



Haywood County
North Carolina



Haywood County

STRATEGIC LISTENING POST EXERCISE: FINAL REPORT

July 15, 2024

Project Team



Principal Consultant &
Project Lead

Jesse C Fripp



Principal
Consultant

David Lilly



Associate
Consultant

Collin Huske



Associate
Consultant

Musa Ndlovu



SHINING ROCK
VENTURES
CATALYZING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES



Executive Summary

Purpose: Haywood County Leadership Stakeholder Listening Post

Co-create an inquiry framework with Haywood County ED staff that enables the identification and prioritization of mid-long term economic development priorities, concerns, risks, and/or considerations

Facilitate direct inputs from a holistic representation of key County leadership stakeholders into priorities, challenges and concerns to be reflected in a clear and locally-contextualized report with recommendations to help Haywood County decision-makers to better understand and improve economic development strategies and approaches in the County and Towns

The goal is to create a high-quality, strategic priorities framework that supports the county's long-term economic development strategy, recovery and resiliency efforts

Methodology

Inquiry Framework Development

Co-create an inquiry framework with Haywood County ED staff to guide the identification and prioritization of key issues and opportunities

Key Stakeholder Interviews (KSIs)

Conduct approximately forty (40) in-person and/or virtual interviews with key stakeholders over an eight to twelve-week period. Each interview will last up to 1 hour, and **guarantees anonymity of individual responses to assure open feedback from interviewees**

Business Community Engagement

Through periodic focus group feedback sessions on emerging themes from interviews, captured in **anonymized responses using digital feedback capture tools and methodologies**

Priority Feedback Workshopping

Utilize inputs from KSIs to structure a Priority Feedback Workshopping session with Haywood County ED staff, resulting in a core narrative or PowerPoint presentation using the PESTLE analysis framework (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal, and Environmental)

Report and Documentation

Develop a fundamental report that summarizes the identified priorities, which will inform the structuring of follow-on long-term Strategic Economic Roadmap and Resiliency Plan

Ongoing Support

Provide ongoing, as-needed support for response scoring, selection, and periodic oversight during the implementation phase

Interviews and Interactions

22 Interviews from Public Sector

- Elected Officials
- Workforce/Education
- 501c6
- Planning & Environmental
- LEO
- Healthcare

17 Interviews from Private Sector

- Banking/ Finance
- Construction / Engineering
- Hotel & travel
- Manufacturing
- Nonprofit
- Community (Mainstreet business, Pastoral, other)
- Media
- Utilities

+ Two Issues & Eggs Business Community
Feedback Sessions with >60 participants

('2030 headline' feedback from these sessions featured on following slide footers)

Tones in Conversations

Conversation Topic	Positive	Negative	Conversation Topic	Positive	Negative
Economic Development	3	3	Community Engagement	5	0
Housing	2	6	Environmental Initiative	4	0
Sewer & Water Infrastructure	0	12	Development vs Preservation	1	5
Infrastructure Concerns (aging)	2	16	Tax Incentives for Businesses	2	3
Broadband access	1	4	Educational Facilities	1	5
Public Transportation	1	3	Healthcare Access	1	4

Prospective Emerging Solutions



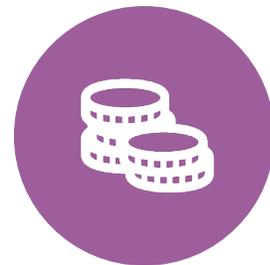
County and Community
Visioning Exercise



Master Planning Exercise



Farmland Preservation
Incentives/ Easements



Conversation Easement
Incentives

Haywood County is a leader in economic growth in WNC

Areas of Praise



Community Engagement

High levels of satisfaction with community involvement and specific successful projects (especially around unified crisis response)



Environmental Considerations

Strong positive reactions to local environmental conservation efforts and sustainable practices

Booming economy due to strong tourism industry and investments in small businesses and affordable housing

Areas of Positive Consensus

7



Broadband Access

Progress in broadband expansion. Significant benefits to the community and role in supporting modern economic activities



Growth in Tourism

Eco-tourism & heritage tourism is seen as a positive development, and recognized as a strong economic driver for the region



Community Collaboration

Positive feedback on collaborative efforts within the community, in response to crises showcasing a strong community spirit and effective coordination



Strategic Planning Approach

Positive feedback and appreciation for listening posts approach to initiate broader strategic planning process

Prosperity through stability and diversity

Areas of Concern



Aging Infrastructure

Sewer and Water services, impacting development potential



Housing

Lack of affordable housing affecting local workers and attracting new residents



Economic Development

Ability to attract and retain businesses due to infrastructure limitations. Competitive disadvantages on land use / usable land



Broadband & Public Transportation

Inadequate for current needs, affecting quality of life and economic opportunities

Haywood lands 5,000 affordable housing units

Areas in Need of Improvement or Additional Focus



Workforce & Training

Concerns about availability and training of the local workforce. There is a necessity for more focused training programs and better job matching for future-focused industry sectors



Site Availability & Development

Limited availability of ready-to-develop sites. There is need for more development-ready shell locations, having them fully “shovel ready” with connected infrastructure- and pricing – is key



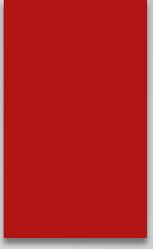
Infrastructure

Concerns over inadequate infrastructure in relation to utilities and transportation. Need for improved road and other transport networks and better utility services to support economic activities and attract businesses



Economic Development Leadership Focus

Need for more resources for leadership in economic development. Existing structures are stretched too thin



PESTLE Framework

INTERVIEWS

Political

10



Stronger Together

Governance and collaboration challenges, noting the unique nature and specific priorities of individual townships and even rural zip codes within the County



Inclusive Vision

Navigating bureaucratic processes and focusing on building/strengthening inter-organizational trust needs to be a priority. Establish a common County vision for the future that respects the distinct nature of constituent communities. Consider follow-on 'community engagement' sessions held in defined constituent communities and Townships via Parent-Teacher Associations, pastoral, community center organizing venues suited to encouraging active inputs from local citizens



Local Leadership

Local government involvement in economic development initiatives is valued overall, though balanced with prudent financial oversight



Intentional Growth

Lack of zoning in the county presents challenges in regulating short-term rentals and managing development but is still not popular – explore a master planning exercise as an alternative

Small Town, Big Opportunities

Economic



Infrastructure Needs

Inadequate water and sewer infrastructure limiting economic development



Job Creation

Difficulty attracting medium-sized businesses due to availability of developable sites and infrastructure access



Economic Diversification

Diversifying the local economy beyond traditional sectors should be a priority, including boosting tourism and tech-oriented businesses



Economic Opportunities

Enhance sustainable tourism, housing affordability and sustainable use of natural resources, including waterways

Haywood County is the best place to live, work and play!

Social



Technological

01

Coverage

The county has been proactive in expanding broadband coverage, targets reaching 80-90% of the County by 2026

02

Broadband Access

Inconsistent Wi-Fi and cell phone reception quality are challenges in certain areas of the county

03

Tech Infrastructure

Improving broadband and other infrastructure is crucial for supporting remote work and attracting new residents

Haywood County is the tech hub of state with a booming economy!

Legal

15

01

Zoning Regulations vs Master Planning

Tensions around use of zoning laws to balance development and community interests, consider master planning exercise as alternative

02

Regulatory Frameworks & Enforcement

Ensuring regulatory frameworks and the use of the permitting and related processes support sustainable development while protecting community values and the environment

03

Environmental

Legal constraints and opportunities related to environmental protections need careful navigation to prevent legal disputes and ensure compliance, while preserving Haywood County's unique natural assets

Resilient small businesses balance growth, tourism and the protection of natural resources to help everyone thrive

Environmental



Natural Resources

Natural landscape preservation affecting tourism, resources (waterways) and local quality of life. There is an opportunity to monetize the high value of Haywood waterways, balanced with sustainability considerations



Flood Risk Management

Need to prioritize planning related to flood plains affecting development options, especially concerns around building/ re-building in these zones



Sustainability Practices

Calls for integrating sustainable development to protect environmental assets and ensure long term viability



Advocacy for balanced development

Balancing economic development with environmental and farmland conservation

Preserve the mountains

Key Takeaways & Summary

17



Focus on balanced economic growth with social considerations (housing, sustainability, demographics, etc.)



Infrastructure investment is a key priority



Opportunity to define a common vision and roadmap for the County, balancing diverse priorities

2030 Headline: Haywood County named the top place to live in the U.S

End of Executive Summary

FULL ANNEXES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST - INCLUDING BUSINESS COMMUNITY
FEEDBACK SESSION HIGHLIGHTS, SURVEY RESPONSES, THEMATIC PRIORITY AREA
DEEP-DIVE ANALYSIS, CONTEXTUAL DATA ANALYSIS, HCTDA MASTER PLANNING
INTERSECTION POINTS, SOURCES CITED