90%
Race: Black or African American	1.80%	4.8%	5.60%	12.50%
Race: American Indian and Alaska Native	0.50%	0.8%	0.70%	0.80%
Race: Asian	1.90%	2.0%	3.00%	5.80%
Race: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0.1%	0.10%	0.20%
Race: Some Other Race	2.80%	2.4%	3.50%	6.00%
Race: Two or More Races	13.20%	7.2%	7.30%	8.80%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	22.50%	9.5%	12.60%	18.70%
Foreign Born	10.40%	4.3%	7.10%	13.70%
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 yrs and over)	7.40%	2.7%	4.50%	8.20%

Educational Attainment, Age 25-64	Lyon County	60-Min Drive Time	Kansas	USA
No High School Diploma	12.4%	6.3%	8.3%	10.1%
High School Graduate	30.9%	26.9%	23.7%	25.1%
Some College, No Degree	21.7%	23.2%	22.2%	19.7%
Associate's Degree	8.3%	9.7%	9.8%	9.2%
Bachelor's Degree	16.4%	21.9%	23.2%	22.4%
Postgraduate Degree	10.3%	12.1%	12.9%	13.4%
Housing				
Total Housing Units	14,998	272,640	1,278,548	140,943,613
Median House Value (of owner-occupied units)	\$136,100	\$179,991	\$189,300	\$281,900
Occupied Housing Units with No Vehicle Available (% of Occupied Units)	6.5%	5.5%	5.1%	8.3%
Social				
Poverty Level (of all people)	16.2%	12.3%	11.6%	12.5%
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	7.2%	6.7%	7.0%	11.5%
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	1.2%	1.2%	1.4%	1.4%
Disconnected Youth ³	1.8%	2.1%	2.2%	2.5%
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	33.9%	28.9%	29.1%	34.0%
Commuting				
Worked in Region of Residence	89.8%	N/A	93.7%	100.0%
Worked Outside Region of Residence	10.2%	N/A	6.3%	0.0%
Worked in State of Residence	99.6%	N/A	93.7%	96.8%
Worked Outside State of Residence	0.4%	N/A	6.3%	3.2%
K-12 Characteristics				
Total Enrollment ²	5,128	101,253	485,424	49,342,118
Total Teachers (FTE) ^{2,6}	418	7,694	38,353	3,210,437
Pupil/Teacher Ratio ^{2,6}	12.3	13.8	12.7	15.4
Spending Per Pupil ³	\$14,096	\$11,829	\$11,960	\$13,514
Electricity Rates				
Residential ⁵	\$0.143	\$0.142	\$0.140	\$0.149
Commercial ⁵	\$0.116	\$0.116	\$0.115	\$0.125
Industrial ⁵	\$0.091	\$0.088	\$0.083	\$0.084
Union Membership				
Total ⁴	8.3%	13.8%	9.1%	10.0%
Private Sector ⁴	5.9%	12.0%	7.0%	6.0%
Manufacturing ⁴	10.8%	16.0%	13.8%	7.7%
Public Sector ⁴	15.9%	19.6%	18.9%	34.0%

Figure 2: Industry Snapshot | Emporia, Lyon County & 60-Minute Drive Time

		Current			5-Year History			5-Year Forecast
NAICS	Industry	Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	Ann %	Ann % - Lyon County	Ann % 60 Min Drive	Ann % Growth
31	Manufacturing	4,189	\$56,559	3.37	4.8%	4.7%	2.8%	0.1%
62	Health Care & Social Assistance	1,872	\$47,265	0.82	-1.7%	-1.9%	0.5%	0.5%
61	Educational Services	1,859	\$44,187	1.50	-1.3%	-1.3%	-0.4%	-0.5%
44	Retail Trade	1,843	\$28,575	1.20	1.0%	0.9%	-0.4%	-0.6%
72	Accommod & Food Services	1,353	\$17,162	1.01	-0.3%	-0.4%	0.8%	-0.1%
92	Public Administration	697	\$50,222	0.98	0.6%	0.6%	0.3%	-0.2%
56	Administrative, Support & Waste Mgmt and Remediation Services	604	\$41,489	0.62	-5.6%	-5.1%	-1.2%	0.1%
81	Other Services (except Public Admin)	498	\$26,265	0.76	1.8%	1.9%	-1.3%	0.0%
42	Wholesale Trade	446	\$67,785	0.76	1.7%	1.5%	1.4%	-0.4%
48	Transportation & Warehousing	438	\$55,980	0.57	5.7%	1.5%	4.0%	0.2%
23	Construction	388	\$50,252	0.42	2.4%	2.1%	2.2%	-0.1%
54	Professional, Scientific & Tech Services	298	\$49,634	0.26	4.6%	5.1%	2.4%	0.3%
52	Finance & Insurance	254	\$56,705	0.41	0.1%	0.3%	-0.5%	0.0%
51	Information	213	\$41,332	0.70	-6.1%	-5.8%	-2.4%	-0.3%
71	Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	189	\$14,720	0.61	-0.2%	1.5%	1.0%	0.6%
53	Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	142	\$44,559	0.51	-5.6%	-3.5%	-1.5%	0.2%
11	Ag, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	105	\$44,545	0.55	-2.0%	-1.1%	-1.3%	-1.0%
22	Utilities	75	\$106,638	0.95	-0.5%	0.6%	-0.5%	3.0%
21	Mining, Quarrying, Oil, Gas Extraction	13	\$36,853	0.22	-11.2%	-11.5%	-4.8%	-0.4%
55	Mgmt of Companies/Enterprises	0	n/a	0.00	n/a	n/a	-0.6%	0.7%
Total - All Industries		15,475	\$44,847	1.00	0.8%	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%

Figure 3: 60-Minute Drive Time County Definition

Emporia - 60 Minute Drive Time is defined as the following counties:	
Anderson County, Kansas	Jefferson County, Kansas
Butler County, Kansas	Lyon County, Kansas
Chase County, Kansas	Marion County, Kansas
Coffey County, Kansas	Miami County, Kansas
Douglas County, Kansas	Morris County, Kansas
Franklin County, Kansas	Osage County, Kansas
Geary County, Kansas	Shawnee County, Kansas
Greenwood County, Kansas	Wabaunsee County, Kansas
Harvey County, Kansas	Woodson County, Kansas

Analyzing the data provides valuable insight into how the city is perceived online. By leveraging online metrics in conjunction with JobsEQ data, it becomes clear that the city functions as a regional hub with a diverse economic base. Several key data points stand out and are worth noting.

Manufacturing \\\

- Emporia is home to several manufacturing facilities, including Hopkins Manufacturing, Inc. and Michelin/Casmo are notable.
- Manufacturing offers a wage significantly higher at \$56,559 compared to the average of \$44,847. The industry saw significant growth over the last five years at 4.8%.

Employment and Unionization \\\

- Major employers include Emporia State University, Tyson Fresh Meats and Hostess Brands, which provide stable employment opportunities.
- Union rates are lower than the benchmarked regions, but per capita income is significantly lower. There is a need to recruit industry that offers a higher wage but still offers value to business.

Education and Health Services \\\

- Emporia State University offers employment opportunities and contributes to the educational services sector. Health services provided by Newman Regional Health and other medical facilities are vital for residents and the local economy. The two provide more than 3,700 jobs at wages slightly higher than the average.

Infrastructure and Transportation \\\

- Emporia's strategic location at the intersection of major highways (I-35 and I-335) enhances its logistics and transportation sectors. This facilitates the movement of goods and services, supporting local businesses and industries. The transportation and warehousing sector has seen significant growth at 5.7% and is projected to grow at 0.2% over the next five years.

Population & Workforce \\\

- Given the size of the community, the labor force participation rate is impressive. The labor force participation rate for the civilian population 16 years and over is 68.1% and the prime-age labor force participation rate for the civilian population 25-54 is 85.1% - higher than the drive-time region, the state and the nation.
- The city has also experienced a significant growth in the Hispanic population topping more than 22% with 10% as foreign born.
- Two areas where the city should aim to improve are poverty level which currently is 16.2 higher than the other regions as well as educational attainment for those with an associate degree or higher which lags at 35.0%, compared to 43.6%, 45.8% and 45.0%, respectively.

Stakeholder Engagement | Themes & Takeaways »

In assessing the economic development structure and goals of the City of Emporia, VisionFirst Advisors, along with city staff, developed an engagement plan that included in-person interviews and discussions with municipal leaders, organizational heads and stakeholders. The purpose of this engagement was to gather candid observations, feedback and ideas from the community to help direct focus and prioritize efforts. Stakeholder engagement sought to answer key questions such as:

- What are your thoughts on how the city can grow?
- What does economic development success look like to you?
- How are the entities working together today? What's working well, and what isn't?
- Where should the city and each entity focus their efforts over the next three to five years?
- What is the city's top three strengths in growing the economy?
- What does success look like, and how should implementation proceed?

Additionally, VisionFirst asked stakeholders why it was necessary to bring in a third-party consulting firm to recommend improvements. The responses generally fell into two distinct groups, reflecting differing definitions of economic development. These strong and differing opinions could lead to resistance against any proposed organizational changes, making it challenging to implement necessary reforms.

The themes highlight the complexity and challenges facing Emporia's economic development efforts, emphasizing the need for strategic alignment, improved communication and greater collaboration among stakeholders.

The key findings from these meetings are summarized on the following pages, grouped by the main themes that emerged from stakeholder conversations. The comments presented are a sampling of the feedback from stakeholder engagement and do not reflect the opinions of VisionFirst Advisors.



PASSIONATE STAFF & BOARD LEADERSHIP

- Each organization is fortunate to have passionate leaders and a supportive board who are committed to organizational success.
- Staff at each of the organizations have developed innovative programming to engage their customers and clients.
- There are opportunities for improvement through better use of data, best practices and strategic partnerships.
- There is a need to engage and develop programming that leverages the growing Hispanic community especially for small business and workforce growth.



LACK OF COORDINATION

- Without contracts that define measures of success, each organization is undertaking programs and initiatives without considering the city's needs and outlined strategic plan.
- Retail development is wanted by many of the community, but no organization is willing to lead the effort or define the parameters for success.
- The changing economy and demographics provide a need for more long-term planning.
- There is a need for additional collaboration and a suite of metrics that each organization utilizes.
- There's a debate over the roles and responsibilities of various organizations such as the RDA, city commission, Main Street and others, and whether they overlap or complement each other effectively.
- Multiple sources mention communication problems among different entities involved in economic development, which hampers collaboration and creates misunderstandings.



RESIDENTS ARE PROUD BUT WANT ADDITIONAL SERVICES

- Residents enjoy the multitude of activities including the gravel bike event, the PRIDE parade and Veteran's Day history.
- The community has supported novel ideas including funding for expanding local childcare, affordable housing as well as creating a makerspace with the Main Street offices.
- Residents would like more services and amenities including large scale grocery stores and additional health care choices.
- Metrics need to be shared for residents to understand value and services.



What we heard...

"If we expect more, we have to do more."

"The structures should change because the times have changed."

"Trying to fix a problem where there isn't one."

"They should all be natural allies; they all have a role."

"There's a lot of fence building" and the longer this goes on, the deeper the division."

"Without partnerships, people and businesses will go somewhere else."



CONCERNS OVER IMPLEMENTATION

- Doubts exist if there really is a problem to fix and due to the current divides, no one will spearhead implementation of any recommendation despite validity.
- Programs, services and metrics need to align with the city's strategic plan.
- The importance of fostering collaboration and partnerships between different organizations and sectors to achieve common economic development goals.
- There is a desire for a unified approach to economic development goals and strategies.



BROAD DEFINITION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Each organization has a different definition of economic development rather than a unified city approach.
- While each organization felt it was accomplishing objectives for economic prosperity there was little collaboration for focused efforts.
- Large misconceptions of traditional economic development and economic impact to area.
- Without an overarching vision, entrepreneurship and tourism is seen as competing with business recruitment.
- Lacking an in depth business retention and expansion program (BR&E).

The Second Impression | What We Saw & Heard »

Developing an effective strategy necessitates a clear understanding of the city's current situation from an outsider's perspective. **The following information presents VisionFirst's initial impressions of the city, the existing economic development organizations, the activities carried out and the level of stakeholder support.**



OUTPERFORMING EXPECTATIONS

The city's population is just 24,000, fitting the definition of a rural area. However, upon exiting the interstate, the city reveals a different narrative. Significant retail outlets and manufacturing activities are present, a vibrant main street is emerging and the city hosts international events.

Furthermore, the community's diversity and inclusivity, exemplified by its Pride parade, distinguish it from other similarly sized communities. Additionally, the city boasts impressive labor force participation rates for both the 16-and-over and prime-age categories.



MYTH VS. FACT

Throughout the stakeholder interviews, VisionFirst encountered several statements that undervalue the community's strengths. For instance, many mentioned that the community struggles to attract new industry due to the two-year timeframe required to bring utilities to a site. However, this is a national issue, with many communities facing similar timelines. Additionally, many stakeholders were unaware of the community's notable labor participation rates and amenities, considering its size. Finally, most stakeholders viewed the city's size as a disadvantage. However, companies and site selectors rarely focus solely on city limits. The area within a 60-minute drive encompasses a population of over 635,000 and is well-served by major interstates, highlighting its strategic location.



RESOURCES WITHOUT PLANS & MEASUREMENT

The city's leadership is dedicated to fostering a comprehensive economic development ecosystem, with each organization boasting passionate staff and leaders. However, the current funding process for these organizations does not promote or require collaboration, a coordinated plan of work or clear metrics for success. The issue is not the number of organizations but the lack of a unified vision to guide their efforts, collaboration and defined initiatives. Each organization should align its activities with the city's four strategic priorities: responsible resource stewardship, growth, quality of life and citizen engagement.

Emporia's Economic Development Ecosystem »

Government functions as an interconnected system driven by the needs of its residents, guided by the policies set by elected officials, executed by staff and stakeholder organizations and measured by the achievement of desired outcomes.

The city's strategic plan and subsequent goals serve as a roadmap for this system. Local goal setting and policymaking are complex processes that require the collective efforts of officials, staff, support organizations and even residents. Each participant must view the city as a whole, rather than focusing solely on individual interests, to create a system that ensures prosperity both now and in the future.

The City of Emporia's vision statement is:

"The City of Emporia is a thriving community where every citizen enjoys a high quality of life. Committed to excellence and good stewardship of our resources, we provide quality essential services and foster an environment where families and businesses flourish."

The vision, goals, priorities and policies adopted by the city for its 2024-2026 strategic plan impact everyone in the community – residents, businesses, customers and visitors. The pathway, priorities and policies determine what services will be provided, the level of those services, what kinds of development will occur and ultimately the community's future.

When goals are clearly defined and assigned, stakeholders can determine effectiveness. When staff and resources are allocated, stakeholders can measure efficiency. When rules and policies are developed and reported, stakeholders can understand progress and celebrate successful outcomes.

The same is true for the organizations that contract and support the city's services and priorities. An effective system requires those that work directly or indirectly within it to have a shared vision, an achievable mission, aligned goals and strategies that achieve each.

The creation, implementation and measurement of the city's strategic plan form the foundation for the road ahead. Aligning goals and strategies around a shared vision, mission and values enables those responsible for executing the plan to understand their roles and responsibilities in achieving success while showing programmatic and financial commitment to residents. This is particularly important for the organizations funded by the city. Their programs and associated metrics must align with the city's overall goals.

A Shared Vision for Economic Development //

Despite the city's vision and plan, the absence of a unified strategic direction for economic development has led to fragmented programs and hindered progress. A collaborative and inclusive approach is essential. By fostering a positive, dynamic and demonstrating collaboration, the city can generate momentum that not only excites and engages the community but also achieves results faster than ever before.

VisionFirst emphasizes the importance of identifying the community's "North Star"—a shared vision that reflects the community's values and aspirations and paints a collective image of what they want to achieve. This vision is too expansive for any single organization, individual or group to realize on their own; it can only be accomplished through collective effort.

This North Star, resonating with all those involved in the city's economic development, should guide efforts, outline a clear course of action, inspire participants and provide metrics to measure success. Aligning the vision, mission and values with the community's goals fosters trust and confidence. To this end, VisionFirst utilized the "Four W's": who you are, what you do, why you do it and for whom—ensuring that the community's aspirations are at the heart of every initiative.

Figure 4: The 4 W Visioning Process



Based on the interviews and engagement, VisionFirst developed the following vision, mission and values for the city's economic development efforts. However, this iteration will need to be discussed by staff and stakeholders.



VISION

Emporia is an economically vibrant community that provides opportunities for residents, visitors and businesses alike.



MISSION

Together, Emporia's economic development activities provide services that foster economic growth, community placemaking and fiscal sustainability and promoting resident, business and visitor wellbeing.



VALUES

Core values help define and drive behavior and should be integrated into daily operations. VisionFirst recommends adopting the following core values to ensure the delivery of services that the residents of the City of Emporia value.

- **Trusted:** Delivering services in a professional and honest manner that conveys trust, mutual respect and open lines of communication with elected officials, employees, residents and partner organizations.
 - **Collaborative:** Emphasizing the importance of cooperation, synergy and collective effort among individuals, teams and entities within the economic development ecosystem.
 - **Transparent:** Clearly communicating and engaging residents about plans, priorities and progress as well as ensuring easy access to public information and services.
 - **Responsive:** Consistently providing excellent customer service through active engagement and timely problem-solving to exceed expectations.
 - **Innovative:** Creating an environment that supports innovative ideas, creative solutions that elevate and diversify the city's services and economy.
-

A Pathway Forward | Recommendations »

The City of Emporia is fortunate to have dedicated elected officials, staff and partners committed to driving the city's growth and prosperity. In 2017, the city achieved voter approval for a referendum that extended a half-percent sales tax, targeting two key objectives: promoting industrial and economic development, and reducing city-levied property taxes. While this illustrates strong community support and provides a stable financial foundation, these measures alone do not constitute a complete strategy.

The sales tax revenue has enabled the city to support the operating budgets of various economic development organizations. However, critical elements such as collaboration, annual work programs and metrics to measure success are currently missing.

Recognizing the significance of these organizations, the city commission engaged VisionFirst Advisors to evaluate the potential and effectiveness of the economic development ecosystem. They understand that government alone cannot tackle every challenge—successful communities are built on strong partnerships.

While each entity within Emporia's economic development ecosystem plays a crucial role, achieving transformational change requires breaking down silos, fostering collaboration and creating opportunities for open dialogue. By working together and actively listening to one another, these organizations can thrive both individually and collectively, setting a new course for the city's future.

This initiative begins with the city. To drive meaningful outcomes, VisionFirst has developed a suite of recommendations and metrics for the city and its partner organizations, prioritizing alignment and accountability. These recommendations, grounded in research, best practices, stakeholder input and an understanding of community priorities, are designed to guide daily decision-making and shape the work programs of each organization, with the city government playing a pivotal role in ensuring success.

Short-Term Recommended Tactics //

Implementation would begin upon action plan approval through the next 18 months

Identify the Needs of the Customer

- **Utilize Customer Needs Matrix to Align Organizations:** Before developing annual activities, it is essential to outline the focus and responsibilities of each organization involved and then use this foundation to identify their customers and understand their needs. Based on the focus and responsibilities of each organization, VisionFirst developed a customer needs matrix, reflecting recommendations below, to optimize the efforts of these entities. The responsibilities outlined in Figure 6 to ensure roles are defined while identifying opportunities for strategic alliances. In a small city like Emporia, with limited resources, coordination and collaboration are vital to serving a broad range of customers effectively.

Figure 5: Organizational Focus & Roles

City	RDA	Chamber	Main Street	Visit Emporia
FOCUS				
Deliver Public Services to Enhance the Quality of Life for Residents	Business Recruitment, Retention & Expansion within Targeted Industry Sectors	Small Business Support for New & Growing Companies along with New Resident Services	Development & Revitalization of Designated Main Street Corridor	Increase Tourism to Emporia by Generating Awareness & Demand
RESPONSIBILITIES				
Provide essential services, such as public safety, infrastructure and utilities, enforcing local laws and regulations, managing public resources and promoting the overall welfare and development of the community.	Attract new businesses, supporting existing industry and promoting job creation. In coordination with the city, lead land acquisition and sales, provide financial incentives and infrastructure support to foster a job creation and capital investment.	Support and advocate for the business community and its members, by providing resources, networking opportunities and representation to help businesses thrive.	Revitalize and preserve the downtown area by promoting by supporting local businesses and enhancing the community's quality of life through redevelopment and community engagement.	Lead tourism planning, identify competitive advantages, create unique experiences, support the local community and ensuring tourism sustainability.

Figure 6: Customer Groups & Needs Assessment Matrix

	Needs	Expectations	Programs, Products, Services
Competitive Projects	• Developable sites that are shovel-ready • Competitive incentives and tax structure	• Accurate, timely and understandable information • Confidentiality • City and RDA are reliable partners • Seamless partner coordination	• Information on sites, buildings, incentives, regulatory environment, workforce, utilities • Long-term partnership
Existing Industry	• Long-term relationships that support growth • Available and reliable workforce • Conducive regulatory environment • Infrastructure to move product	• Accurate, timely and understandable information • Advocacy and partnership	• Assist in workforce development, attraction and retention • Relationships that support expansion, retention and prevent closure. • Connect to local suppliers to reduce logistics costs, getting critical materials
Small Businesses	• Programs that support business growth • Financing resources • Advocacy for policies and regulations that support growth • Access to customers • Market data	• Accurate, timely and understandable information • Advocacy and partnership	• Workshops and networking events, permitting and business regulation assistance • Advocate for small business growth • Inventory of space in downtown or other locations
Out-of-Market Retail	• Sites with infrastructure • Ease of permitting and regulatory environment	• Accurate, timely and understandable information • Advocacy and partnership	• Market demographics • Site characteristics • Public finance programs
Visitors	• Attractions • Events • Accommodations • Ease of travel • Ideas for leisure travel	• Accurate and updated information • Information is easy to find	• Websites, publications, news stories
Residents	• Housing options, quality education, safe environment, affordability, amenities, accountable government, job opportunities	• Knowledge of area as it relates to city services and options	• Online resources for new residents • Dashboard of economic measures

Not all customers are the same for each organization. Ultimately, there are two types of customers:

1. Core customers are critical to the organization's existence.
2. Indirect customers or stakeholders, while not central to the organization's mission, can significantly impact its success (e.g., media).

Each customer group has distinct needs and expectations that are dynamic and vary over time. A holistic economic development approach optimizes the city's ability to meet these needs by leveraging all organizations within a customer-focused framework.

The challenge is to establish ongoing methods to capture the "voice of the customer," translate these needs into improved products and services and gather feedback to assess performance. Successfully meeting these needs will turn customers into advocates for Emporia, amplifying the city's marketing and sales efforts.

Figure 7: Which Entities Support the Customer Group

	Competitive Projects	Existing Industry	Small Business (In-Market Retail)	Out-of-Market Retail (Chains & Franchises)	Visitors	Residents
City Staff	X	X	X	X	X	X
RDA	X	X		X		X
Chamber			X		X	X
Visit Emporia					X	X
Main Street			X	X		X

Establish a Coordinated Framework

- **Form a Steering Committee:** Create a steering committee comprising representatives from each organization and one city commissioner to oversee collaborative efforts, set goals and ensure accountability. The first meeting should be the joint planning session outlined below.
- **Set Shared Goals:** Conduct a half-day joint planning session to establish shared goals that align with each organization's mission, objectives and customers. The session should be facilitated by a professional from outside the community. The session should include the entire staff of each organization, the board chair, the city manager and one commissioner.
- **Identify Collaborative Projects:** Identify and prioritize projects that leverage the strengths of multiple organizations and where increased synergies could be beneficial.
- **Establish Annual Metrics:** Using the metrics located in the appendix, establish 10 metrics that apply to all organizations and 10 specific annual metrics related to their individual programs of work and activities – these should be tied to annual budget requests. The metrics should range from attainable to aspirational.

- **Streamline Data and Information Sharing:** Establish protocols for sharing data and information relevant to economic development initiatives. This includes market research, economic impact studies and community needs assessments. Identify cost savings measures as part of the effort.

Enhance Accountability & Transparency

- **Improve Contracting Mechanisms:** New agreements between the city and each entity should be reviewed annually but guarantee a three-year funding cycle.
- **Establish Reporting Timeframes:** Each agreement/contract between the city and the economic development organization should contain deliverables and reporting requirements, to include but not limited to:
 - **Annual Report** to include information, status and updates on the goals, metrics, key activities and deliverables as established in the funding agreement and how each aligns with the city's strategic plan (June).
 - **Quarterly Economic Development Meetings** to include the mayor, one additional city commissioner along with the executive director and board chair of each organization. The meetings will include but are not limited to the discussion of contracted programs and initiatives, the status of recruitments or ongoing projects (within confidentiality agreements); and discussion of any resources or assistance needed from the city to achieve the shared goals.
- **Implement Annual Board Training:** It is essential for board members to understand not only the operations of their own organization but also those within the broader economic development ecosystem. To achieve this, an annual joint board orientation should be established as part of the onboarding process for any new members and elected officials. Components of the orientation should include, but not limited to:

– Ethics policy	– Overall value proposition of past projects
– Role of the board	– Role of the staff
– Programs, products & services	– Financial overview
– How each organization fits in the economic development ecosystem	– Confidentiality of work and what is shared publicly
- **Executive Director Contracting:** Long-term consideration should be given to the approval of the contract of the executive director of each organization along with associated performance metrics.
- **Dissolve Emporia Enterprises:** Given the RDA's ability to purchase and sell land, Emporia Enterprises role is duplicative. In dissolving the organization, the Chamber would gain control of the assets which would then be transferred to the RDA. Coordination among the leadership of both entities along with the city is needed to ensure a smooth transition along with communicating the accountability and transparency aspects of eliminating the entity which would include additional board oversight. A new board structure is needed to ensure broad representation and the ability to maintain a quorum. The current structure includes: from two city representatives, two county representatives, one Chamber representative,

one Emporia Enterprises representative and one at-large position. The structure would expand to 11 members and include: three city representatives (can include one commissioner, city manager and one representative), three county representatives (can include one commissioner, county controller and one representative), an utility representative, the Emporia State University president, the Flint Hills Technical College president, one representative from a business with more than 100 employees, one representative from a small business with less than 100 employees. In addition, both the Main Street director and the Chamber president would have non-voting seats on the board.

Expand Stakeholder Engagement

- **Enhance Websites:** Each organization's website lacks details about programs, services and success. Collectively, the group should reimagine their websites with a unified look that clearly outlines staffing, programs by customer, services, how to volunteer, funding and metrics.
- **Gather Community Input:** Solicit feedback and input from the community through surveys, town hall meetings and focus groups. Ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.

Aspirational: Transition to an Umbrella Organization //

Implementation to begin upon completion of short-term strategies and seek to create new organization at three years.

Based on our discussions and feedback, there is support for establishing a private, not-for-profit umbrella organization to coordinate a holistic approach to economic development in the city and county. However, the strong and varied opinions on which existing organizations should be consolidated, preserved or restructured—along with differing views on governance and funding—make this approach challenging to implement. Simply rebranding the existing organizations and creating an overarching 501(c)(6) board to direct funding is unlikely to succeed. Instead, VisionFirst recommends a strategic, phased approach with short-term, intermediate and long-term objective – a crawl, walk, run approach. **VisionFirst recommends the early development of an organization at 18 months with a goal to launch a new organization in three years.**

The short-term recommendations focus on fostering greater collaboration through clearly defined goals for each organization. These goals should be supported by appropriate funding and measured through metrics, with oversight provided by a steering committee to guide initial efforts.

Sustained success in economic development, however defined, is most effectively achieved when the business sector leads in partnership with government. While public-led economic development funded by single-source tax revenue can be effective, it often struggles to maintain long-term success due to the shifting nature of political influence. This is true not only for Emporia but for any economic development organization reliant on public funding.

As Emporia begins to reshape its overall organizational model, the focus should be on clearly defining economic development, establishing a forward-looking vision, allocating public funding based on sound objectives and metrics and leveraging selfless business leadership across all involved organizations to achieve these goals. The city must drive the vision and framework for the overall economic development strategy.

Any new umbrella organization should be designed around a clearly defined vision and measurable outcomes, such as increasing visitor spending, hotel room nights, reducing downtown property vacancy rates, boosting retail sales, fostering small business growth, supporting new business start-ups and attracting manufacturing capital investment and jobs. More ambitious goals might include population growth, higher household incomes, reduced poverty rates and an expanded tax base.

The umbrella organization should be structured around the functions required and the needs of its customer groups (as outlined in the matrix), utilizing a single paid team and drawing on resources from special-purpose entities like the RDA and Main Street, which could contract with the new 501(c)(6) organization. In this model, the boards of existing government organizations would continue to exist but would contract with the umbrella group, which would be led by a single CEO and governing board.

Regardless of structure, each of the entities should strive to be high-performing organizations operating efficiently and professionally, focusing on meeting the needs of its customers and proactively engaging stakeholders.

In working with and for numerous economic development entities throughout the country, VisionFirst has observed certain characteristics of those EDOs operating at a higher performance level regardless of structure which include:

- Operates at the speed of business.
- Solicits private sector involvement for incorporating business practices.
- Utilizes intellectual capital of business leaders to develop policy and strategy.
- Instills a laser-like focus on vision and purpose.
- Develops a culture for professional development of others within the community.
- Creates a collaboration of the public and private sectors and their various entities to achieve economic success.
- Focuses on programs and strategies that demonstrate measurable success.
- Understands the value proposition of investments and demonstrates the value of a project for public support.
- Commits to fiscal responsibility and management of programs and initiatives.
- Practices transparency with operations.
- Builds support and trust through proactive communications.
- Creates an operating congruence amongst the various boards that support and/or enable economic development.
- Communicates effectively so that stakeholders understand the purpose.

- Have succession planning in place for staff and board members.

One such example of an umbrella organization model described above is the **Area Development Partnership** in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Private Partnership with Public Support

In this model, the private corporation is a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) not-for-profit corporation and serves as the leader in economic development. In certain instances, the funding comes directly from the city/county to the corporation and in others there is a contract for services.

About: The Area Development Partnership (ADP), based in Hattiesburg, Mississippi is recognized as the lead economic development organization for the greater Hattiesburg area serving Forrest, Lamar and Perry counties. All the staff are employees of the ADP and report to one board that is private sector driven with multiple public sector partners.

In 1992, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce and the Forrest County Industrial Foundation were merged in to the new 501(c)(6) corporation named the Area Development Partnership. All the assets of those two organizations and staff become part of the ADP. While the new private sector organization was created, several public sector economic development partners remained in existence. Those public partners include the Forrest County Industrial Park Commission (FCIPC), Lamar County Economic Development Authority (LCEDA) and the Perry County Economic Development District (PCEDD).

While all three of these entities have a board, each has a multi-year contract with the ADP to provide specific economic development functions and services. These public entities are support organizations to the ADP providing critical tools for successful economic development. The FCIPC owns the industrial park and has built and leased spec buildings and purchased property with the intent of recruiting job creating businesses to the region. The same is true for both the LCEDA and PCEDD. The ADP staff manages the day-to-day operations and financials of these support organizations. In addition to the contract fees received, the ADP adds private sector dollars to the overall budget through membership dues, nontraditional income and capital campaigns.

- **Year Formed:** 1992 - In 1992, the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce and the Forrest County Industrial Foundation were merged in to the new 501(c)(6) corporation named the Area Development Partnership
- **Model:** Public/Private Economic Development Partnership
- **Staff Size:** 11: President, Executive Vice President, Chief Financial Officer, VP of Marketing & Research, Economic Development Director, Community Development Manager, Community Development Coordinator, Communications & Events Director, Communications & Events Coordinator, Membership Director, Investor Relations Director.
- **Board Members & Structure:** 20 representatives from the corporate sector and the president of the ADP serve as members on the board. 8 ex-officio members (non-voting) serve on the board including the Chair of Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, Forrest County

Industrial Park Commission, Hattiesburg Convention Commission, Lamar County Board of Supervisors, Mayor of the City of Hattiesburg, Forrest County Board of Supervisors, Mayor City of Petal, Perry County Board of Supervisors.

- **Funding:** Public and private

PROS	CONS
• Utilizes existing organizations. • A business focused board drives the decision making with limited direct public involvement. • Private funds support operations. • Staff are all private employees. • Public board focuses on managing its assets, i.e., industrial park, buildings, etc. • Private organization leads the process. • Disruptions in public funding can be offset by the private sector. • No local or state legislation required.	• Model relies on contractual relationships between private and public entities. • Public board focuses on managing its assets, i.e., industrial park, buildings, etc. • Contracts can become cumbersome. • Short-sighted agendas can disrupt the process. • Possible disruptions in funding.

Appendix: Suggested Metrics »

CITY METRICS

Indicator	Quantity	Units
Population growth	Population	#, % share
Median income growth (total, race, gender)	Population	%, \$
Tax revenue (sales, transient guest tax, etc.)	Revenue	\$
Cost (Taxes) per citizen versus peers	Revenue	\$
Surplus/deficit per citizen	Revenue	\$
Population diversity	Population	#, % share
New housing starts and sales	Infrastructure	#, %
Businesses by employment size	Businesses	#, %
Percent of locally owned businesses	Businesses	#, % share
Total and per capita expenditures on arts and culture	Investment	\$
Social amenities and services (parks, recreation, churches, schools, medical)	Facilities	#
Socio-economic profiles and indices (rank of local health areas)	Index	Rank
Poverty rate	Population	#, %
Health facilities (hospitals, beds, health centers)	Facilities	#
Average life expectancy, morbidity, mortality rates, other health measures	Years	#
Childcare openings	Facilities	#, % growth
Schools	Facilities	#
School achievement	Test scores	%
Third grade reading scores	Test scores	%
Attendance (reduce chronic absenteeism)	Achievement	%
Graduation numbers, rates	Graduation rates	#, %
Educational Attainment (associate degree & above)	Achievement	#, % increase in advanced education
Crime rates	Occurrences/1000	%
Transit services	Facilities	#, type
Festivals and events	Events	#, type

COLLECTIVE METRICS FOR CITY & FUNDED ENTITIES

Indicator	Quantity	Units
Linkage between city strategic plan & organizations' strategic plans	Relationships	#, narrative
Relationships with residents, business, educational institutions	Relationships	#, survey, qualitative
Partnerships for sharing resources	Partnerships	#, qualitative
Board roles and responsibilities trainings	Partnerships	#, qualitative
Volunteers	People	#, qualitative
Community outreach - meetings, workshops, presentations,	Interactions	#, survey, qualitative
Local/regional partnerships	Partnerships	#, size, type
Private/public contributions to engagement/outreach	Investment	\$, qualitative
Information sharing with stakeholders	Interactions	#, qualitative
Businesses participating in board/leadership	Businesses	#
Businesses, individuals participating in program delivery	Businesses	#
Website ranking (search engine optimization)	Search position	#
Client success stories	Stories	#, qualitative

CHAMBER METRICS

Indicator	Quantity	Units
Ignite funding granted	Grants	#, qualitative
Members (new and retained)	Partnerships	#, %
Programs conducted (satisfaction survey)	Programming	#, %, qualitative
Childcare spots created	Programs	#, % increase
Kindergarten readiness	Testing	% increase
Recipients of coaching/advocacy	Recipients	#, qualitative
Recipients of technical assistance	Recipients	#, qualitative
Recipients of training	Recipients	#, qualitative
Small business assisted	Recipients	#, qualitative
Small businesses surveyed	Businesses	#, qualitative
Host small business start-up and growth programs	Businesses	#, qualitative
Minority businesses supported	Businesses	#, % change
Marketing campaigns, type, reach, efficiency	Campaigns	#
Marketing expenditures	Expenditures	\$

MAIN STREET METRICS

Indicator	Quantity	Units
Total net jobs created (full, part-time, total)		#, \$ payroll
Hourly wage increase		%, \$ change
Square feet of buildings rehabilitated		#, \$ value
Vacancy rates		% change
Business program participants still in business 1 - 5 years		#, % change
Succession plans, transfers to new owners	Plans, Transfers	#, qualitative
Resources to current and prospective businesses		#, % change
Connect businesses with outside financial resources		%, \$ change
Networking and mentorship initiatives		#, % change
Minority businesses supported		#, % change
Offer direct financial support to businesses	Grants	#, \$
Assist with business marketing efforts		#, % change
Host entrepreneurship and incubator programs		#, % change
Volunteer recruitment, retention		#, hours
Online reputation	Net Promoter Score (NPS)	%
Website/social media hits	Page hits	#

RDA METRICS

Indicator	Quantity	Units
Businesses by industry	Businesses	#, %
Businesses created (by industry or sector) versus all businesses	Businesses	#, %
Availability and cost of business inputs (tax rates, energy, labor)	Various	#, \$
Business climate rating	Business climate	rank; qualitative
Labor force participation size and rate	Workforce	#, %
Relationships with site selectors	Relationships	#, qualitative
Businesses attracted (by industry or sector) versus all businesses	Attraction	#, %, qualitative
Business leads that choose to locate in community/region	Attraction	#, %, qualitative
Presence, quality, ROI of incentive programs	Investment	#, survey, qualitative
Branding efforts launched	Attraction	#, click rates, success measures
FDI attracted to the community/region	Attraction	#, \$
Timeline for project completion	Attraction	#
Businesses retained (by industry or sector) versus all businesses	Retention	#, %

Businesses expanded (by industry or sector) versus all businesses	Expansion	#, %
New products, product lines, services	Expansion	#, qualitative
Exports and trade activity	Exports, trade	\$, % growth
New market development	Expansion	\$
Businesses at risk retained	Retention	#, qualitative
Assessment of business workforce needs	Workers	rating, narrative

VISIT EMPORIA METRICS

Indicator	Quantity	Units
Tourists/visitors	Tourists	#, % change
Tourists/visitor total spending	Expenditures	#, % change
Tourist/visitor average spending	Expenditures	\$
Tourist/visitor length of stay	Days	#
Accommodations facilities (hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, vacation properties, lodges, resorts)	Properties	#
Accommodation units (hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, vacation properties, lodges, resorts)	Rooms	#
Room revenues	Revenues	\$
Campground/RV facilities	Properties	#
Campground/RV units	Sites	#
Approved tourism facilities (accommodations, attractions, festivals, events)	Properties	#
Tourism businesses	Businesses	#
Packages, experiences	Packages	#
Online reputation	Net Promoter Score (NPS)	%
Website/social media hits	Page hits	#
Municipal and regional district tax (MRDT)	Revenues	\$

Appendix: RDA Recruitment Profile

Suggested Title »

- President & CEO

Suggested Compensation Range »

- Given the community's size, existing industry, organization size and fiduciary responsibilities the suggested salary range is \$150,000 to \$175,000 based on experience. This does not account for additional compensation such as vehicle allowance, bonus structure, etc.

Desired Job Experience and Expertise »

- Executive management experience with proven track record of successfully leading a similar organization, economic development or corporate experience
- Strong experience and knowledge of implementing programs and initiatives
- Ability to collaborate with local business, leaders and stakeholders and provide solutions and break down silos
- History of leadership with attention to details
- Knowledge and understanding of economic development operational functions
- Proven track record of successfully navigating relationships with industry professionals, consultants, elected officials, community partner organizations and community stakeholders
- Exceptional communication skills
- Ability to recommend and implement new programs and initiatives when needed

Characteristics & Personality Traits »

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Forward thinker | • Approachable |
| • Natural leader | • Resourceful |
| • Facilitator | • Driven |
| • Strong work ethic | • Creative |
| • Communicator | • Collaborator/team builder |
| • Focused | • Good listener |

Education »

Qualified candidates will have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with major coursework in Business, Business Administration, Marketing or related field. The most highly qualified candidates for consideration will be selected based on a combination of education, career experience and accomplishments that best fits the needs of the organization.

Top Requirements »

- Executive leadership experience
- Leading as a team builder
- Ability to partner with local community leaders and partner organizations to deliver results
- Background, knowledge and familiarity with chamber of commerce, main street programs and economic development functions
- Strong work ethic
- Professionalism
- Communication skills
- Ability to navigate various issues and conversations

Goals & Objectives »

- Close communication with the Board of Directors, members and local leaders to prioritize initiatives
- Coordinate existing resources and identify needed resources, programs and partners to fill gaps
- Build reporting capability to allow for measuring activity and success
- Execute overall administrative strategy of the organization and build support for the strategy through creative leadership
- Develop the needed infrastructure, systems, protocols and partnerships
- Engage public and private sector leadership in activities and initiatives
- Gain quick understanding of Emporia region and community culture
- Continue focused approach to support minority business and diversity

Strengths of the Position »

- Engaged economic development community and stakeholders eager to move the community forward
- Opportunity to make significant impact
- Fulfilling professional growth opportunity
- Dedicated funding source and committed community to sell to prospects
- Existing institutions and industries headquartered in the community, region and state

Appendix: Programmatic Best Practices

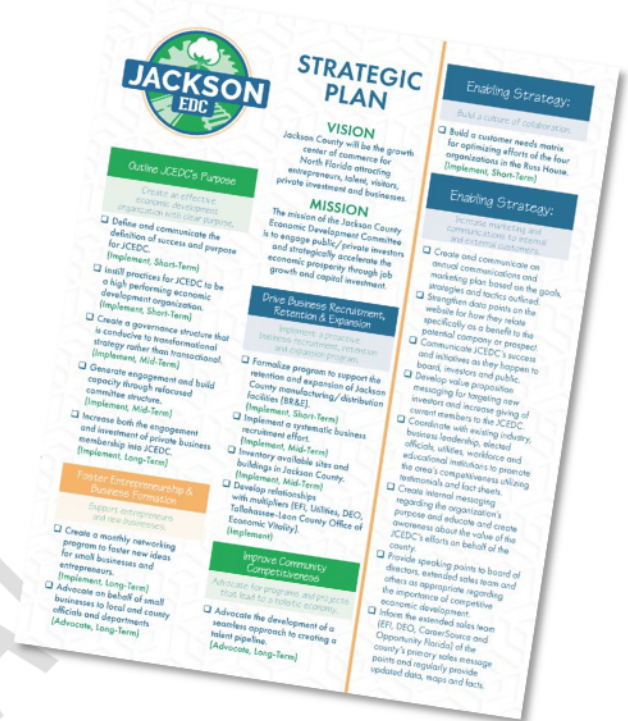
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

Building Broad Understanding of Economic Development: The Jackson County Florida EDC (JCEDC)

organized their strategic plan into a two-page PDF to guide residents, committee and board members, investors and elected officials through the key components of the organization's vision, mission, purpose, strategies and metrics for the next five years. The PDF is available for download and made available at all board and public gatherings.

The EDC also created **BASICS (Building Aware Stakeholders and Interested Citizens for Success)**.

The course spans two to three hours and focuses on five key components: an overview of economic development at all levels, the benefits of local economic development, the importance of competitiveness, supporting business and how residents can help. Cohorts are offered quarterly and rotate between lunchtime and early evening meetings to allow for maximum participation.



Leveraging Outdoor Resources: Roanoke Regional Partnership in Virginia includes the outdoor industry highlighting the area's natural resources including trails, events such as marathons and cycling events, parks and conservation lands. Bolstering the efforts, the region commissioned a study comparing it to other regions known for their outdoor lifestyle and highlighted in industry magazines and sites. The region also hosted the outdoor blogger summit, giving social media influencers a first-hand look at what the community offers. The efforts have been incredibly successful with the region home to two outdoor gear distribution centers, nearly 10 small manufacturers and a host of small businesses ranging from skills training to outfitters to retail.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Supporting Entrepreneurs: 1 Million Cups is a national program designed to engage, educate and connect local entrepreneurs. Founded by the Kauffman Foundation, 1MC is based on the idea that entrepreneurs network and discover solutions over a million cups of coffee. The free, bi-weekly coffee gathering helps build startup communities at a grassroots level. At 1MC, everyone connects with each other: the entrepreneurs who present, the communities that offer support and the organizers who dedicate their time to make the program happen.

Grow Small Business: Kauffman's FastTrac Program is Designed in Spanish and English, FastTrac equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the business skills and insights, tools, resources and peer networks necessary to start and grow successful businesses. Coursework is offered in an 8–16-week format to help entrepreneurs build a business plan. Affiliates can determine the best delivery method for their entrepreneurial community: in-person, virtual or hybrid. FastTrac affiliates are expected to hold at least two FastTrac cohorts, or classes, and enroll at least 20 participants annually.

Reduce Employment Language Barriers: GreeneSpeaks! in Greene County, Tennessee is an English as a second language program that is open to any English language learner. The program is taught by volunteers and coordinated through the Greene County Partnership and the United Way of Greene County. With Greene County's ever-growing population of non-English speakers, a need for an English as a second language program was identified. By learning English, this growing population can obtain jobs or apply for better jobs, communicate effectively with children's teachers and integrate with the community.

Increase Home-Based Childcare: Transylvania County, North Carolina is supporting the county's home-based childcare providers through a comprehensive network that connects and educates the grandmas, aunts and neighbors taking care of the community's children and provides the financial and technical assistance to those who want to become licensed childcare providers in their own homes. Funded by a Building Comprehensive Networks grant from Home Grown and regional funders, the network will eventually serve as many as 150 home-based providers. Each provider who signs up for the program receives a developmental tool kit—books, toys, lessons and sometimes a free tablet that they can use with their children at home. They also get a gift card stipend for attendance at various social or learning activities: story time at the library, playtime at the recreation center and training on nutrition or safety led by experts. Finally, and most importantly, they are welcomed into a monthly roundtable which is run by home-based providers just like them. By licensing previously unlicensed providers, the community is increasing the number of childcare spots in their community.

MAIN STREET

Use Micro-Grants for Beautification Countywide: For more than seven years the [Hamilton County Development Authority \(HCDA\)](#) has utilized its Commercial Beautification Micro-Grant Program aimed to improve the visual appearance of businesses in Hamilton County. The micro-grant program provides matching funds to renovate and improve the visual impact of the properties in the county. This grant is available to all retail, commercial and industrial property owners. The board of the HCDA authorized a budget of \$25,000 for the initial pilot program with eligible businesses able to receive up to \$1,000 in matching funds – the effort has since been renewed. The funds can be used for beautification purposes for such things as exterior painting, new awnings, sign improvements, planting shrubs, flowers, trees, etc. The goal of the grants is to help stimulate redevelopment and increase property values while providing safe and attractive environments.

Support Low-Income Residents & Local Restaurants: [Hope & Main](#), a Rhode Island Culinary Incubator, hosts Main Street Meals which provides meals prepared by local food businesses to food insecure neighbors. Each week the organization distributes hundreds of meals at the point of need. No ID or registration is required. This program supports lives and livelihoods and is an innovative way to provide emergency food assistance while supporting the local economy. The organization also hosts a BOGO event where residents can purchase a single-serving meal, and another is automatically donated to a neighbor that is unable to pay for their own at this time. The program would offer exponential opportunity during Emporia's major tourism events.

VISIT EMPORIA

Attract Regional Visitors: [Downtown Thomasville Georgia](#), recognized as [Georgia's Downtown of the Year](#), has focused on reviving its downtown to enhance the community's identity and historic character. The goal of the community's improvement efforts was to create a dynamic and creative city center where people want "to live, aspire to work, love to play and long to return." Since 1981, hundreds of millions of in funding has been reinvested in downtown Thomasville in public and private improvements. In addition to facade restorations on downtown storefronts by individuals with grants and other funding, city government has boosted downtown by providing an amphitheater facility, removal of asphalt exposing downtown's original brick streets, improved parking at storefronts, improved sidewalks and enhanced lighting and landscaping. Tourism [generates](#) approximately \$77 million in total visitor spending, 845 jobs directly supported by tourism, \$6.2 million in state and local taxes generated by visitors, which equals an approximate \$347 in tax savings per household. What's notable is most visitors come from a three to five-hour radius of the community, with 50 percent of the city's downtown sales coming from Tallahassee – which is approximately one-hour away.

Thank You



VISIONFIRST ADVISORS
3800 Esplanade Way, Suite 195
Tallahassee, Florida 32311
(850) 558-6900