An Analysis of Economic Development Opportunities  
Lee County, Georgia  
2013

Economic Development is the establishment of a process and activity that improves the economic vitality and quality of life for its citizens by creating and retaining jobs and expanding the tax base. Economic Development strategies should be based on the needs, assets, and goals of the community. Prior to developing a strategy, an analysis of a community’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats must be examined. Strengths are assets that make it attractive for business to move into and remain in the community.

Weaknesses are obstacles or constraints to businesses in the local economy that make it difficult for a business to develop, operate profitably, or grow. Opportunities are conditions external to the community that make it easier or possible to develop competitive advantages. Threats are unfavorable trends or developments external to the economy that lead to a loss or decline in a community’s competitive advantage or economy in general.

In order to produce a complete and accurate analysis, all criteria contained in the analysis must be examined on a regional basis because potential investors see no county lines separating “The Community.”

Let’s first examine some of Lee County’s Strengths. 2006 found that Lee County was the 8th fastest growing community in Georgia and the 43rd fastest in the nation. With that said, Strengths must abound because year after year for 25 years, more and more people want to experience some sort of perceived quality of life that exists in Lee County.

Strengths responsible for existing rapid population growth

- Excellent School System
- Appreciation of Housing Investment
- Overall Low Cost of Living
- No Blighted Conditions in most of the County
- Reasonable Taxes
- Proximity to 6th Largest MSA in the State (shopping, cultural, recreational, medical, and continuing education opportunities)
- Reasonable local property taxes as compared to surrounding counties
- Availability of Superior Health Care

Strengths existing for Commercial & Industrial Investment

- Existence of affluent growing population
- Available land
- Upscale Industrial Park already developed with 25 remaining available acres
- Regional retail shopping destination already attracts many daily consumers
- “Retail Pull Factor” for Dougherty County Area is second strongest in Georgia
- Expansion of Water & Sewer now exists so as to accommodate potential commercial & industrial investors
- Low Labor Costs
- Low Electrical Rates
- Existence of No Organized Labor within the County
- Existing Labor Force of over 90,000 within a 30 minute drive
- Existence of Continuing Educational Opportunities with the presence of Albany State University, Darton College, and Albany Technical College
- Low Crime Rates within the County
- 100% Freeport (personal property tax exemption for raw materials)
- An Existing Excitement within the Business and School Community which communicates a good community to Live, Work, Play, & Invest
- An Active, Vibrant, and Well Supported Local Chamber of Commerce which exemplifies to potential investors that Lee County is a Good Place To Do Business “Come and Join The Club” where Live Works Well Here in Lee County

A community that is strictly rural and agricultural yet suddenly experiences rapid growth faces numerous challenges.

**Weaknesses** which exist that impedes Commercial and Industrial Investment

- Commercial Land Costs are high because of the large demand for strategically located properties
- Lack of Available Vacated Buildings where mature enterprises have moved & expanded presents operating costs challenges to small “start up” enterprises
- Limited Transportation access for Industrial Investments
- Small Inventory of Developed Industrial Properties
- Potential Industrial Property is too expensive for industry for which we qualify
- Incentives for Industrial Investment are limited in Lee County yet abundant in neighboring county of Dougherty
- Tier IV Community Designation which means limited State & Federal Financial Assistance
- Perception of limited available trainable labor within the region
- Demographic existence not quite within the Matrixes to attract certain Big Box, Hotel, and Restaurant Investments
- Continual lower unemployment rates within Lee County as compared to region, state, and national
- High Health Care Costs

**Opportunities** that do exist, external to the community, which are competitive advantages for attracting Commercial & Industrial Investment

- Perception of a Good Quality of Life within the community “Lee County, Life Works Well Here”
- The Region has many of the ingredients to attract Retirees who will bring new disposable dollars to circulate and possible entrepreneurship passions
The Forrester Extension and Westover Extension will open up new commercial corridors
Development of Agri Tourism
Additional access to Kinchafoonee and Muckalee Creeks could open up additional tourism opportunities
At the appropriate point in time, the structured development of properties presently owned by the county known as Grand Island Country Club

**Threats**, the unfavorable trends and developments external to our local economy

- Rising costs to local community to “keep up with demand for services” for a rapidly growing population including: School Facilities and Staffing; Public Safety & Fire Protection; Water & Sewer Delivery; Government Administration; Roads expansion and Maintenance; Etc.
- Ability to Expand The Local Tax Base fast enough to fund the services required to support the rapidly growing population without the necessity of increasing taxes
- New and expanding manufacturing investment opportunities are becoming very limited due to companies moving offshore in order to access lower labor costs
- Free Trade Agreements with other countries are adding strong competition to goods previously manufactured in the United States
- Increasing costs of Agricultural Operations including escalating land values, competition from imported commodities, and strict environmental laws are threatening the largest “export” industry in our county (agriculture)
- Existing Facilities with “bargain basement pricing” that exist throughout the Southeast, Georgia, and Southwest Georgia where former manufacturing and distribution operations moved off shore
CONCLUSION

Careful examination of Lee County’s *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats* by: Georgia Tech; University of Georgia; Georgia Department of Economic Development; Georgia Power Economic Development; Georgia EMC Economic Development; and Lee County Development Authority and its Executive Director has concluded that the best strategy to increase the local tax base and create jobs is:

- Continue the expansion of infrastructure within strategically located corridors where opportunity exists for commercial investment
- Continue to promote Lee County’s *Strengths & Opportunities* throughout the state and country to potential commercial developers and retail investors
- Continue to work with local commercial realtors to help facilitate new commercial locations by supplying them with the data and information needed to entice and justify that an investment in Lee County will be successful and appreciate
- Continue to work with commercial developers who have long standing relationships with National Retail Chains for the purpose of recruiting such investments to Lee Co.
- Continue to “remind” existing industrial entities within the region that Lee County has available properties within the Oakland Meadows Business Park. Also, keep State Developers aware of this available property
- Continue the Public Relations efforts to paint the picture that Lee County not only has a superior Quality of Life to other regions throughout the southeast, but also is a “Business Friendly Community”
- Work regionally to attract retirees

Note: It is the conclusion of all entities which have been consulted within the last year that Lee County would be better served to invest what monies that it can afford by creating the necessary ingredients which would entice commercial and retail investments, rather than investing in additional industrial properties at this time.