

Economic Development Taskforce
Oconee County Chamber of Commerce Office
September 23, 2019 – 9:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark Saxon
Mark Thomas
Janet Jones
Brian Brodrick
Tim Burgess
Rick Waller
Tammy Gilland
Brad Tucker
Lisa Douglas
Sharon Maxey

OTHERS PRESENT:

Craig Lesser
Michael Prochaska
Justin Kirouac
John Daniell
Courtney Bernardi

Craig Lesser, Pendleton Group, began the meeting with a review of the ED process discussed during the last ED taskforce meeting. Craig reiterated that during group discussions, the specific focus of this taskforce is business opportunities for the county.

Craig asked the group what they felt were the top reasons to invest in Oconee County. Responses included: attractive to employees/employers; affluent population, location – proximity to Atlanta; access to quality healthcare; the University of Georgia and other higher ed options; recreational opportunities; cultural arts; low crime rate; history; infrastructure (316, 441); strong leadership; available land; people. It was discussed that the true competitive edge for Oconee is the University of Georgia. It was also noted that there is an understanding that there are barriers that we must be aware of as well such as infrastructure (lack of fiber connectivity, sewer capacity), restrictive ordinances and location.

Craig took the group on a deep dive regarding the State's 11 Global Industry Classifications: energy, materials, industrials, consumer discretionary, consumer staples, healthcare, financials, information tech, utilities, telecom services and real estate. He shared that looking at these classifications and the 4 different sectors in which they all fit will help guide the group to determining the best focus for business recruitment. It was also mentioned the business retention will need to be a continued focus in regard to ED for OC.

Craig discussed the strength of UGA and the 16 research and development centers that blend with areas of focus related to the 11 GICs. Craig suggested that a focus on a strong UGA partnership might make sense for OC regarding business recruitment. The group discussed the need to better utilize UGA as a resource and to pay special attention to the healthcare, engineering and ag pieces. It was also discussed that this type of focus could and should be done on a regional basis. Partnering with neighboring communities when partnerships already exist - Athens Clarke, Barrow, Gwinnett – Innovation Crescent and Innovation Corridor.

The discussion continued in regard to what the overall vision for ED should be for Oconee County. How do we want to grow, do we want to grow, what does growth mean for the county, how does it benefit OC? Craig tasked the group with thinking of a vision statement for ED and submitting to Courtney prior to the October 7th meeting. These ideas shared will be discussed in detail on October 7th.

The meeting was adjourned.

Minutes submitted by:
Courtney Bernardi, President, Oconee Chamber of Commerce