



**ANSON
COUNTY,**
North Carolina
Opportunity awaits

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AT A GLANCE

ANSON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

WHAT: A county of 25,000

WHERE: In southern North Carolina, southeast of Charlotte

WEBSITE: www.co.anson.nc.us



ANSON COUNTY, North Carolina

Opportunity awaits

Anson County, North Carolina, which was formed in 1750, and named for George Anson, a British admiral who circumnavigated the globe from 1740 to 1744, and bought land in the state, was known for many years as merely a long stretch of open highway somewhere between Charlotte to the northwest and the Carolina coast to the east. But today, this rural expanse of approximately 25,000 people is rapidly changing, and Anson County is currently positioned for both residential and commercial growth, as well as accelerated industrial development.

“We believe that the population of the county will be 30,000 by 2030,” says John Marek, Executive Director of the Anson County Economic Development Partnership. “A major new road opened two years ago called the Monroe Expressway. Monroe is a small city between us and Charlotte. Prior to that Expressway opening, you had to go through some 30 traffic lights to get from Charlotte to Anson County. When the Expressway opened, that went down to two. So, it’s significantly decreased the travel time. Peachland, which is the town in the far western part of the county, is less than 45 minutes from Charlotte. So, we’ve gotten to a reasonable commute distance, now, and we’re anticipating that we’re going to see residential and commercial development in the western side of the county as a result of that.”

On the other side of the county, recent developments in the Port of Wilmington, some 140 miles away, has also provided Anson County with an opportunity to become a major road and rail corridor between it and Charlotte. “About five or six years ago, the state legislature decided to start investing money in the Port of Wilmington,” Marek recounts. “They dredged it out to allow it to retain larger ships; they created a turning channel that allows ships to be processed more effectively; and most importantly, they built a large, onsite frozen and cold storage



facility that allows agricultural products to ship from that port. That has been a huge thing; the entire southeastern part of North Carolina is huge agriculturally and we're learning to export to Europe and the Far East, and the Port of Wilmington has become an important part of that. So, our location between Charlotte and Wilmington offers us the opportunity to be one of the leading areas in making use of that port."

While agriculture is still Anson County's most important industry, manufacturing remains a prime component, with over 20 percent of its workers engaged in the production and shipping of goods. Key sectors include advanced textiles, food and beverage, metal fabrication, and forestry and wood products. "Our largest employer is a textile company, called Hornwood, with about 350 employees," Marek reports. "We do have a number of companies in the 100-250 employee range; and then we have a lot of smaller companies in the 50-100 range. We don't have any large business with 500-700

employees. So, our workforce is distributed over a large number of companies. COVID has shown that to be kind of an advantage for us. Our unemployment rate has gone up, but not as much as in the surrounding counties, because we don't have that large automotive supplier that had to shut down because all its customers shut down. We have smaller companies that are a little bit more nimble.

"An example is Hornwood. They're a manufacturer of advanced fabrics, and they're in a number of different markets. They do some automotive work; they do some aerospace work; they do a lot of work in apparel with specialized fabric; and they do some work for the military. When the pandemic hit, they were tasked by the government to come up with a fabric that met certain specifications for permeability - a fabric that would allow the person wearing it to sweat and to breathe, but would not allow particulate matter to enter. Think of it like Gore-Tex for viruses. They were able to develop a fabric that



met the government’s specifications, and they have been turning out as much of it as they can make over the last few months.”

Marek goes on to note some recent developments in Anson County that have propelled its economic agenda forward. “The first thing was the development of what we call REV Uptown,” he begins. “It’s a business incubator and co-working space in Uptown Wadesboro, the county seat. We felt like we wanted to do a couple of things with the 5,000 square feet that we have available. We wanted to create a one-stop-shop for all of the quasi-governmental organizations – the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development, Uptown Development, and Tourism Development, and we successfully did that.

“Then, we wanted to provide a place for new businesses trying to get their start, mainly where service and information technology businesses could come in and have some non-dedicated

space to collaborate with others and have access to high-speed internet, printing, and shipping capabilities. In the co-working space, we already have a company that’s working with big data for agricultural innovation, as well as a local entrepreneur who’s doing marketing and graphic design work.

“And we wanted an incubator aspect to it, as well, so a larger, more developed company could come in and we were very successful in bringing in a company called Borgstena. The division that we work with here is actually based in Portugal, although the company, itself, is based in Sweden, and the parent company is in South Korea. They’re an automotive supplier that makes headliners for various trucks and vehicles. They’re very interested in establishing a manufacturing presence here, but as a precursor to that, they wanted to open a sales and engineering office. So, we provided that space for them. Unfortunately, they were forced to head back to Portugal because of the pandemic’s



travel restrictions. But I've been in contact with them and they're planning to return to the United States as soon as it's feasible."

"We've actually had a lot of success over the last couple of years with international businesses," Marek adds. "I mentioned Borgstena. Another one of our big wins was a company called Lova-Wakol, a German company that moved their North American headquarters to Wadesboro and that's been a tremendous boon to the local economy. We also had a smaller company, Veit, which is a poultry transportation company; that's a Czech company that located their facility in Peachland."

Another development project in the county concerned making some needed infrastructure improvements at its Wadesboro Industrial Park. "In order to expand that park, we needed to increase the size of the gas line and run some additional water and sewer lines. So, we got a \$1.7 million grant from the State of North Carolina to assist us with that," says Marek. "Then,





we partnered with a private sector company that was going to put up a 50,000-sq.-ft. shell building, expandable to 100,000 square feet. We were originally planning to break ground on that in April, but because of the uncertainties created by the coronavirus, that's been pushed back until, probably, the first quarter of 2021. We've not done a shell building in the county before. Between 75-80 percent of the inquiries we get are for existing buildings. And we just don't have a stock of existing buildings above 50,000 square feet. So, we're pretty excited about that."

In addition, the county recently opened its newest business park, the Atlantic Gateway Logistics Park, a 129-acre development in the eastern part of the county. The new park, on U.S. Highway 74, east of Lilesville, is a partnership between the Pee Dee Electric Cooperative, NCSE (North Carolina's Southeast, a regional public-private partnership that markets the states southeast region), and the Anson Economic Development Partnership. At build-out, the park will encompass 800,000 square feet of warehouse, distribution, and light manufacturing space; will generate between \$3 and \$5 million in annual property tax revenue for the county; and will employ 300-plus workers with a total annual payroll of more than \$11 million.

Pee Dee Electric Cooperative started clearing and site work on its new headquarters on the north side of the park in August. The state-of-the-art office, customer service, and engineering/logistics facility will replace two existing buildings, one in Anson County and one in Richmond County, and represents an investment of \$20 million. Construction is expected to conclude by the end of 2021. When finally completed in 2022, the new facility will include a customer service center, operations, and engineering facility, a warehouse, fleet parking, dispatch center, a hardened secure data center, and administrative offices for the Cooperative's 66 employees.

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we think that's going to be a great logistics location for companies that are either looking to bring things in from the Port of Wilmington, or looking to service the Charlotte market from the periphery," Marek shares.

For any company looking to relocate to Anson County, as well as existing companies looking to expand, Marek says that in addition to many state-offered incentives, the county also has an attractive tax grant program in place. "We grant back a percentage of the new taxable investment that a company makes," he notes. "The company pays the taxes either on their new facility or on an upgrade to an existing facility, and then, we grant them back 75 percent of those taxes for a period of either one, five, or six years, depending on a couple of factors, the largest one being the size of the investment." In addition, most of the Town of Wadesboro is in a federal Opportunity Zone, so there are federal incentives connected to that program.

Another recent development in Anson County

is a new plant being built by Catawba Biogas, a leading operator of renewable energy facilities. Located in the heart of the "Broiler Belt," Anson County is home to more than 940 poultry houses and produces 5.5 million broiler chickens, annually. "Traditionally, farmers would clean out the chicken houses with a combination of sawdust and chicken waste and they'd dump it in on fields as fertilizer," Marek explains. "The problem with that is there's a lot of runoff into streams and groundwater. And after a certain point, the chemicals in that fertilizer build up in the soil and it becomes counter-productive."

"So, we started working with Catawba Biogas about three years ago," he continues. "They're going to take a large percentage of the chicken waste from Anson and several surrounding counties and convert it to natural gas. They collect the natural gas and pump it right into the natural gas pipeline. That's very exciting because they're taking something that, at worst, was negative to the county, and turning it into a source of revenue. That particular process has



been done with other types of waste. There's a facility in Charlotte that takes household waste and does the same thing with it, and there's a facility a couple hundred miles from here that does that with pig waste. Chicken waste has a high ammonia content and it tends to kill the microbes that do the conversion of the waste to natural gas. This company has a proprietary technology that extracts the ammonia on the front end; that ammonia is captured, and it becomes a pure organic fertilizer which can be transported. They have contracts in California for that fertilizer; they're going to be putting it on a rail car and shipping it across country. The remainder is natural gas, and the byproduct of it all is a crumbly substance that's sold as a soil additive. So, essentially, it's a 100 percent environmentally-friendly process. By converting waste into fuel and stable organic fertilizer, the plant will help increase North Carolina's renewable energy capacity while protecting our local waterways." The company plans to invest at least \$15 million in state-of-the-art biogas technology on a site near the Pee Dee Electric gas turbine "peaking" plant east of Lilesville.

Going forward, Anson County has a lot going for it: a prime location, a skilled workforce, available land, and a business-friendly administration all combine to make this once sleepy area the new hot growth corridor in the Charlotte, North Carolina region – a place where opportunity awaits.

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