

Harrison, Arkansas
ACTION PLAN
FOR
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



HARRISON REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Prepared By
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Introduction

Economic Development Is A Team Sport!

Economic Development is a Team Sport requiring input, ideas, dollars, and energy from the entire community. As you look across the country at successful, growing communities, you will note some similarities among all of them. They have a lot in common including product (land and buildings), resources (adequate funding to not only administer the program but to also offer incentives to attractive projects regardless of it being a new relocating project or an existing employer who needs some assistance to grow and/or modernize), and a clean, modern community that offers an attraction to a highly qualified workforce. In these communities you will find an apparent camaraderie among the leadership in both private companies and in public entities. Disagreements are settled quickly and quietly, and common ground is found in most, if not all issues.

You are going to find some recommendations in this report that seem costly, but you are advised to look at them as investments in the economic growth of your community. A favorite saying of mine is “Great communities invest in themselves!” This is another common facet of a successful community.

This Report

To effectively author a report that provides achievable **Action Steps** and **Tactics**, it requires the gathering of honest and frank feedback from those in leadership positions in the community. To ensure that those recommendations are accepted and embraced by the those from the community who hold leadership positions in business, political office, or in community activities, requires the involvement of those leaders in this process. With that being said, I must pass along my gratitude to those in leadership for their enthusiastic participation in this important exercise.

This work product would also have been impossible without the cooperation and diligence of the President of the Harrison Regional Chamber of Commerce Bob Largent and his great staff team of Wilson Marseilles and Lloyd Mahoney. The leadership skills and work ethic of Bob and his team will be crucial

to the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Their assistance aided in the gathering of accurate and timely information that led to the completion of this report.

Additionally, I conducted interviews with the following and their input was valuable and essential to the preparation of this document and its recommendations:

Neil Both, FedEx Freight

Eddie Bartlett, Former VP/GM at Thorpe

Craig Campbell, Boone County Economic Development Corporation

Sammie Cribbs, NARMC

Melissa Collins, Weichert, Realtors-Market Edge

Jeff Crockett, Crockett Properties, Developer

Dr. Randy Esters, President, North Arkansas College

Ryan George, Ozark Crossing Mall

Hon. Robert Hathaway, Boone County Judge

Jim Harp, Boone County JP

Jim Holland, Phillips Media (Harrison Daily Times)

Hon. Jerry Jackson, Mayor of Harrison

Bob Largent, President & CEO – Harrison Regional Chamber

Roger Leonard, Claridge Products

Vincent Leist, NARMC

Jimmy Luyet, Westrock

Clay Maxey, Clay Maxey Ford

Laura Miller, U. S. National Park Service

Joe Oleson, FedEx Freight

Jason Patience, Wabash National

Dr. Stewart Pratt, Superintendent, Harrison Public Schools

John Sherman, Pace Industries

Nick Simon, Farmer/Rancher

Scott Tennyson, Arvest Bank

Bruce Wiley, Equity Bank

Joe Willis, NWAEDD

I also conducted several Focus Groups including:

Past Chairs of the Harrison Regional Chamber of Commerce

The Harrison Regional Chamber Economic Development Committee
Harrison's Financial Institution CEOs
Historic Harrison Business Association
Small Business Connection
Tourism Business officials and owners
Harrison Young Professionals

I would be remiss if I did not identify and thank the *#believeboonecounty* effort for kickstarting the economic development enthusiasm in this region.

Timeline & Metrics

In a Strategic Plan for Economic Development we would recommend a timeline for each Action Item and Tactic. We would also place a timeline for completion of each of these items. This document is an "Action Plan", meaning that the intent is for these items to be accomplished quickly; as soon as possible and as soon as practical.

This Action Plan for Economic Development is designed to position Harrison and Boone County for economic growth and to establish the economic development program of the community as a viable and sustainable vehicle for economic growth. Our highest recommendation is to aggressively pursue completion of these Action Items and Tactics.

I will be providing the Chamber a template for designing a timeline for completion of the tactics recommended in this document and recommended assignments for community partners involved in the process.



BOONE COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

Comparisons

Indicators		Boone County, AR	United States	Percent difference Boone County, AR vs. United States
Demographics	Population Growth (% change, 2010*-2018*)	1.6%	6.2%	
	Median Age (2018*)	42.4	37.9	
	Percent Population White Alone (2018*)	96.1%	72.7%	
	Percent Population Hispanic or Latino (2018*)	2.4%	17.8%	
	Percent Population American Indian or Alaska Native (2018*)	0.8%	0.8%	
	Percent of Population 'Baby Boomers' (2018*)	26.5%	24.6%	
Income	Median Household Income (2018*)	\$43,262	\$60,293	
	Per Capita Income (2018*)	\$23,998	\$32,621	
	Percent Individuals Below Poverty (2018*)	14.9%	14.1%	
	Percent Families Below Poverty (2018*)	11.1%	10.1%	
	Percent of Households with Retirement and Social Security Income (2018*)	62.4%	49.5%	
	Percent of Households with Public Assistance Income (2018*)	25.7%	20.1%	
Structure	Percent Population 25 Years or Older without High School Degree (2018*)	13.0%	12.3%	
	Percent Population 25 Years or Older with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2018*)	16.0%	31.5%	
	Percent Population That Speak English Less Than 'Very Well' (2018*)	0.4%	8.5%	
	Percent of Houses that are Seasonal Homes (2018*)	3.3%	4.0%	
	Owner-Occupied Homes where > 30% of Household Income Spent on Mortgage (2018*)	26.0%	28.5%	
	Renter-Occupied Homes where > 30% of Household Income Spent on Rent (2018*)	35.1%	46.5%	

Source: Headwaters Economics

Harrison's Action Plan for Economic Development

Business Development

Goal #1 – Covet and promote the existing primary employer base through an aggressive Business Retention & Expansion Program and work with them to provide a platform for continued growth and success.

Tactic – Continue the subscription to the Synchronist software for tracking and surveying existing employers.

This software is already in place but should be aggressively used. Building and maintaining a database of information gleaned from regular interviews will identify job and capital investment growth opportunities and will identify a crisis long before it becomes a crisis.

This effort can also be coordinated and can interface with the Membership management of the Chamber for useful data storage on members and potential members.

Tactic – Recruit, train, and use a volunteer force to survey and maintain data collected from local primary and mainstreet employers.

Visit and survey these important employers on a regular schedule. Be their advocate. Know their struggles and celebrate their successes. Anticipate a crisis before it becomes a crisis and offer them assistance when and where possible. One person cannot perform this function, so it is imperative to recruit a volunteer group.

Goal #2 – Make Harrison the “hotspot” for retail development in the north central Arkansas region.

Tactic – Participate in the Retail Academy made possible with a grant from NWAEEED.

Be sure to take advantage of the Retail Analysis and Assessment made available through the program and make sure that the Chamber staff participates in the 6-hour training session.

Continue to be cautious about elevating retail recruiting above all other economic development efforts. Sometimes retail recruiting consultants forget that the most important element to retail is the customer that is provided through primary employment in the community.

Tactic - Develop a “Fact Sheet” on all potential development sites and buildings. Include site ownership, status for marketing, traffic counts, location data, and any available incentives.

This colorful Fact Sheet should be designed in conjunction with a website update, so they appear to be representing the same community. The Fact Sheet should contain all information that would be of value to a developer and his/her investors.

In this Fact Sheet, talk about the traffic counts on U. S. Highway 65, AR Highway 7 and major thoroughfares. Talk about the connection from Springfield, the easy and quick access to Branson, and the Buffalo National River.

This Fact Sheet should be positioned on the website and be downloadable.

Tactic – Join the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). Become active in their local and regional events. Exhibit at the Red River Regional event in Fort Worth.

Very few, if any, deals are made at the big ICSC Trade Show in Las Vegas in May of every year. This extravaganza is for the huge consultants to wine and dine the huge developers and strategize the huge deals in larger metro areas. The Red River ICSC event usually held in Fort Worth, attracts more of the size and level of developer who would have interest in a project in a community like Harrison.

Avoid the expensive retail consultants who will “take credit for anything that just happens anyway!”

Tactic – Develop and print a list of those things that the City can provide to a retail development project.

Organize a few local focus groups, talk to surrounding communities, consult the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, and determine some incentive

items that the City of Harrison and Boone County can offer a retail development project. It may surprise you how some little, inexpensive things can make the difference on a project.

Goal #3 – Prepare Harrison and Boone County to attract new businesses and primary employers.

Tactic – Review the City’s and the Chamber’s websites to ensure consistency and attractiveness to potential investors.

Be sure to update terminology in the text and in demographic tables. Be sure to identify your source of information on each demographic portion.

The Chamber site should contain information for new residents moving into the community (information on available housing, schools, daycare, churches, etc.).

Add a headshot and a welcome message from the Mayor on the City website!

Be sure to identify the “Point Person” for economic development along with their contact information (see the following Tactic!) on both the City and Chamber webpage.

Tactic – For prospect hosting and working with consultants, AEDC Project Managers, and developers, designate the President of the Chamber as the “Economic Development Point Person” to work with business prospects.

It is important that the community identify a “Point Person” who is recognized by site selection consultants, AEDC project managers, and real estate developers as the one and only “Point Person” for economic development. Many of those mentioned above have told me over the years that it is extremely frustrating to have to determine “who is in charge” when working on a project. Many times, they use this excuse to eliminate a community from consideration on a project.

Tactic – Be sure the staff of the Harrison Regional Chamber is involved and engaged in professional development activities.

The President of the Chamber should join and be active in the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), the Arkansas Economic Developers and Chamber Executives (AEDCE) and be active in their conferences and programs. This will ensure Harrison getting to and staying at the top of the profession.

Economic development is a “relationship business” and successful economic developers pursue and maintain close working relationships with others in the profession.

Tactic – Identify property for a new Business Park.

The existing Industrial Park has only one five (5) acre site left for attracting industry. A tract that small is likely not going to be a useful or sellable product in today’s economic development world.

You need to form a task force to identify a minimum, 300-acre site for the “Boone County Business & Technology Park.”

Tactic – Continue the pursuit of the development of the Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC).

Aggressively pursue the design and development of a state-of-the-art Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC) focusing on workforce skills needed now and in the future for regional industry and manufacturing. This collaborative undertaking should engage partners such as North Arkansas College, NWAEDD, the O.U.R. Cooperative, the Chamber and local employers engaged in manufacturing. AMC will be an essential component of the economic development in the region.

Tactic – Continue to develop and enhance the Workforce Initiative Network (WIN) that was initiated last year.

An original initiative of the Boone County Economic Development Corporation (BCEDC), the program is administered by the Chamber and O.U.R. Education Services Cooperative in a 5-county region. This important program directly connects students with WIN-supported employers that will provide a work-ready pipeline of trained, knowledgeable employees with a high school diploma.

Tactic - Host Fam Tours of Harrison and Boone County.

Invite Arkansas Economic Development Council and Arkansas utility company project managers for an annual “Fam Tour.” It is important that your community and its assets remain constantly on these project managers radar screen!

Placemaking

Goal #1 – Ensure that Harrison and Boone County become identified universally as a diverse and inclusive community.

Tactic – Provide support and administration to the D & I effort being pursued by the Harrison City Council, the Boone County Quorum Court, and the Chamber.

It is important that your citizens, community organizations, political leaders, and your primary employers know that this is an ongoing, successful effort to ensure diversity and inclusiveness of the region.

Your support of Hate Crime legislation in Arkansas is vital as it has become the norm in states across the US.

Tactic – Include recognition (awards) for efforts in D & I by individuals, organizations, and companies.

Most major, national companies already have D & I policies in place. It is vital that they are aware of and are participants in the community’s efforts.

Goal #2 – Implement a Vibrant Downtown Development Program.

Tactic – Revive and aggressively pursue the CORE Project!

This aggressive downtown/regional project is massive and expensive but would, along with the Newton County project, be a “Game Changer” for the region and specifically for Harrison. Identify some “champions” for this project and pursue this aggressively.

Embrace the Buffalo! It is your biggest asset, possibly next to the new investment project in Newton County

(Here is a potential location for the Buffalo River Heritage Center described in the CORE Project.)



**108 E Stephenson Avenue,
Harrison, AR 72601**

Tactic - Develop a strategy for “moving” empty buildings in the downtown district.

To ensure activity on empty buildings, review City of Harrison ordinances regarding fire safety and appearance, then make sure buildings are conforming to the ordinances.

For those buildings that are on the market, be sure they are listed on your website with a link to the real estate listing agent and/or the owner.

Tactic - Host “Pop Up” Saturday(s) to demonstrate the potential for locating in the downtown district.

Allow startups and people with a retail idea to set up “sidewalk” and vacant building, one-day businesses.

Tactic - Provide free Wi-Fi downtown.

Placing some routers at proper places around downtown can provide public wi-fi which is available in most modern cities. Provide some signage to advertise the service.

Tactic – Design and install “Wayfinding Signage.”

While Harrison enjoys beautiful “Welcome Signage”, there is a need to help visitors find Harrison City Hall, downtown, the Boone County Courthouse, the Chamber office, the Historic Square, schools, and other important places. *(Here is an example of Wayfinding Signage from Jenks, OK and Bentonville, AR)*



Attractive Wayfinding Signs with directional arrows will help get traffic off the highway, into downtown, into the neighborhoods and to discover the beauty and attractiveness of your community.

Tactic – Recruit hotels and attractions to Harrison.

Identify potential sites and develop an incentive package to recruit a developer to construct a hotel (a major chain such as IHG, Hilton, Marriott, or other major chain) inside the city limits of Harrison. Locating inside the City of Harrison gives them the advantage of participating with the Harrison CVB and its funding source.

With the new investment in the Newton County project by Johnny Morris, new accommodations will be needed and used. Don't let this opportunity to benefit economically from this project slip away to the north.

Tactic – Develop a plan to promote the “Ozark Mountain Tech Corridor.”

Coordinate efforts with Taney County, Branson, and Springfield to develop the “Ozark Mountain Tech Corridor” or another more appropriate name. The Highway 65 thoroughfare from Springfield, Missouri to Harrison, Arkansas is one

of the nation's top traffic generators. Harrison must become an active addition to enjoying this economic boon.

Springfield, Branson, and other communities are more than willing and ready to welcome Harrison to the family.

Tactic – Offer assistance and encouragement to the City of Jasper and Newton County in the implementation of their new Strategic Plan.

As with any new strategy or plan, there is danger of discouragement and difficulty in bringing it to successful implementation. An offer of assistance and encouragement might be helpful in them attaining some degree of successful implementation.

Ongoing Challenges/Recommendations

Traffic Issues

Traffic, specifically truck traffic, is historically and currently an issue on U. S. Highway 65 through Harrison, especially north of the Industrial Park Road intersection.

We are reluctant to recommend any type of bypass route. There are many examples of bypass streets and highways in other communities that have been disastrous for the business and caused a decline in sales tax revenues.

Prior to promoting and implementing a bypass, other remedies need to be explored. There also should be a careful analysis of the impact on businesses that will be left along the original route.

We recommend that the Chamber immediately formulate a task force to expedite addressing this issue. Work with the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ArDOT), NWAEDD, City of Harrison, Boone County, and Arkansas political leadership, and involve all stakeholders in this process.

We also recommend that the business community, through the Chamber and its Economic Development Committee, support the efforts of ArDOT, the City of Harrison, and Boone County in their efforts to upgrade intersections, install

longer and more adept turn lanes, and timed/sequenced signaling to U. S. Highway 65 through Harrison and Boone County.

It is important to remember that traffic (heavy traffic counts) and accessibility is a most important factor for both existing and “to-be-recruited” retail business.

Economic Development Funding

Economic Development in Harrison is limited and insufficient. Economic Development is an expensive venture for a community but when pursued properly, it can provide great benefits to the citizens in expanded services and amenities. We are recommending that a task force be appointed and charged with the development of permanent and adequate funding for economic development operations and incentives.

Several communities in Arkansas such as Newport, Booneville, and Camden have enjoyed funding via a ¼ cent sales tax dedicated solely to economic development. We would recommend pursuing a small percentage sales tax administered much like the CATPC tax and contract with the Harrison Regional Chamber of Commerce to provide economic development services.

In 2020, a ¼ cent sales tax in Boone County would produce approximately \$250,000.

I am sharing a report on Economic Development Funding in Arkansas prepared by Ms. Frankie Gilliam, CECD, that describes the successes of publicly funding economic development in Arkansas communities. The report also details laws that allow this type of funding and describes its benefits as well as its restrictions.

Product Development

Working with a 5-acre tract in the existing industrial park is not sufficient to attract major, primary employers. You should begin immediately in identifying additional property for business development.

Ideally, this would be a planned development business park of at least 300 acres (larger if possible!). The ideal site would be on relatively flat ground close to highway, rail, and utility amenities. Once purchased, pursue EDA grants for

development and expansion of streets, drainage, and utilities through the NWAEDD for the new “Boone County Business & Technology Park.”



Benchmarking

Not every great program idea is generated internally. We highly recommend that the Chamber design and implement an annual “Benchmarking Visit” to a like sized community that may have some amenities and programs that would benefit Harrison and Boone County.

Build an itinerary for a 2-day visit to a community. Arrange for transportation and meals. Establish a registration fee. Promote and pursue!

We recommend West Plains, MO, Newport, AR, and Nixa and Ozark, MO for starters.

Organizational Structure

The Boone County Economic Development Corporation (BCEDC) has been the owner of property and the funding entity for economic development in Boone County for decades and are to be commended for their contributions and outstanding success.

If other recommendations in this report are followed, we recommend that the BCEDC be dove-tailed into the Harrison Regional Chamber of Commerce as their economic development entity. The BCEDC could provide the initial support for the attainment and development of a new “Boone County Business & Technology Park,” as well as other economic development initiatives.

APPENDIX

Credits

Demographics material used in this report was prepared by *Headwaters Economics*.

Some material used in the preparation of this report were from research on the websites and through interviews with the following organizations:

US Bureau of Labor Statistics

International Economic Development Council (IEDC)

Economic Development Administration (EDA)

Arkansas Economic Development Commission

Entergy Arkansas

Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District (NWAEDD)

City of Harrison

Boone County

Frankie Gilliam, CECD

Interview Results

Following are assets, liabilities, and ideas gleaned from interviews with community, business, and political leaders, as well as the focus group exercise we conducted.

Community Assets

Location

Transportation

Healthcare Availability

Higher Education and Tech Training

Public Education System

“Small Town America”

Community Liabilities

Perception of Racial Attitudes

Truck Traffic

Young Professionals – nothing to do

Family Farm decline
Resistance to Growth/Change

Focus Group Ideas Presented

Following discussion, the Focus Group was asked to present their individual ideas to enhance economic development in the area. Here are those suggestions:

- Establish an incentives program for targeted businesses.
- Invest in small businesses.
- Establish targets for both retail and primary business.
- Work on landscaping and cleanup along city streets.
- Provide a truck parking/turn around facility on Highway 65.
- Retool the Recreation Complex and offer with other amenities.

This report was prepared by Jim Fram, CEcD, FM, CCE, and is the property of the Harrison (AR) Regional Chamber of Commerce.

