

BUSINESS VIEW

MARCH 2021

civil and municipal

A Focus on Economic Development in Global Communities



COLLINGWOOD, ONTARIO

GOOD THINGS ON THE HORIZON

Also in this issue GARDNER, MA • MILLBROOK, AL • BROUSSARD, LA • HICKORY, NC



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Business view magazine

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The importance of people.

It's a common denominator and key emphasis of every conversation I have with community and company executives throughout North America, Oceania, and the Caribbean. Those daily interviews are my favorite part of this job – truly enlightening and never a dull moment. Each and every person is keen to share what makes their business or city/town/county/shire special and successful.

Inevitably, the emphasis comes around to highlighting the people in their circle. The valuable customers they serve. The supplier and partner relationships that sustain them and help them grow. And, almost always, the discussion ends with something along the line of "We wouldn't be where we are without our own amazing team." These aren't empty words... I hear the heartfelt sincerity in the voice. Which is sometimes a surprise, when the person I'm speaking with has been very matter-of-fact and 'all business' during the call. It comes through loud and clear that every member of their team plays a key role in keeping things alive and moving forward. Acknowledging that doesn't have to cost a penny. A simple kind word or gesture, asking how they're doing – and actually listening – can mean more than you know. And a big thank you that comes with a smile is always welcome, even on Zoom!

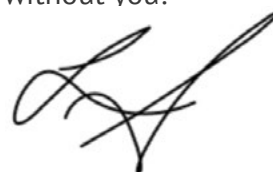
This month's editions of Business View North America and Civil & Municipal showcase great examples of innovation, green initiatives, and strategic master planning for a bright post-pandemic future across the board. Our cover feature salutes HAAKER Equipment Company, coming up to half a century as a family-owned,

total service equipment provider to the municipal, industrial, and contractor industries. Kudos to ATCO Wood Products' focus on softwood lumber manufacturing in the most sustainable way, and Blue Marble Global Payroll and Payroll Vault with their sage solutions for navigating the complexities of payroll reporting.

The Aviation sector is starting to soar again after a bumpy 2020. We spoke with Airport reps at Yeager, Rogue Valley International – Medford, Leesburg International, Pryor Field Regional, and Joseph A. Hardy Connellsville and they are all busy with upgrades and expansions that will benefit, not only their airports, but also their local communities and regions at large.

Our exciting March issue of BV Civil & Municipal opens with a positive outlook from the Mississippi Municipal League and then carries on with a scenic cross-country and cross-border tour of 20 outstanding Towns and Cities – from Dracut, Massachusetts to Monroe, Louisiana to Amherst, Nova Scotia – and ends on a good news note with our cover story on Collingwood, Ontario.

At this point, I'd like to give a shout-out to my own super amazing team! These great magazines you love to read don't produce themselves. It takes a huge group effort of talented individuals working behind the scenes to create four beautiful editions of Business View every month. Cheers to you all from your grateful EIC – couldn't do it without you!



Lorie Lee Steiner
Editor in Chief



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The opinion expressed in each article is that of its author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of Business View Publishing.

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Opening Lines

MARCH 2021

CANADA CLIMATE LAW INITIATIVE APPLAUDS TRUDEAU-BIDEN COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE REPORTING AND DISCLOSURE OF CLIMATE RISKS

Canada Climate Law Initiative (CCLI) welcomes the commitment of Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden for Canadian and American public and private financial institutions to work together to advance the adoption of climate-related financial risk disclosure, including the achievement of a net-zero emissions economy.

The bilateral announcement reinforces CCLI's view that disclosure of climate-related financial risk is a necessary and urgent imperative for Canadian businesses to remain competitive, and to continue to attract capital as global investor sentiments and regulatory regimes shift towards a net-zero economy. The two leaders also pledged to work together against 'unfair competition', which could include measures such as partnership on a carbon border tariff

adjustment that would prevent 'carbon leakage', or the practice of moving production away from jurisdictions with tighter carbon controls. CCLI supports the initiatives of the federal government that advance the integration of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors into company and pension fund decision-making processes as well as in financial reporting.

CCLI leads the way in providing the necessary tools and knowledge to Canadian corporate and pension boards about the latest developments in climate-related financial risks and opportunities. In addition to rigorous research in conjunction with international partners, CCLI's Climate Governance Experts program offers 70 of Canada's most highly respected and informed professionals to deliver free of



CCLI offers knowledge and resources to help develop the strong and capable leadership that is needed for Canada to successfully transition to a net-zero economy

LABORATION

charge presentations to directors and trustees to help them navigate the fast-changing climate governance landscape.

“There is a big emphasis today on board competence around climate change. We know that BlackRock, the world’s largest shareholder, is asking boards to be climate competent and deliver credible plans for how their business models will transition to a net-zero economy. It will require a big shift in understanding at a time when directors are also busy responding to the impacts of the pandemic. CCLI offers knowledge and resources to help develop the strong and capable leadership that is needed for Canada to successfully transition to a net-zero economy,” says Juvarya Veltkamp, Director, Canada Climate Law Initiative.

CCLI applauds the launch of High-Level Climate Ministerial cooperation to align our policies and goals with the United States to tackle the climate crisis. “The financial risks of climate change are not uncertain at all, the only uncertainty is the timing of impacts; and what is key is to effectively manage the risks and engage in forward-looking strategic planning as Canada navigates towards a net-zero emissions economy,” says Dr. Janis Sarra, Principal Co-Investigator at CCLI. It is thus important that Canada works with the United States to address climate change on a policy level. CCLI’s robust legal research allows the team to propose specific policy recommendations that can help support this international cooperation.

CCLI’s Experts deliver presentations to corporate directors and pension trustees to strengthen their climate governance. The Canada Climate Law Initiative looks forward to greater collaboration between the Canadian and American public and private financial institutions.

About the Canada Climate Law Initiative

The Canada Climate Law Initiative (CCLI) is a cross-disciplinary research initiative that advances the understanding of climate governance across Canada through research, dialogue and knowledge sharing. CCLI conducts rigorous legal analysis and consult with a national network of 55 Canadian Climate Governance Experts to bring up-to-date governance knowledge and tools to corporate and pension boards across Canada. CCLI is led by three principal investigators, Dr. Janis Sarra and Dr. Carol Liao from the Peter A. Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia, and Professor Cynthia Williams from the Osgoode Hall Law School, York University.



Canada Climate
Law Initiative

L'Initiative canadienne
de droit climatique



FLORIDA ENGINEERING SOCIETY & AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ENGINEERING COMPANIES OF FLORIDA ANNOUNCE 2021 SESSION PRIORITIES

Urban Search & Rescue Engineer Liability Protections, and Long-Term Water, Energy and Transportation Solutions Top Priorities

The Florida Engineering Society (FES) and American Council of Engineering Companies of Florida (ACEC-FL) has released its 2021 Legislative Session priorities, placing a priority on liability protections for engineers conducting urban search and rescue missions during natural disasters, and on long-term water, energy and transportation planning and solutions.

“Engineers serve as boots on the ground to Florida’s growing resiliency and infrastructure needs, and are frequently the ‘go-to’ resource for engineering-related search and rescue missions during times of natural disasters.

While lawmakers will rightly place a leading focus on the health and safety of Floridians and our state’s economic recovery from COVID-19, we encourage elected leaders to also take bold actions on the tremendous infrastructure-related needs facing Florida,” said Allen Douglas, Executive Director of FES and ACEC-FL.

Urban Search and Rescue Engineer Liability Protections

During times of natural disasters, structural engineer volunteers are often called upon by local and state government officials to inspect structures to ensure they are safe for first responders to enter. Since 2017, the number of licensed engineers volunteering their search and rescue services has dropped by 60 percent due to threats of liability lawsuits.



We encourage elected leaders to also take bold actions on the tremendous infrastructure-related needs facing Florida

ERING

FOUNDED 1916



Florida
Engineering
Society

ACEC

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF ENGINEERING COMPANIES
of Florida

- **Liability Protections for Search and Rescue Engineers:** To help increase the number of engineers providing search and rescue mission services, FES and ACEC-FL support legislative efforts to shield engineers who volunteer their professional services for these efforts.

Water, Energy & Transportation Solutions

With nearly 1,000 new residents moving to Florida each day, preparing Florida's water, energy and transportation systems to meet this

growing demand is of paramount importance. The FES and ACEC-FL support the following:

- **Long-Term Water Resiliency Solutions:** Creating a holistic strategy to address state-wide environmental, water supply and flooding issues using a systematic assessment of long-term infrastructure needs, and a fiscally sound approach to implementing engineering projects in a manner similar to the State Transportation Work Plan.
- **Florida's Transportation Future:** With more than 3 million new drivers expected on Florida's roads by 2030, FES and ACEC-FL believe innovations and investments in Florida's transportation systems (roads, airports and seaports) should be a priority. They support a transportation plan that puts safety, infrastructure condition, mobility, Florida's economy and our environment as interrelated goals to create Florida's transportation future.
- **Diverse and Reliable Energy Resources:** Developing a plan to meet Florida's steadily increasing energy requirements with affordable, efficient, sustainable and resilient energy solutions.

Additional legislative priorities include strengthening structural engineering occupational regulations, and supporting competitive procurement qualifications.

About FES & ACEC-FL: The FES and ACEC-FL are the state's leading organizations representing Florida's professional engineers. FES represents more than 2,700 individual engineers working in private industry, government and higher education. ACEC-FL represents more than 350 engineering firms working in the transportation, water resources, energy and structural sectors.

www.fleng.org.



SEVEN ARIZONA BIO STARTUPS EARN \$30K THROUGH FLINN FOUNDATION ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAM

Five Phoenix, two Tucson firms to receive personalized learning plan, other benefits

Artificial intelligence to assist Alzheimer's disease caregivers, rapid virus screeners, a headband to monitor for concussions, and new technologies for surgeries and drug discovery are some of the innovations of the participants in the 2021 Flinn Foundation Bioscience Entrepreneurship Program.

Seven Arizona-based firms will each receive \$30,000 in funding support through a non-profit partner, a personalized learning plan to help advance the company, and connections with the state's bioscience leaders in business, research, and policy.

The Flinn Foundation has competitively selected 47 bioscience firms in Arizona since 2014 to participate and provided nearly \$1.4 million in support for the program. "We are thrilled to welcome these seven Arizona startups into our program, which we believe will accelerate their path to success in the biosciences and lead to innovations that will improve the lives of Arizonans and people around the world," said Tammy McLeod, Flinn Foundation president and

CEO.

The 2021 program winners, including five from the Phoenix area and two from Tucson, are:

Botanisol Analytics

Botanisol Analytics of Phoenix is developing rapid, digital virus screeners for COVID-19 and other pathogens. The portable device can be operated anywhere by minimally trained, non-medical personnel and provides results about chemical and biological threats in less than 10 minutes. A laser is used to detect molecular signatures and allows for real-time analysis in the field.

LabPair

LabPair is a web application that matches scientists with incomplete, complementary work, thereby improving their collective chances of publishing and receiving funding. The Tucson-based company will be especially impactful for biomedical research, as it will help eliminate redundancy, increase the pace of research, and result in more impactful studies.

Movement Interactive



We are thrilled to welcome these seven Arizona startups into our program, which we believe will accelerate their path to success in the biosciences

Movement Interactive is a developer of wearable technology to address undiagnosed concussions and unreported falls. The Phoenix-based company is the maker of the Hiji® band, a comfortable and versatile headband with a Bluetooth sensor that connects to a mobile app to provide real-time data directly to parents and coaches about possible concussion-strength impacts.

Paxauris

Paxauris is a Phoenix-based company that has created soft, silicone earplugs that inflate in the ear to provide a comfortable seal that blocks unwanted noise. The earplug is fabricated from durable materials and is designed to be reusable for more than 100 insertions. The earplug can also serve as a biometric platform for many physiological measurements.

Satori Orthopaedics

Phoenix-based Satori Orthopaedics is developing a next-generation intramedullary nail that expedites healing from tibia and femur fractures and decreases the potential for complications requiring additional surgery. This is the first intramedullary nail which allows surgeon-modulated controlled axial motion.

Scintillation Nanotechnologies

Scintillation Nanotechnologies develops, manufactures, and sells multiplexed nanoscale radioisotope detectors for use in drug discovery in academic, biotech, and pharmaceutical research laboratories. The unique chemical and physical properties of the Tucson-based company's products give researchers unprecedented insight into drug uptake, binding, and distribution while saving time and reducing costly hazardous waste.

TapRoot Interventions & Solutions

TapRoot Interventions & Solutions has created an AI-powered digital assistant, Ella, to provide a personalized behavioral approach in caring for cognitively impaired individuals, beginning with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. The Phoenix-based company's TapRoot smartphone-based system provides behavioral interventions for patients, helping caregivers improve their efficiency and performance.

The program benefits include a \$30,000 grant awarded to and administered by the non-profit Arizona Bioindustry Association, a trade association that promotes the growth of the state's bioscience sector, as well as a tailored, yearlong learning plan provided by an industry expert. The firms also receive a one-year membership to Arizona's Bioscience Roadmap Steering Committee, joining new leaders Eve Ross and Heather Carter and more than 125 science, health-care, business, academic, and policy leaders who guide Arizona's Bioscience Roadmap, the state's long-term strategic plan.

To learn more about the Flinn Foundation Bioscience Entrepreneurship Program and the nearly 50 selected Arizona firms, visit www.flinn.org/entrepreneur

*The Flinn Foundation is a privately endowed, philanthropic grant-making organization established in 1965 by Dr. Robert S. and Irene P. Flinn to improve the quality of life in Arizona to benefit future generations. In addition to advancing the biosciences in Arizona, the foundation supports the Flinn Scholars Program, a merit-based college scholarship program; arts and culture; and the Arizona Center for Civic Leadership.


FANUC AND ROCKWELL AUTOMATION FORM COALITION TO QUICKLY ADDRESS SKILLS GAP WITH ROBOTICS AND AUTOMATION APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

FANUC America and Rockwell Automation officially formed a coalition to kick off accelerated work and learn apprenticeship programs designed to upskill current and future workers for jobs in advanced manufacturing, robotics and automation.

The coalition includes APT, a FANUC and Rockwell Automation systems integrator, and NOCTI Business Solutions, which provides independent assessments of occupational standards and validation using recognized International Organization for Standardization (ISO) process validation methods. Franklin Apprenticeships is also a key partner of the coalition, ensuring apprenticeship support structure and success enablers for employers and apprentices.

The coalition has developed new apprenticeship programs offering people opportunities to gain credentials that include fundamental robotics (Robot Operator) and automation (PLC Operator). The program offers a second level of credentials for Robot and PLC Technicians. A third credentialing level called Integration Specialist builds on the fundamental and technical skills that teaches people to operate and troubleshoot integrated FANUC-Rockwell Automation technologies. All of the new apprenticeship offerings will provide more people with fulfilling careers and help companies to bridge the demand for skilled workers.

“Our number one goal is to help create a worker pipeline that will not only help people increase their skills and future earning potential, but to help manufacturers achieve their production goals and maintain a thriving economy,” said Paul Aiello, Director of Education, FANUC America. “In most cases, current and future workers can complete the apprenticeship skills training and achieve their industry-recognized certifications



As industry adopts new technologies, it is vital to be able to quickly adapt with a well-trained workforce

in less than one year. It’s also important to note that these programs support all types of apprenticeship and certification models, including pre-apprenticeships.”

“As industry adopts new technologies, it is vital to be able to quickly adapt with a well-trained workforce,” said Michael Cook, Director Global Academic Organization, Rockwell Automation. “Having the most current standards will drive manufacturing competitiveness and simultaneously grow new talent to these new occupations, upskill current employees, and allow companies to be more agile in their workforce planning.”

The apprenticeship programs aim to help companies rapidly upskill employees at every level from Operator to Technician to Integration System Specialist. In addition to improving the skills of current production workers, these programs will be extremely valuable for engineers who are working to implement new automation systems and processes that require new employees trained in the latest automation technologies.



ADDRESS MANUFACTURING PROGRAMS

“As technology advances at a fast pace, it is important that companies play a bigger role in education to ensure a safe, productive and sustainable work environment,” said Aiello. “FANUC and our coalition look forward to helping as many people as possible take advantage of these accelerated work and apprenticeship programs.”

Over 40 leading companies, including Dana, Magna, Tyson Foods and Flex-N-Gate, have agreed to support and participate in apprenticeships for automation technologies, ensuring that their employees receive adequate training and are qualified to succeed.

Customer Testimonials

“Automation is imperative to a competitive U.S. manufacturing base. In order to meet our demand in automation expansion, we will need skilled candidates to fill high-demand, and technically driven positions like Robot Operator, Robot Technician and Integrated Systems Specialist.” Heidi Koedam, Manager, Engineering Learning Organization, Dana Incorporated.

“In order to support the expansion of manufacturing automation and create growth and development opportunities for our employees, we join this project team to engage skilled candidates and help fill technically driven positions like robot operators, robot technicians and integrated systems specialists. Magna Seating projects it will support a number of maintenance technician trainees between 2021 and 2023.” Paul N. Myles, Sr. Manager, Government Workforce Development and Training Programs, Magna International Inc.

“Tyson Foods currently has a US DOL Industrial Maintenance Apprenticeship underway and we are successfully developing our team members. FANUC has won our national account and it makes a lot of sense to collaborate with FANUC and other vendors, such as Rockwell/Allen-Bradley on these Level 1, 2, and 3 apprenticeship standards. I applaud FANUC’s support of workforce development across the nation at secondary and post-secondary institutions.” Mike Rogers, Senior Director Maintenance and Refrigeration, Tyson Foods.

“We take pride at Flex-N-Gate in helping our employees build fulfilling careers. As we expand, we’re looking for qualified and ambitious people for our team, and we feel high-value apprenticeships are an ideal avenue to helping people start or expand their careers.” Bill Beistline, Executive VP – Flex-N-Gate Metals Manufacturing & Procurement.

Industry leaders FANUC and Rockwell Automation have worked together over the past decade developing training, certifications and an education and training delivery network. FANUC’s network of educational partners includes more than 1200 high school and post-secondary FANUC-certified training organizations, and over 150 university and career technical training partners associated with this industry team. FANUC’s network of schools coupled with Rockwell Automation’s education partners represent nearly 1600 schools, the largest nationwide collaboration of industry and education working to narrow the skills gap. For more information, visit www.fanucamerica.com/apprenticeships.



NEW RIVER GORGE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY MOVES FORWARD WITH STUDY ON AEROSPACE SKILLED TRAINING NEEDS

Jina Belcher, executive director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Authority (NRGRDA), announced the selection of Pavlik and Associates to undertake a comprehensive review of skilled training needs for aerospace companies locating at the 105-acre site at Raleigh County Memorial Airport.

“The development of aerospace manufacturing and innovation opportunities is one of the most compelling ways to diversify and grow the economy in southern West Virginia,” said Belcher. “Coming off the recent announcement of the \$8.3 million site development at the airport, we want our workforce to be ready for the new companies locating at our Airport Industrial Park.”

Belcher said the aerospace education and workforce study will be completed in 10 months and offer a roadmap for collaborating institutions – New River Community and Technical College (NRCTC) and West Virginia University Institute of Technology (WVU Tech) – to address the two- and four-year degree programs needed. She noted the recent focus on development of the airport site and creation of new jobs has caused many local citizens to contact both institutions to inquire about their respective aerospace and aviation training programs. This work is being funded by a \$50,000 Appalachian Regional Commission POWER grant awarded to NRGRDA in 2020 as well as a matching award of the same amount from American Electric Power (AEP).



 We want our workforce to be ready for the new companies locating at our Airport Industrial Park

In 2020, both New River Gorge Regional Development Authority and Greenbrier Valley Economic Development Partnership, along with their respective airports – Raleigh County Memorial Airport and Lewisburg Airport – received an AEROREady™ designation for a combined 11-county area. Belcher said the AEROREady study identified the ease of transferability of skills possessed by displaced coal industry workers into the aerospace industry.

New River Community and Technical College President Bonny Copenhaver has been involved in workforce conversations since the inception of the project. “Recognizing and targeting our already skilled workforce allows the partners involved to have a jump start on training and

recruitment to a newly developed aerospace training program,” said Copenhaver. “With campuses strategically located in Princeton, Beaver, and Lewisburg, and serving a combined 9-county area, we are committed to develop a new Aviation Mechanic Training school to help train a workforce that could have guaranteed employment at neighboring aerospace companies.”

Also located within the footprint of the 11-county project area, WVU Tech has agreed to partner its existing two-year Aviation Engineering program with New River Community and Technical College to develop a 2+2 aerospace program of study. WVU Tech Campus President Carolyn Long said students agreeing to and completing all four years of training and coursework will graduate with the skillsets and training need to excel in Aviation Mechanics and Maintenance positions. She added that the average entry level wage after earning this degree is \$60,000 to \$80,000 annually.

Belcher commended WVU Tech and NRCTC for their collaboration on advanced workforce development and training. She said Pavlik and Associates, of Fort Worth, Tex., can fill the gaps and work with the Federal Aviation Administration and other technical and regulatory bodies to conduct the workforce assessment and recommendations.

About New River Gorge Regional Development Authority:

The New River Gorge Regional Development Authority’s (NRGRDA) mission is to initiate, facilitate and support the economic and community development efforts within the counties of Fayette, Nicholas, Raleigh, and Summers located in this region of southern West Virginia. NRGRDA stimulates the regional economy through business expansion and retention efforts, including an extensive portfolio of financial services; the management of sites for new companies locating to our region; and serving as a point of access for local service providers which offer a variety of technical assistance for business owners.



The Business of Ecommerce:

Heading online? The most common ecommerce marketplace mistakes

Over the past year, we have seen more businesses make the digital switch and take services online than ever before. For many, an ecommerce offering was a means for survival during an incredibly volatile and unpredictable time. While for others, an online focus has been slowly developing for some time now as the digital revolution becomes increasingly undeniable.

Marketplaces have their challenges, too. And for businesses utilising these sales channels for the first time, or for those struggling to make them work to their advantage, it is likely they are making one, or some of these common mistakes...

Choosing the right platforms

Today, there are countless online marketplaces to choose from, all offering their own unique benefits.



It is likely you have heard of some of the biggest, including Amazon, eBay and Alibaba, but there are also many smaller ones which can be just as effective at generating revenue for your business.

Generally, businesses tend to flock to the more well known platforms when setting up shop on an online marketplace. And understandably so, as these platforms attract the largest number of users, thus putting your brand in front of more customers. They also tend to be perceived as more trustworthy, which can then reflect positively on your brand. However, as more and more businesses take this viewpoint, it is to be expected that the competition on such marketplaces is also on the rise. Therefore, businesses need to take a strategic and informed approach when deciding which marketplaces to use. And this decision should be based on which is frequented by or accessible to your target audience.

For instance, if your target demographic is categorised by geographic location, you may want to consider using platforms that attract the largest audience in those specific countries, such as Alibaba across Asia, and Amazon and Walmart in the US. In Europe, Zalando is the marketplace of choice for fashion. But with advancements in technology and



changing consumer habits, these traditional online marketplaces are no longer the only way to sell, with social media platforms now also getting in on the action.

Notably, Facebook's investment into developing its Marketplace feature and now a Shopping page on Instagram are changing the way both businesses and consumers interact and make or enable purchases. Similarly, the age of your target customer base can also help you determine the right platform, with usage and uptake of such channels more common among the 18 – 34 age demographic, and more precisely, females within this group.

Marketplace management

Although retailers do not necessarily have to manage the technical aspects of a third party marketplace, which is a real selling point for companies with small teams or strained resources, they do have to consider order management and stock list updating, on top of their management of any other channels they are using.

Often, businesses underestimate the amount of work this can involve. But when you consider the reason for using a marketplace in the first

instance – to reach the larger pool of customers and maximise sales – the additional workload makes perfect sense. Whether you are considering using a marketplace, creating your own marketplace, or are having difficulty managing existing activity, don't let this deter you, because fortunately, there are a number of software solutions that can help. For example, many of the biggest brands in the world use just one platform, which provides a single comprehensive commerce solution, including marketplace management. It combines activity across every sales and logistics channel, enabling greater efficiency for the business and a unified experience for customers.

For a brand that wants to access global marketplaces, ChannelAdvisor is often used to aggregate data feeds and order management across all marketplace sales channels. Through use of such platforms, the management aspect of having multiple order and revenue streams becomes much more streamlined. This will allow businesses to focus on other commercially critical areas, or scale up their online offerings in order to target the optimal amount of customers in all of their markets, and via the most suitable channels in each.

Furthermore, these platforms offer valuable data capture and analysis opportunities, which also come at no real additional price to the company. With all information held centrally, businesses can get rich insight into the effectiveness of their activity, as well as confirmation of whether their decisions on things such as platform choice for example, have in fact, been successful. If not, the data and insight available could offer a suitable alternative, or at least areas of improvement, enabling the entire process to come full circle.

Ultimately, marketplace success is not too difficult to achieve once you have the right knowledge and tools under your belt. And with clear benefits of the sales channel, and a strong indication that they will be here to stay for some time, there is only a case for businesses to invest in such tools in order to yield fruitful online results.

*** Written by Nate Burke, CEO of Diginius, a software solutions partner for ecommerce and digital businesses across industries, www.diginius.com*



Power Question

What is the most important piece of advice you would give to someone who's considering starting a small business today?

Shane Howe, Managing Director of Phoenix Construction Group, Grand Cayman:

"As someone who likes starting new businesses, I would say to make good alliances. Strategic alliances with people who support your business. if you remain true to yourself, it can be very rewarding."

Jason Cannon, Director of Economic Development, Town of Wake Forest, NC:

"My advice would be to really recognize the resources that are available. Here in our area, the Triangle is incredibly blessed with some resources you can't find in many other places. We have RTP (Research Triangle Park), the largest research park in the entire world. We



have engineering schools at NC State that rival schools across the world. Three tier one research universities – NC State, Chapel Hill, and Duke. If I were looking to be an entrepreneur at this point in time, it's just really recognizing the resources that are out there. And I don't think everyone capitalizes on that as strongly as they could."

Martijn Balkestein, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Aruba:

"The most important thing that entrepreneurs need to know is prepare yourself for the future. Be well informed and optimize your planning before you start your company."



Michael Smith, President of Norwest Engineering, Portland, Oregon:

“I would say be mindful that you’re in it for the long term. Business is an infinite game. Players can come and go, and it takes patience and time to make sure that you’re making the best decisions long term.”

Aldwyn Wayne, CEO of WiPay Trinidad & Tobago:

“The most important advice I would give is that there is no better time than now. Before, if you had an idea it took a lot of effort to turn that idea into a product. Before globalization via the internet, it was difficult to get started; you needed some capital. If you have an idea today, you could have your business off the ground

in 48 hours because the internet allows you to create a presence online. Social media allows you to talk to billions of people that normally it would take millions of dollars to reach through traditional marketing. So everything is in place for us to BE that entrepreneurial generation. To be the start-up generation. I say the best time is now to be an entrepreneur... because of the internet, because of digitization, because of this new gig economy where you exist in a virtual space. You don’t have the overhead, the red tape, or the restrictions to get your business started, like the people who came before us had. So, if you have an idea or something you’re passionate about, now is the time to get your business going.”

city view



MISSISSIPPI MUNICIPAL LEAGUE



HELPING TOWNS & CITIES EXCEL

CLINTON, MISSISSIPPI



YOU BELONG HERE

DRACUT, MASSACHUSETTS



FRIENDLY, SAFE, AND PROGRESSIVE

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS



RICH IN HISTORY AND POTENTIAL

YARMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS



THE SPIRIT OF CAPE COD

FOXBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS



THE GEM OF NORFOLK COUNTY

MILLBROOK, ALABAMA



COMFORT, CONVENIENCE
AND COMMUNITY

BROUSSARD, LOUISIANA



WHERE INFRASTRUCTURE IS KEY

CENTRAL, LOUISIANA



A COMMUNITY THAT CARES

WEST MONROE, LOUISIANA



SO MUCH TO LOVE

HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA



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ROLLING WITH THE CHANGES

COLLINGWOOD, ONTARIO



GOOD THINGS ON THE HORIZON

TECUMSEH, ONTARIO




THE SPIRIT OF 'HOME'

MISSISSIPPI MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

Helping towns & cities excel





The Mississippi Municipal League (MML) is the official non-profit private organization of Cities and Towns of Mississippi. MML serves its members in a variety of valuable ways including lobbying the state and federal legislatures, and providing education for municipal elected officials, as well as technical support. The League also represents municipalities with public and

private entities, and acts as a networking media for municipal members.

Business View Magazine recently spoke with MML Executive Director, Shari Veazey, and Deputy Director, Robbie Brown, about the mission of the organization and the many programs and services it offers to help members manage and grow their

AT A GLANCE

MISSISSIPPI MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

- WHAT:** Official non-profit private organization of Cities and Towns of Mississippi
- WHERE:** Based in Jackson, Mississippi
- WEBSITE:** www.mmlonline.com

communities. The following is an edited version of our conversation.

BVM: How would you describe the overall mandate of the MML?

Veazey: “The Mississippi Municipal League is a private association that was founded in 1931. We’re one of about 49 Leagues of Cities across the country. We are proud to have 94 percent of Mississippi cities as members. Our true mission is to help them excel, whether it be economic development projects; helping them learn how to be a city official when they get elected; what their role is as a council member or a board member versus their role as a Mayor or City Manager. We do advocate for our members, so we spend a lot of time researching at the legislative level and looking for ways that laws need to be changed to be more effective; to update laws that are antiquated and aren’t keeping up with technology. Funding is always a huge issue in a legislative session, helping protect current municipal revenue streams but also finding additional ways that more revenue can be available to them, particularly as it pertains to improving water, sewer, and street infrastructure.”

BVM: What educational programs do you offer?

Brown: “We have a program called Certified Municipal Officials (CMO) with Basic, Advanced, and Professional Development levels. Whether you’re a Mayor or an Alderman or a Councilman, the first level teaches the basics you need to know to do your job. Core classes include basic law; basic organization; basic finance – people come from a wide variety of backgrounds and maybe haven’t dealt with a government budget before, so we talk about municipal finance; and basic land use, covering zoning codes, etc. They take those core classes plus elective classes. In total, they get 60 hours of education to complete the Basic level.

“The Advanced level shows them how to help



their community grow. It’s comprised of three core classes where we have someone come and teach community development, another teaches economic development, and the third core class has those presenters coming together to talk about how the two types of development go hand in hand. That class involves a hypothetical city. Attendees break up into groups and tackle problems like budget issues to better your community. It gives practical experience on how



that would work. There are electives with that level too, for 40 hours in total.

“The last level is Professional Development where we teach how to talk to the media, public speaking, management issues, HR issues, labor issues. That’s another 40 hours. Once a member completes all three levels, they’ll have had at least 140 hours of education. They pay to come to one of our conferences and that’s where they

do most of the education. The last one we had in the summer of 2019 we offered 67 different sessions they could choose to attend. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve developed webinars to replace the in-person conferences. We’ve now done several of those for training. It’s a new world for us, we had talked about going virtual before but COVID kind of pushed us to move forward in that regard.”

BVM: Are there a lot of common issues among Mississippi municipalities?

Veazey: “Yes, obviously, the bigger the city, the bigger an issue can be. But all the municipalities have been dealing with some of the same concerns, especially during COVID. They are public bodies, so one of the first things we helped them with was figuring out how to keep their meetings open to the public in the midst of a pandemic. That’s been a challenge. Many of them have had to do video conferencing to allow members that were quarantining to call in to the meeting, as well as managing social distancing to the public that were coming to meetings.

“We’ve also had some federal funding that was appropriated by our legislature for municipalities to help with the impact of COVID. They had to look at expenses that weren’t budgeted. PPE and additional public safety expenses, enforcing emergency orders – even the smallest towns have had to deal with that. Mississippi is very rural, we only have about 15 cities over 20,000. Our largest city, Jackson, is about 165,000. The bigger cities have had more revenue loss because of COVID. Sales tax is a big driver, so larger cities saw significant lost revenue when retail shut down. Ironically, some of the small towns saw an increase in sales tax because people were sheltering at home and spending money locally at the mom and pop stores. It’s been a weird dynamic, some of the really small towns have had record sales tax revenue through the pandemic.

“When it comes to storms and weather-related issues, our role is helping them facilitate the federal assistance that comes through FEMA and navigate that process. Interestingly, our current MML President is the Mayor of Gulfport, so he is very familiar with this – the Gulf coast in 2005 was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. And in the midst of the pandemic they’ve also had to deal with the impact of several major storms this year. Some flooding and wind damage. We also have a very active tornado season in Mississippi.”

BVM: How do you communicate with the membership?

Veazey: “We’re always working on improving the ways we communicate. We have a quarterly magazine and an active social media presence, and we send out a lot of emails. We’re moving more into text messaging now because these days people are more apt to see a text before an email. So in our next legislative sessions, if we need to send out an alert about a bill, we’ll be doing that through text messaging.”

Brown: “We put out an annual Grants & Loans book that we send to our members. In that book, they’re organized by category and we update it once a year, after I’ve talked to every state agency in Mississippi to find out what grants are available to municipalities. Grants are very competitive, so we want our members to know where and when they can apply.”

Veazey: “Robbie is in charge of our City Hall Center which is focused mainly on small towns; it’s a clearing house of information they can go to. There’s a special section on our website and in our quarterly magazine. Just making sure the smaller towns know what resources are available because they don’t have all the people and departments that a larger city has to access information. That’s something we spend a lot of time doing. Eighty-five percent of our member cities are under 10,000 and about 55 percent of them are under 5500. So there are a lot of little towns that need some handholding and help





from the League.”

BVM: How will MML continue to be a viable voice for members?

Veazey: “The pandemic has probably changed forever how we operate. But one thing we’re constantly trying to do is help them find funding for infrastructure. So our focus for the next two to three years will be helping protect their current municipal revenue stream and fighting hard against unfunded mandates getting passed down to them. We’re working really hard to build a stronger relationship with our state legislators and our federal delegation because going forward it will be more important than ever for us to be engaged at the state capital and in D.C. as well.

“So much of what our members gain from the Mississippi Municipal League is the networking with each other. We provide a lot of training but they learn a lot just from visiting with other city

representatives because they’ve all had some of the same issues. Not having those opportunities to engage with each other is going to be a real challenge. You can only do so much virtually, so we’ll be looking at what other associations are doing and focusing on how to meet that challenge.”



CLINTON

AT A GLANCE

CLINTON, MISSISSIPPI

- WHAT:** Mississippi's 10th largest city; population 25,000
- WHERE:** Located within the Jackson Metropolitan Area
- WEBSITE:** www.clintonms.org



Clinton, Mississippi

You Belong Here

Located in the Jackson Metropolitan Area, the City of Clinton, Mississippi extends a warm welcome to more than just its residents. Clinton is also home to many thriving businesses and they are always looking to expand that number. “As a city, we are open for business,” says Mayor Phil Fisher. “We want people to come and be part of our city. Our motto is ‘You Belong Here’ and we mean it. If you want to come here and you want to do well and you want

to take part in our community, we’d love to have you here. One of the reasons for our great success is that we are a safe city. In fact, Clinton has been named 3rd Safest City in Mississippi for the third year in a row.”

Since 2013, Clinton has gained 1000 jobs in its industrial park alone. The city of 25,000 is home to national and international businesses including Taylor Power Systems, E3 Environmental, Siemens, Gulf States



Canners and Gulf Relay. “Our industrial base has really been expanding,” Fisher reports. “But I think the biggest economic development driver we have had has been the addition of Continental Tire – a company based out of Germany that has come here and will be making over-the-road tires. Continental will employ 2500 people when they get to full capacity, and then they will be able to add to the 900 acres of land they bought here. We are looking for them to become huge in the future.”

One reason that Continental located in Clinton, and one of the many competitive advantages the city has to offer, is the availability of a skilled workforce. According to Gabriel Prado, Clinton’s Director of Economic Development, “If you look at it starting all the way from high school, we have one of the best, if not the best, school systems in the state. And one of the biggest reasons for that is because they incorporate a lot of the vocational skills into it. They work hand-in-hand with our industries





like Taylor, Continental, and some of the others, so that when the kids are coming up through 11th and 12th grade, they are already starting to experience some of that vocational work. On top of that, our community college works closely with our industry, as well. All of our businesses in the industrial park and Continental are able to basically customize their workforce needs into what the different schools can provide them.”

Clinton is also home to Mississippi College, which recently had its electrical engineering program accredited. The private college of 5,000 students has one of the highest medical school acceptance rates in the state. “Not only do they provide the workforce that is needed for the businesses here in the area, in the city, our industrial park, Continental, but also throughout the state,” says Prado.



The city is always looking for innovative ways to operate and attract new businesses. They recently beat out other cities nationwide to become the site of the upcoming Lifetime movie Teacher Watching. And with the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the world last year, they knew they had to try even harder to bring in new opportunities. Prado admits, “We had a decision to make – either to stop or innovate, and we decided to innovate. That’s when I brought in the idea of using virtual reality for both recruitment and workforce development. In recruitment, we have a 750,000-square-foot building that we’re working to get occupied, so we took that building and placed it into virtual reality. In other words, if you were to put on that headset anywhere in the country, you could see what the building looks like once it was fixed to the potential prospect. We took those headsets and sent them all around the U.S., including technology companies in Silicon Valley, all throughout the West Coast and the Seattle area.”



For workforce development, they started a pilot program in the city’s high schools to help augment education. “Gabriel arranged a demonstration of it with about half a dozen of us

and we went into the classroom,” Fisher recalls. “The lady there was teaching us about sea life. You could actually walk to the edge of the ocean, step off into the water, sink down and find the particular plant, whale, porpoise, whatever you were looking for and follow it around instead of just looking at a one-dimensional picture of it.” Clinton High School is the first high school in the continental United States to be granted a charter from the international academic honor society Phi Theta Kappa.

The city likes to share the wealth, too. The more people that come to Clinton and surrounding area, the better for everyone. Fisher confides, “I’m a strong believer in ‘the rising water lifts all boats.’ If you don’t want to come to Clinton, or next door to Clinton, and you want to go down the road to Bolton or to Vicksburg or Byram, or one of these other small cities, we still benefit, just like they benefit from Continental. We benefit from whatever else may come there because people are going to still want to find a





place to live. They will look for a place to shop. There's all kinds of ways to compete for the customer in an effort to help our own economy. The goal is to bring people to town and have them spend money. If there wasn't a cash register at the end of the line somewhere, I'm not interested."

Part of spreading the wealth includes having a partnership with the Greater Jackson Alliance, a regional economic development agency that aims to promote the Greater Jackson area, enhance cooperation between various governmental jurisdictions, and coordinate economic development in the region. "The Greater Jackson Alliance has been very important to us because they have all of the biggest economic developers in the area," says Prado. "They are the ones we are competing with, but like the Mayor says, where the water rises, it rises for everyone. They help us a lot with data, information, and marketing and some of the other things that are crucial in economic

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development. We want this to be the place where you can grow your family, but not only that, you can also work here. You can do everything that you need within the area and you can shop or go to restaurants. And I think that working with the Alliance and some of their other partners has been crucial in that fight.”

Being a place with a high quality of life, where people can grow is of utmost importance to Fisher. “You can be born here, you can be educated up to a PhD in Clinton, and find a job,” he says. “A young person can graduate with a PhD and go to work in town and be transferred all over the world and come back and live here. Or you can move here and raise a family.”

To make the city even more enticing for families, Clinton has embarked on a program to upgrade its infrastructure, including an expansion to one of its water sewer facilities, as well as spending a significant amount of money on parks and

walking trails. “We are going to spend over a million dollars this year building walking trails,” Fisher says. “And that’s just the start of a four-year program that will finally end up with 15 miles of walking trails in our city. This is what people are demanding when they come to town. They have young families and they want their kids to be able to get out there on their bikes and ride on the trails, or be able to run on the trails and not have to deal with traffic or things of that nature. So that’s the direction we are going in.”



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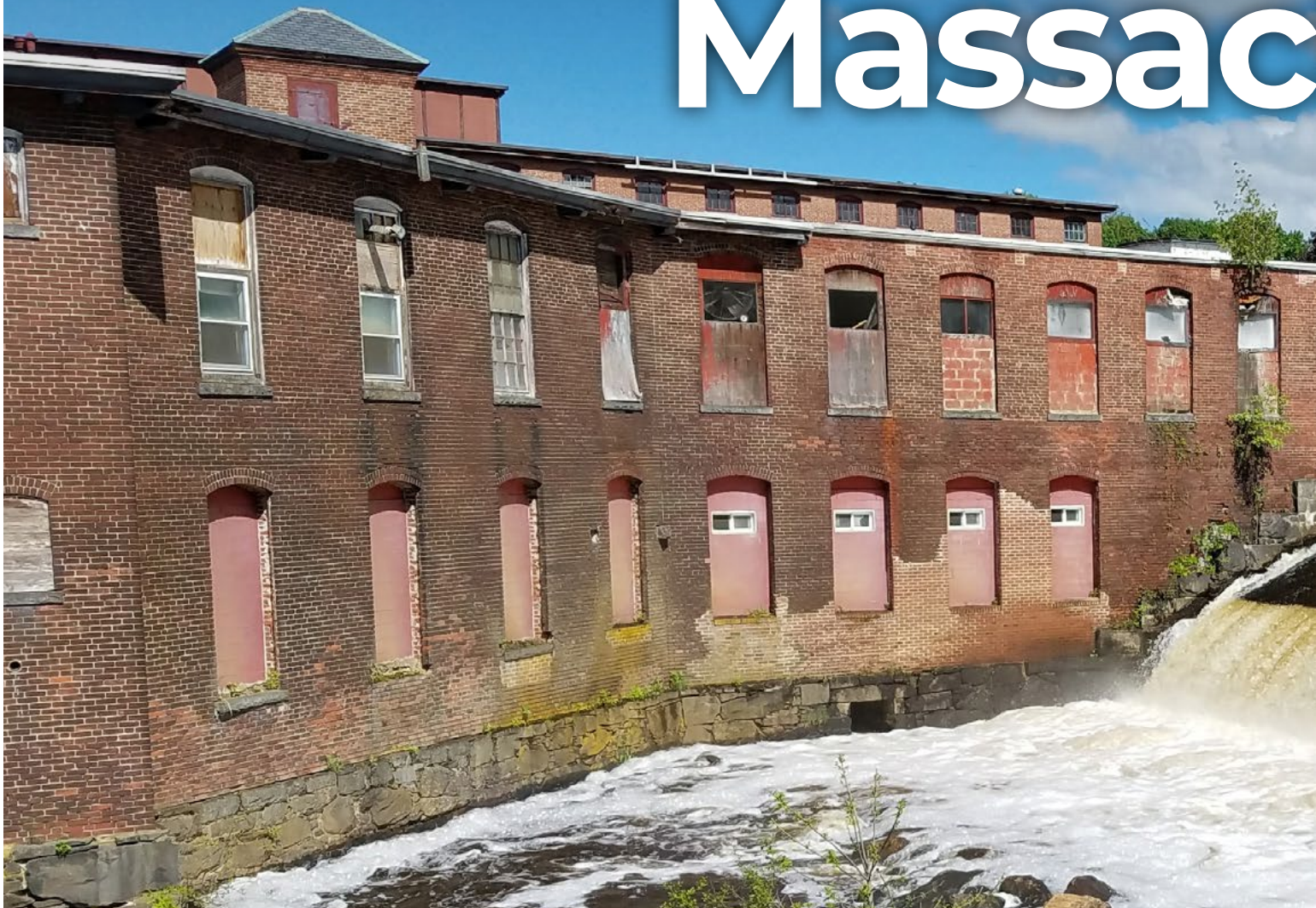




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AT A GLANCE

DRACUT, MASSACHUSETTS

- WHAT:** A charming, progressive New England town; population approx. 33,000
- WHERE:** Middlesex County, MA
- WEBSITE:** www.dracutma.gov



Dracut, Massachusetts

*Friendly, safe,
and progressive*

Once the site of the first armed conflict of the American Revolutionary War, modern-day Dracut, Massachusetts still brings forth intimations of its past, but in much more peaceful, compromising ways. From its heritage-protected rural landscapes to its handsome historic houses, it's the kind of New England town that can make you homesick for a place you've never been.

All Dracut farms are privately owned and some are under permanent protection either with the State Agricultural Preservation Program (APR) or a Conservation Restriction. Dracut's historical preservation is also an area the Town has invested in, as evidenced by the re-location and renovation of a historical building that is regularly used by the community. "We are committed to encouraging and facilitating the preservation and appreciation of Dracut's natural farm and recreational lands," says Town Manager, Ann Vandal. "By working with municipal and state organizations we strive to integrate local conservation and environmental goals with state and regional initiatives."

Situated just 25 miles northwest of Boston on the border between Massachusetts and New Hampshire, Dracut is one the largest towns in Massachusetts to still be governed by an open town meeting – a form of regional assembly in which local, qualified voters act together as the town's legislature.

In 2001, Dracut adopted the Community Preservation Act (CPA), a state law that permits residents to vote to add a surcharge onto their existing property taxes for the purposes of protecting local landmarks and preserving the historical heritage of the town. To date, over \$2.35 billion in CPA funding has been raised on 12,000 projects throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. “It’s been a high priority for the community to continue funding these critical projects,” says Town Manager, Ann Vandal. “The CPA has really made a major impact in allowing us to move forward with certain purchases that the general fund wouldn’t normally pick up.”

GreenStar Herbals was one such project; in collaboration with Vantage Builders Inc., a metro Boston-based design-build and construction management firm, they converted a World War II-era woolen mill on the Merrimack River into a 13,000-square-foot, wooden-floored, steel-beamed cannabis dispensary.

“The Town meeting approved the cannabis retail, distribution, and production business, so we currently have four marijuana facilities on the books,” shares Vandal. “When the town put to a vote whether we were going to allow marijuana into Dracut, we also proposed that the cannabis facilities be restricted to industrial-zoned properties and lands. A lot of our mills happen to be in that existing industrial zone. GreenStar’s owner invested about \$8 million into his mill to get things up and running. It’s a beautiful facility. Very well run. Very professional.”

“These cannabis companies have also committed to doing job fairs within Dracut,” adds Alison Genest, a Member of the Board of Selectmen. “They’ve promised to give the majority of their positions to Dracut residents, which is a sign of a good corporate partner.” The Board of Selectmen has so far authorized four special permits and licenses for retail marijuana outfits: GreenStar Herbals, Lazy River Products, BKPN and New



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England Craft Cultivators. And Green Thumb Growers, a marijuana cultivation microbusiness operating out of the former Butterworth building on Lakeview Avenue, is scheduled to open soon. "The marijuana investment in the town is really not small money," emphasizes Tony Archinski, a voting Member of Dracut's Board of Selectmen. "It isn't just storefront selling, either. We're talking about an economic development tool that we're all benefiting from."

In addition to cannabis retail, several urgent care and assisted living resources are the beneficiaries of a significant investment from the town. Circle Health's Outpatient Care Center on



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Lowell Five Bank President and Chief Executive Officer, David E. Wallace, takes great pride in Lowell Five's long-standing partnership with the Town of Dracut, MA, with whom it has a trusted banking relationship.

"Dracut Town Managers and Town Treasurers have continued to place their trust in the experience and advice of the Lowell Five Team since the early 1990s," Wallace comments. "Our strong relationship with the Town of Dracut has grown deep roots in the community and developed into a municipal partnership that extends beyond banking."

These community roots have opened up opportunities for the Bank to give back to the Dracut Community in the form of sponsorships and investments in civic and charitable organizations and events. Additionally, throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the strength of Lowell Five's commitment has provided the Town of Dracut with the financial flexibility to address unexpected needs within their community quickly and to provide assistance.

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Loon Hill Road is an outpatient facility offering key services including walk-in urgent care, primary care, outpatient testing and diagnostic imaging services. Behind that building is Genesis HealthCare, a private 120-bed skilled nursing facility specializing in long-term care, orthopedic rehabilitation, and senior living services.

Genesis Healthcare has not begun construction due to the pandemic and other extenuating circumstances, but they have extended their permitting, so they are expected to move forward.

“Our previous Town Manager and I made the conscious decision to move forward with economic development in the healthcare industry,” says Vandal. “We have quite an elderly population which continues to grow, and so that’s been one of our focuses. Getting over the bridge to Lowell, where a lot of the physicians and hospitals are, can be difficult for those

residents. We’re trying our best to provide as many services in town as we possibly can so that they don’t have to get in their car, trek across town, and deal with city parking.”

The neighboring city of Lowell (pop. 111,000) sits across the Merrimack River from Dracut. It’s home to Lowell General Hospital, Encompass Health Rehabilitation Hospital, and an array of preventative healthcare services. Vandal says they’re currently working on a Mammoth Road development in Dracut to bring some of those same medical, dental, and health care services closer to home.

Also down the pipeline for Dracut is the Town Hall Annex project, developed by the Coalition for a Better Acre, in partnership with Veterans Northeast Outreach Center and Veterans Assisting Veterans. Vandal recounts, “When we built the new Town Hall six years ago, we put several town departments, including Building



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and Board of Health, under one roof. In doing that, we emptied buildings like the Town Hall Annex located next to the first Town Hall." The core of the Old Town Hall was constructed in 1883, with additional wings added in 1939. The building served as the center of town government for about a century but has now been demolished. Dracut has committed just over \$1.2 million in CPA funds to preserving the adjacent Annex building. Originally a two-room schoolhouse, it will be repurposed as affordable units with a preference for veterans as future residents. The Town Hall Annex is about half a mile away from the new Town Hall; it previously housed the Building, Recreation, Conservation, Engineering and Board of Health, all of which are now in the new building.

"We're working towards nine units, with 70% of the membership being constituted by Dracut residents," says Vandal. Although residential construction in various capacities is on the rise, Vandal insists that the town is advancing these



projects with sustainability and community in mind. She notes, “We do have a couple of major 200 to 300 unit developments coming in. Those are obviously going to increase our population and shift an additional burden onto our schools, so that’s an area we’re keeping our eye on. When housing developments come in sets, with one- or two-bedroom units, that’s not as much of an impact on the town. But when you get to three, four, and five bedrooms, now you’ve got to ask yourself, ‘How is this going to impact public safety? How is it going to impact education?’ There’s a lot more thought that goes into it at that point.”

The economic development process in Dracut involves a similar balancing act. According to Archinski. “Since the day I was elected, I’ve felt the struggle between wanting to keep the town rural and generating enough growth so that the tax burden doesn’t fall on the homeowners. Ultimately, I think we’ve done a good job finding and maintaining that balance. You can drive

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down one of the main roads in town and still see farms because we've elected to keep our industrial area tucked off to the side." Genest agrees, noting, "That's one of our biggest draws. People come to Dracut because they love the small-town feel, the agriculture, and the ruralness of the community. As much as we've grown over the past several years, we still have that hometown feel about us."

A shared vision for Dracut's near-term future includes more family-friendly amenities and entertainment options that would persuade residents and existing businesses to stay local. "I'd like to see a large indoor/outdoor seasonal facility, like a YMCA," says Vandal. "We're going to continue bringing business into town, but keeping it zoned properly," adds Archinski. "If you're willing to locate your business in Dracut, we can offer you a tax break. We've got a state-funded Tax Incentive Financing program that will pay half of your business taxes for five years, to offset some of your development

costs. Basically, we developed a whole little neighborhood that way, one that was really low impact relative to services. That's what I'm looking at, going forward. That program did us a lot of good."

A description of Dracut would not be complete without highlighting the work of the many community volunteers in a variety of capacities. These volunteers contribute vast amounts of time and effort serving on more than 50 boards and commissions that play an important role in the town's success. Speaking to the special qualities of the town, Genest shares, "We might all be biased because we've been here for a long time. But really, Dracut is an awesome community to live in." Archinski chimes in with his own personal sentiment, "I wasn't born in Dracut, but I've been here about 40 years. I tell everybody: 'I wasn't born here, but I got here as soon as I could.'"




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Gardner, Ma

Rich in history and potential

Situated 30 miles northwest of Worcester and 60 miles northwest of Boston, the City of Gardner shines as the ‘diamond of north central Massachusetts’. With a population of 21,000, it’s quickly becoming a sought-after location to live and do business.

“Gardner is unique,” shares Gardner Mayor Michael Nicholson. “It’s a city with a ‘town feel’ and I think that’s one of the best things about it.” Gardner’s politics are also rare and full of “neat little tidbits.” Nicholson was elected as Mayor in July 2020 at the age of 25 – making him the city’s third youngest Mayor. Currently, the average age of an elected Gardner official is 35, well below state average, and largely below national average.

Another of the city’s many unique aspects is its name. “We were founded as a town in 1785, right after the American Revolutionary War,” Nicholson recounts. “If you look at the other towns surrounding Gardner, they are named after places in England where the first settlers were from. Gardner is the only one named after a Revolutionary War Veteran, Colonel Thomas Gardner, who was the first person killed during The Battle of Bunker Hill. Gardner was the first town in the area created after the revolution. They wanted to discontinue the use of naming towns after places in England, so they named it after a Massachusetts war hero.”



The demolition of an old factory building in the city (featuring the Mayor, though)

Massachusetts



AT A GLANCE

GARDNER, MASSACHUSETTS

WHAT: A city with a rich history and a town feel; population 21,000

WHERE: North central Massachusetts, 30 miles northwest of Worcester and 60 miles northwest Boston

WEBSITE: www.gardner-ma.gov

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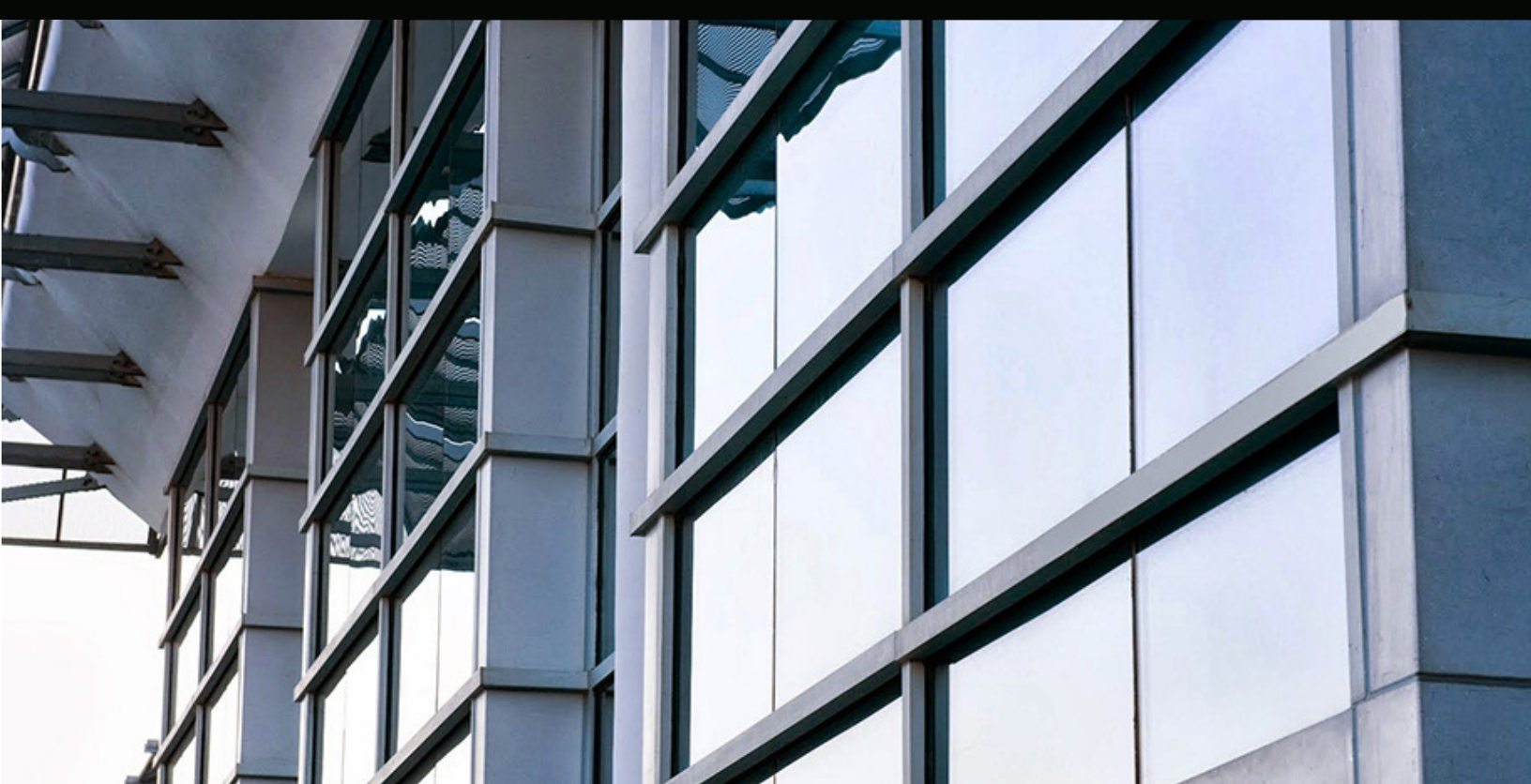
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In the 1920s, Gardner was considered a ‘large’ town and officially became a city in 1923 during the height of its factory days. Back then, it was known as ‘The Chair City’ because it produced more chairs than anywhere else in the world. Gardner crafted chairs for Buckingham Palace, the Boston Garden, and the White House. The two remaining chair factories are still in production today. As times changed, so did the city’s manufacturing industries. Despite some difficulties during the Great Recession in the late 2000s, the city’s economy was fortunate enough to remain steady unlike other cities in the U.S. Nicholson explains, “Gardner’s small retail sector, as well as our manufacturing and engineering segments, actually grew during that time. Gardner has the largest cable ties manufacturer in New England and the Northeast. And our manufacturing sector now has a couple biomedical sectors. We have a large biomedical engineering firm called vivitide that has doubled in size over the past ten years, working on different peptide formations for targeted

chemotherapy. It is working to create special proteins to put into chemotherapy to target just the cancer cells, so the healthy tissue remains the same, minimizing the negative side effects to the patient.”

Also under constant improvement is the city’s business development. An example is a project Nicholson describes as one “people seem to be very excited about.” It involves the smaller business district, with the movie theatre and several car dealerships, located right off of Route 2, the major highway intersection in Gardner. Currently, a new plaza is under construction there that will house a Ninety Nine Restaurant & Pub, a Starbucks, a cannabis company, a swimming pool company, and a financial investment firm.

Even though the plaza itself is not finished, the Ninety Nine Restaurant & Pub has been open for business since August 2019. Nicholson reports, “When it was first built, it had a wait



Mayor Nicholson with Congresswoman Lauri Trahan, City Council President Elizabeth Kazinskas, and State Representative Jonathan Zlotnik at a site at which Comcast recently committed to installing high speed internet services

time of three hours for the first month. I'm not exaggerating, that's the data I have in front of me. We do have other small restaurants, but when the factories started to leave, a lot of the other industries left with it. Most residents aren't used to having a lot of chain options here in the city anymore. While a lot of people are still supporting local businesses, we are seeing a lot of increased traffic from outside the city coming in with this new development."

Supporting Gardner's entrepreneurs is another important focus, as emphasized through the upcoming MakerSpace project. The concept is for retired craftsmen from the city's factories to teach their time-honored woodworking techniques to aspiring artists to incorporate those methods into their own work. The city is working with a local artist group to create a community where people can learn from each other in a shared space for a membership fee. The hope is to secure a space by the end of 2021.

Gardner also makes workforce development a priority and sometimes offers training through the Massachusetts' Workforce Development Board's MassHire program. And the city also has a community partnership with Mount Wachusett Community College, which offers professional development classes. Additionally, Gardner High School (GHS) just launched its first Vocational Trade program with a Manufacturing program. "I started a program with GHS and used City Hall as the starter," Nicholson explains. "We've actually seen many businesses, including Garlock Printing & Converting and Seaman Paper, pick it up as well, creating a new Internship program. Our students will receive credit for getting real world experience as part of their regular curriculum. Even if they don't continue in those sectors, they've at least broadened their network."

All of these flourishing developments in Gardner's economy have had a positive impact on its population growth – along with COVID-19, surprisingly. "As a result of the pandemic, believe



Mayor Nicholson at the Gardner CAC annual coat drive



Mayor Nicholson bell-ringing for the Salvation Army



it or not, our numbers are growing substantially,” says Nicholson. “This is due to the cheaper cost of living here compared to the Greater Boston area. As more companies realized they were able to accommodate their employees remotely rather than in a traditional office, we started seeing a massive amount of people moving out of the Boston area to central Massachusetts.” Over the past year it was common for a 2,000-square-foot single-family home with 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms to be on the market for 36 hours and sell between \$325,000 and \$350,000. In the Greater Boston area, an identical home with less land would have sold between \$500,000 and \$600,000.

In the downtown core, some of the distinctive heritage district buildings are being repurposed and revitalized in creative ways. According to Nicholson, “Gardner’s downtown was settled because it was the location between all of the chair factories. And we just signed with a developer to create a large-scale apartment

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complex with 1,700-units to bring people in to support the businesses downtown. We are using the resources we have to get creative and see where it takes us. We're also working with that developer to build an event plaza to hold festivals downtown to promote economic development."

This creative problem solving also applies to the city's infrastructure. From September to November 2020, the city paved 10 miles of roadway. That's more than been done since 1999, with an additional 26 miles of road repaving planned for 2021. Prior to any actual repaving, new water and sewer lines are first installed and new sidewalks are also constructed alongside every newly paved road. Integrating all these projects is an efficient way to keep the roads in good shape while also ensuring the safety of residents.

There is also a lot happening in the area of sustainability and green initiatives. "All of

our public buildings like City Hall and The Department of Police are run by solar power," says Nicholson. "We have a solar field on city property with a net metering agreement with National Grid. Mount Wachusett Community College operates solely on two wind turbines. In the next 6 months, we'll be adding 10 miles of bike trails connecting Mount Wachusett Community College, Heywood Hospital, downtown, and our green spaces. We've also installed new electric car charging stations, we are doing energy audits on all of our buildings, and we applied for the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program. We just broke ground on a new elementary school two months ago, as well – the first new elementary school in 100 years! That is probably going to be the greenest building in the region because of different solar options and green roofs."

Looking ahead, Nicholson would like the city to make the most of its current development and



Shawn Hayden giving Mayor Michael Nicholson a tour of the GAAMHA facility in Gardner.



Mayor Nicholson with the owner of Nails 2000, a local Gardner business



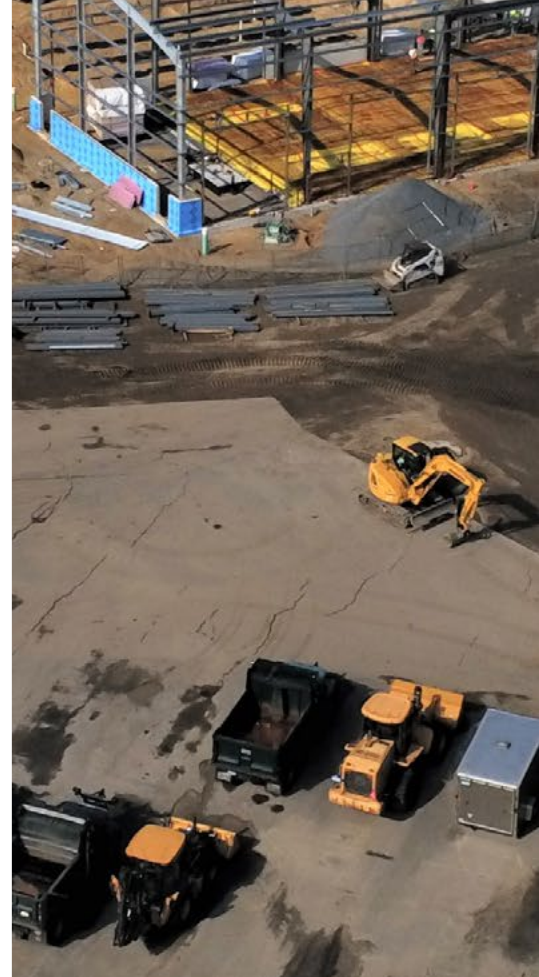
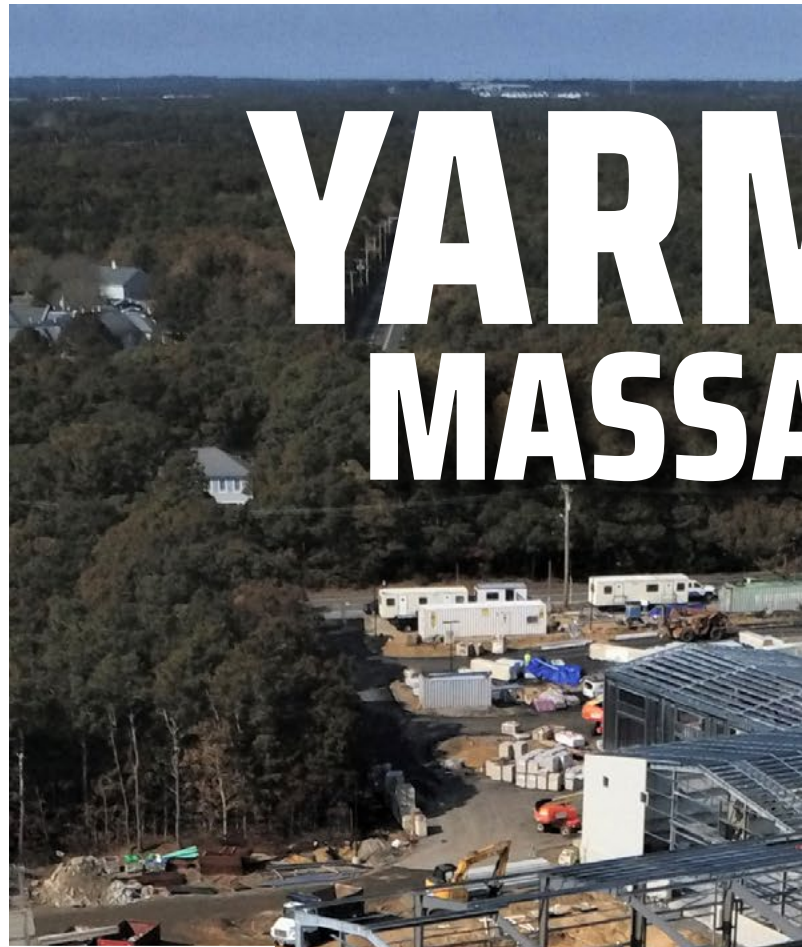
Mayor Nicholson touring Gardner business Garlock Printing, looking at Southwest Airlines peanut bags

population growth by creating more community gathering spaces over the next three to five years. Communal meeting places have a new importance as a result of COVID-19's impact. Once the new elementary school welcomes students in fall 2022, the existing school will be repurposed into a community center.

Bringing together the city's residents, while simultaneously highlighting Gardner's uniqueness is exactly what Nicholson wants to encourage. He shares, "People outside of Gardner hear about it because it's a dot on the weatherman's map. Most likely because it's the city with the most snow in Massachusetts. We need to build upon the different opportunities we have to maximize the unique aspect that makes our city stand out from everywhere else in north central Massachusetts. I'd like to create different spots that people find special. Especially in a post-pandemic world, once people are out and about again, what did they miss the most, and how can we do that here in Gardner?"

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YARMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

AT A GLANCE

YARMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

- WHAT:** Second oldest town in Cape Cod; population 23,000
- WHERE:** Barnstable County, MA
- WEBSITE:** www.yarmouth.ma.us

The spirit of Cape Cod

Prior to the arrival of English settlers in Massachusetts Bay in 1630, several indigenous Native American tribes under the collective Wampanoag nation occupied the lands that today comprise the towns of Yarmouth and Dennis. The area was called “Mattacheese”, which in Wôpanâak (the tribe’s long-lost language) meant “old lands by the borders of water.” Yarmouth’s name first appeared nine years later, in a court-issued document granting the lands to John Crow, Thomas Howes, and Anthony Thacher – none of whom, incidentally, hailed from Yarmouth, England. The true origins of the new Cape township’s name may never be known, but it’s assumed to be a nod to that old English seaport on the Yare River which saw hordes of passengers arriving from Holland, the home country of many Mayflower pilgrims.

Modern-day Yarmouth, MA is a 28-square-mile town in Barnstable County – the second oldest on the Cape – with a population of just under 24,000. Comprised of three distinct villages, West Yarmouth, Yarmouth Port, and South Yarmouth, it’s a historically rich place brimming with iconic landmarks including Gray’s Beach boardwalk, the 18th-century Judah Baker Windmill, and the

Captains' Mile – a meandering road featuring over 50 sea captains' homes, all of which bear the distinctive oval Schooner Plaque awarded by the Historical Society of Old Yarmouth.

“We’re a tourist destination with a lot of wonderful cultural and historical assets,” asserts Economic Development Coordinator, Kyle Pedicini. “We also have terrific conservation areas (our Conservation Department just published great trails map for those) and a ton of natural resources with the ponds, oceans, and rivers.” Add to those the many beautiful salt- and freshwater beaches, 81 holes of golf, and the kind of natural scenery you’d travel miles to see, it’s no wonder the Town of Yarmouth stands out as a highlight of the Mid-Cape area. “Growing up on Cape Cod, I always viewed Yarmouth as the Mini-golf Capital,” quips Pedicini. “We have a lot of great family-friendly attractions like that in town. We’re definitely a community built on the hospitality industry.”

“Cape Cod Within Reach” is the town’s slogan, a message that reflects both the proximity and easy accessibility of Yarmouth, but also the community’s affordability relative to the rest of the Cape. Its Mid-Cape setting makes it a logical base for day trips.

Like most bucket list beach destinations across the country, Yarmouth typically sees its population double during the peak, June-through-September tourist season. “There’ve been several demographic studies conducted and the consensus is that our full-time residential population isn’t anticipated to increase,” reports Town Planner, Kathy Williams. “But what we’ve seen with COVID-19 is that people are coming to the Cape and living here either as second homeowners, or they’re buying homes and working remotely. I think there’s a possibility that that trend will extend post-COVID and increase our full-time population slightly. Our seasonal population doesn’t just account for tourists who are visiting and briefly staying at our motels or rental properties... there





are also people living in their second home several months out of the year, and who are really part of the community when they're here."

In 2019, the Town of Yarmouth, in collaboration with Dakota Partners, completed the \$22 million construction of Yarmouth Commons – one of Cape Cod's latest affordable housing communities. Located on Route 28 in South Yarmouth, it features three residential buildings totalling 69 units, a common green space, fitness center, leasing office, playground, and community center. "That's one of the things that we like to do in Yarmouth, get the most bang for our buck," Williams teases. "We were able to use Community Preservation funds towards those units, providing some beautiful architecture and design along Route 28, while also getting rid of an old, outdated motel that had been vacant for quite some time."

"We always try to tick as many boxes as we can," shares Director of Community Development,

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Karen Greene. “We had a number of these outdated motels and we knew we had a need for affordable housing – workforce housing – so that people could live in town manageably. We also wanted to give these commercial properties another option for redevelopment. Part of the way we did that was through some creative zoning and regulatory relief. The other part was by leveraging the local Community Preservation Act funds and investing in those projects.”

In addition to Yarmouth Commons, the town has already financed a second project that’s currently underway. Yarmouth Gardens is a 2.1 acre development in partnership with Commonwealth Community Developers. “The site’s clear,” Greene confirms. “They’re going gangbusters. That’s another 40 mixed one- and two-bedroom units of affordable housing that we’ll be producing.”

Always fond of carving out new opportunities where they don’t yet exist, the Town of Yarmouth is also looking to expand its broadband

connectivity, to support workforce development and make working from home easier during the global pandemic. “There’s a fully-fibered broadband backbone along our two main commercial hubs, Routes 28 and 6a,” Pedicini explains. “We have good potential to expand our broadband capabilities, it’s just a matter of figuring out that last-mile solution so that applications can be used by our residential and commercial property owners. We did get a \$100,000 grant through the State’s Community Compact Information Technology Grant Program, which will address our immediate goal of connecting our municipal buildings to that broadband network. That project should set the stage for future broadband expansion, as well.”

Wastewater infrastructure is the other major hurdle that, once overcome, will facilitate the Town of Yarmouth’s ongoing growth and development. “We’re currently exploring a regional alliance with the towns of Dennis and Harwich,” says Greene. “That would bring us to something called the DHY Clean Waters



Partnership. We've secured some funding locally and adopted, at town meeting, a Wastewater Infrastructure Investment Fund. That proposal will go to ballot in the spring. We're basically looking at a menu of funding options for our wastewater program, with the goal of being zero tax impact on property owners."

"We're hoping to start having hookups in five years," adds Williams. "We chose Phase 1 of our wastewater initiative along Route 28 and South Shore Drive to promote economic development, in addition to improving our water quality." Most of Yarmouth's properties still treat wastewater with septic systems. "We commissioned a study through the UMass Donahue Institute, which estimated there was \$100 million in pent-up demand for redevelopment due to our lack of wastewater infrastructure," Pedicini reveals. "There is huge potential in Yarmouth to turn some outdated structures into modern amenities that people want."

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YARMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS



In terms of active accessibility, Yarmouth connects to the Cape Cod Rail Trail, a 25.5-mile paved route that passes through the towns of Dennis, Harwich, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet. The trail begins at Station Avenue, connects to Peter Homer Park, and continues as the town-owned Yarmouth multi-use trail, which runs for two miles to Higgins Crowell Road. They are now working on Phase 3 that would connect Yarmouth to Barnstable. “That’s a great east-west bike path,” says Williams. “We’re working on a shared use pathway on Higgins Crowell Road which would connect several residential neighborhoods and schools with the Cape Cod Rail Trail, and a couple of recreation and conservation areas. We also have a bike path on Forest Road that brings people south towards Route 28.”

They are also working very closely with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation on some other Route 28 projects. According to


Williams, “We’re advocating very strongly for the incorporation of a shared use pathway on the south side of Route 28. We understand that bikeability is something our residents want and are raising their voices to make happen. What I like about living in Yarmouth is that it really does have a small town feel. South Yarmouth, West Yarmouth, and Yarmouth Port each have a slightly different feel. There’s something for everyone. Overall, it’s a great place to get out, exercise, and inhale Mother Nature. There are plenty of opportunities to get off the beaten path and enjoy all the natural beauty we have here.”



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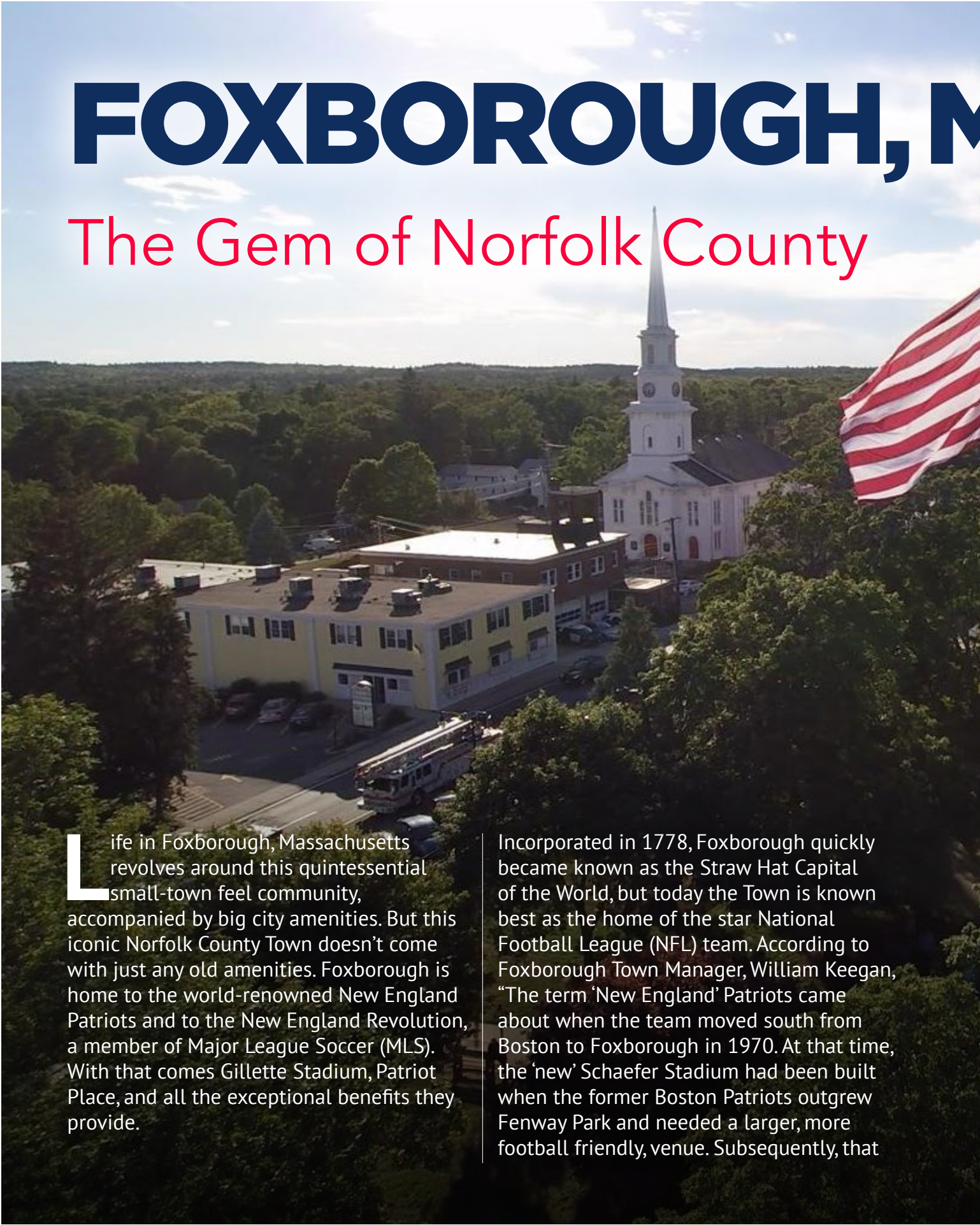
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Incorporated in 1778, Foxborough quickly became known as the Straw Hat Capital of the World, but today the Town is known best as the home of the star National Football League (NFL) team. According to Foxborough Town Manager, William Keegan, "The term 'New England' Patriots came about when the team moved south from Boston to Foxborough in 1970. At that time, the 'new' Schaefer Stadium had been built when the former Boston Patriots outgrew Fenway Park and needed a larger, more football friendly, venue. Subsequently, that

MASSACHUSETTS



Courtesy of Foxboro Cable Access

AT A GLANCE

FOXBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS

- WHAT:** Small town home of the New England Patriots; population 17,000
- WHERE:** Norfolk County, 25 miles from Boston, MA
- WEBSITE:** www.foxboroughma.gov www.gilletttestadium.com www.thekraftgroup.com

stadium was torn down; though it remained in Foxborough for over 30 years.”

In 2001, Gillette Stadium was built by the Kraft Family after they had bought the former Schaefer Stadium in 1988 and then took ownership of the football team in 1994. The Kraft Family (now referred to as the Kraft Group) had a vision and mission of success for the Patriots that has also benefited the Town of Foxborough by becoming one of the most widely recognized community names in the country. Once the Kraft Group took over ownership of the team, “of course, the rest is history,” Keegan adds. “During the past 20 years, the Patriots have dominated the NFL by consistently being one of the best teams in their conference and by capturing an historic six Super Bowl Championships.”

In addition to attracting world-wide sports attention to the Town, the Kraft Group has made a lasting impact not just on Foxborough but to

other stadium cities across the country. “I think the Kraft Group has done more to change the dynamic of the NFL corporate world by being creative in their non-sports related investments,” says Keegan. “They came up with this concept of capitalizing on the stadium as an attraction and as a focal point for economic development. Today that model has been followed almost everywhere in the country where new stadiums are being built”.

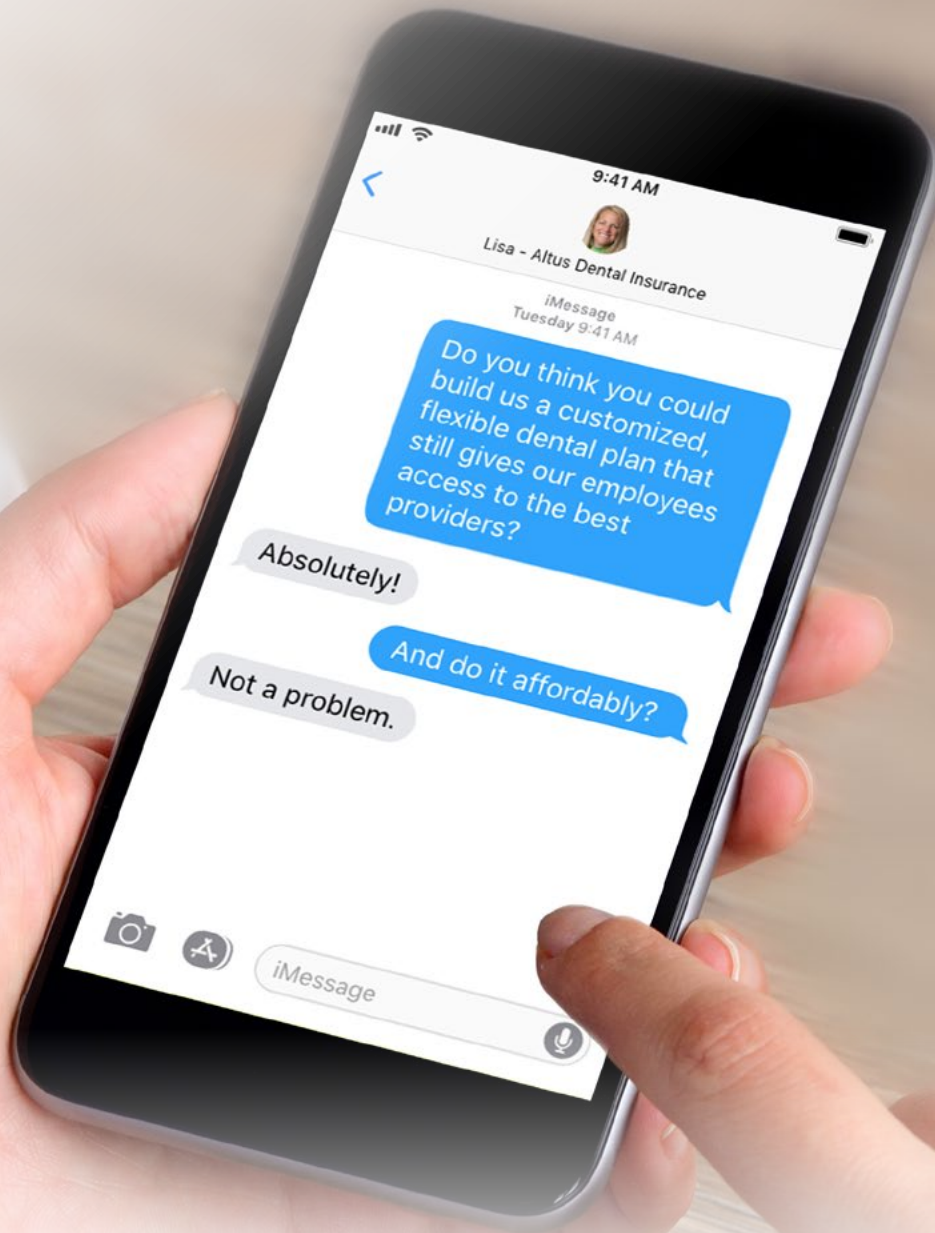
The Kraft Group’s development portfolio in Foxborough includes Patriot Place, a 1.3 million square foot complex that features retail shopping, two hotels, a theater, and 19 restaurants. It is also home to the Mass General/Brigham Healthcare complex. “We have over 300,000 square feet of world class healthcare within the Patriot Place campus; it’s the world-class healthcare delivery system that you would get in Boston that now also resides here in Foxborough; and it’s been hugely successful,” says Ted Fire, Vice President of Construction and



Patriot Place - Courtesy of The Kraft Group



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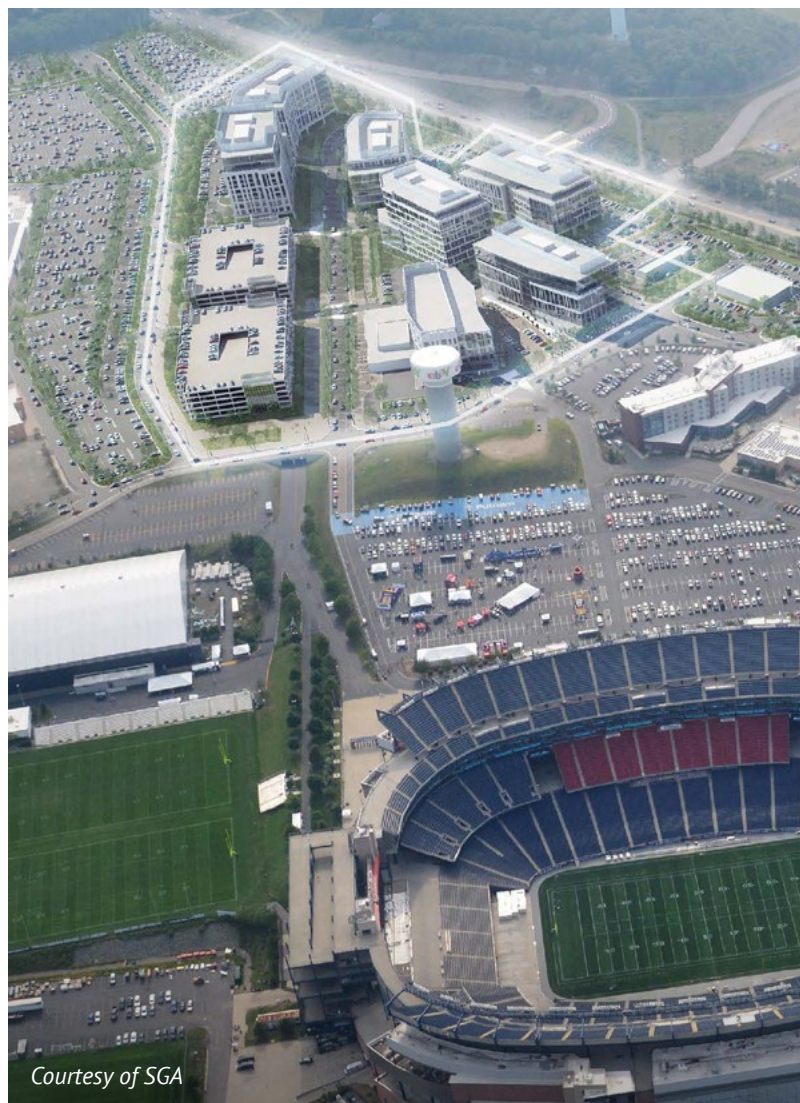
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Town Commons - Courtesy of Foxboro Cable Access



Development for the Kraft Group.

The Kraft Group's next frontier is Quarter Point at Patriot Place, a 1.5 million square foot development planned to house life science labs, commercial office space and some limited manufacturing. Keegan notes, "We think it's going to be a gamechanger for both the Town and the Kraft Group in the sense that it's actually going to start building upon the biotech vision that we both believe will take hold in this area." Foxborough's locale, coupled with the amenities offered at Patriot Place, make it an attractive destination for biotech and life science firms.

"It opens the doors for workforce recruitment for those types of employees and tenants that want to see set up shop here," Fire explains. "We have great vehicular access and we have

a commuter rail station on the site that has recently been activated. The expectation is that this, along with available land and existing infrastructure, will help drive these major life science-based and commercial office tenants out to Foxborough. We have everything they will need at their doorstep and the tagline we like to use is 'the best of the city, close to home.'"

Situated equidistant from Boston and Providence, the Town of Foxborough is bordered by Interstate 95 and Route 495 on one side and is then bisected by State Routes 1 and 140 – making it an ideal location to live and do business. Keegan explains, "There are a lot of high-end residential homes in the community along with a great school system and the high quality of our municipal services has become a trademark of the community".

Foxborough's downtown – known to locals as the “uptown” area of Town – is currently experiencing a revival. Over the past two years the Town has approved 115 new apartments, while a group of community-minded residents have also banded together to salvage the Town's old community theatre. A once-abandoned fire station will soon be redeveloped into a 19-unit Apartment Complex; complete with a new Brew Pub. “We really want to nurture our uptown,” says Paige Duncan, Foxborough's Planning Director. “Right now, we see a lot of services that you would normally see in many village centers – hair salons, restaurants and other service amenities – and they are all doing great, but we also want to see the bakery, the cheese shop, the ice cream store, and the little sundries that draw people out of their homes and into their central business area to walk around, browse and take the time to enjoy our historic Town Common.”

In addition to the revitalization efforts of the uptown area there are also new plans to create a rail trail that will connect uptown to Patriot Place and the new Foxborough commuter rail station. This will help the Town become more walkable and accessible than ever before.

Having a cooperative working relationship with local businesses, can often lead to assistance in funding community improvements. For example, Schneider Electric recently provided a \$150,000 grant to redo the electrification of the uptown Town Common, while also providing \$100,000 to the local High School for aspiring students interested in pursuing electrical engineering and/or STEM based careers. And the Kraft Group runs an ongoing program offering up to \$100,000 per year toward various community-based programs and charities. Fire admits, “We think of our relationship with Foxborough as a partnership. We have a representative on the Town's Economic Development Committee and we participate in initiatives that work in our collective best interests. The Town has been great to work with.”



Cranberry Bog - Courtesy of The Kraft Group



Farmers Market - Courtesy of Amanda Smith



Despite being home to one of the top NFL teams, Foxborough is actually quite a small town. It's population has hovered at 17,000 since 2000 – and that is by design. Only 25 percent of the Town has access to a sewer system, which limits the amount of residential growth potential. “When other communities were looking to add sewer systems throughout their communities, Foxborough took a much more strategic approach,” says Duncan. “We have certain areas in Town that have the sewer infrastructure and those are the areas that support our new growth. However, in other areas where access to sewer is limited, the community has made it abundantly clear that they are not looking to attract throngs of people to those areas of Town. This has helped to preserve Foxborough’s small town character.”

Looking to the future, Keegan says, “We need to start thinking about what the future is going to look like for Foxborough and we need to continue to work with our elected officials and community partners so that we can help develop solutions that will best meet the needs of our next generation.”

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Town Commons - Courtesy of Amanda Smith

Millbrook, ALABAMA

Comfort,
convenience
and community

Millbrook, Alabama had its early beginnings during the 19th century, when wealthy families of nearby Montgomery first enjoyed the area as a summer retreat. The rural setting offered a quiet place to escape the city and relax in the cool, clear water of the Robinson Springs. The community grew in popularity during the 1920s and 1930s and, over time, permanent year-round residences started to appear, followed quickly by schools, churches, and rail transportation. The city was formally incorporated in 1977, a few years after Interstate 65 was completed, resulting in continued population growth and community development.

Millbrook is now the largest city in Elmore County, with a population close to 20,000. Located just 10 miles north of Montgomery, it offers a small-town quality of life for its many citizens who work in the larger metropolitan area. Millbrook Mayor, Al Kelley, reflects,





“Millbrook is a bedroom community without a doubt, and we don’t mind saying that. We strive very hard to maintain a quality of life here. Montgomery is our major city. We have many military people, civil service, and State of Alabama workers that make the short commute into Montgomery, which is less than 10 minutes. We try to keep a very good quality of life for our residents. We take a lot of pride in our parks and our recreation, the things that families want to do when they get off work.”

As Millbrook continues to grow, emphasis is on developing employment opportunities within the community. Ann Harper, City of Millbrook Economic Development Director, shares, “Quite a bit of our working population goes to Montgomery to work. However, in our own right, we are developing employment opportunities here as a sales and service community. We are developing our retail and commercial base utilizing our builders, electricians, professionals, and other service providers currently working in our growing residential market. More and more people are finding job opportunities here.” The increase in people working from home during COVID-19 has fortunately provided a better-than-expected experience for some Millbrook businesses, as citizens are enjoying local restaurants, salons, and other services in the community, rather than travelling to neighboring areas.

Reliable broadband service was an Elmore

AT A GLANCE

MILLBROOK, ALABAMA

WHAT:	A thriving bedroom community; population 20,000
WHERE:	Ten miles north of Montgomery, AL
WEBSITE:	www.cityofmillbrook.org


County initiative prior to COVID, but it became a priority when the pandemic created an increased need for people to work, study, and connect with others online. As Cary Cox, Executive Director of the Elmore County Economic Development Authority, reports, “We were mapping out where we had broadband and where we did not. We did a comprehensive study for the whole county. That study was being used to further broadband, specifically fiber, in the areas that needed it. The project was on going and then COVID hit and we went immediately to phase three. After consultation with Elmore County Board of Education, we strategically installed hotspots around the county and activated them as quickly as possible. We feel Elmore County is ahead of the game on broadband.” The City of Millbrook has also assisted in the effort by establishing hotspots in various locations throughout the community for use by those whose rural location makes working or studying difficult due to connection issues.

The Alabama Community College System consists of more than 20 colleges, several of which are close to Millbrook, adding to the appeal of the city. “The beauty of Millbrook is all about location for us,” says Harper. “We are so close to everything. It might not be right in the middle of our community, but as far as our proximity to colleges, universities, hospitals, and airports, they are just minutes from us. That puts us in a very desirable position. You can be close enough, but you don’t have to have it right in your backyard.”

After moderate growth over the past decade, Millbrook is once again seeing an influx of residents, creating a need for additional housing. Developers are working to meet this demand, with more than 300 new single-family residences are in the works for 2021. According to Mayor Kelley, “Things have picked up again, our retail is picking up tremendously, and the housing starts are coming back. It’s the idea that



Ann Harper, Economic Development Director & Mayor, Al Kelley



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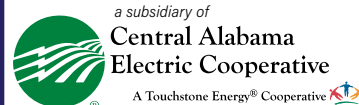
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MILLBROOK, ALABAMA

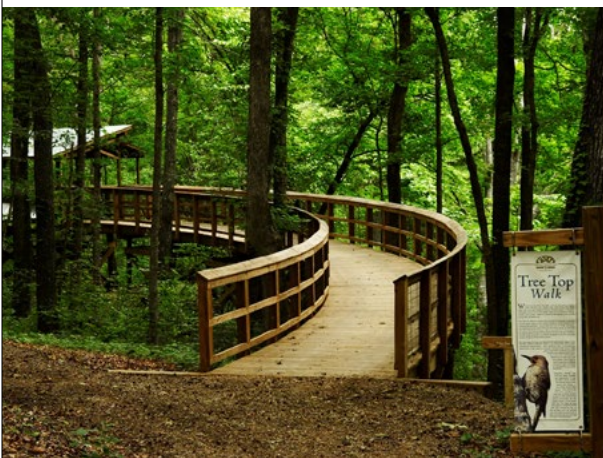


people want to get away from the big city and live outside of it a little bit. They feel safer, and I think they just enjoy the small-town atmosphere which we strive to provide.”

Without a traditional downtown, there is a strategy in place to develop one centered around the Village Green, a popular public park located on the City’s Main Street. Part of the plan includes purchasing property in that area of town, as it becomes available. Mayor Kelley shares, “Over the past three years, the city has acquired strategic pieces of property with the intent to help steer desirable and quality development in what we envision as the downtown area one day. We are maintaining municipal government facilities in this area to promote downtown vitality. In many cities, when a major road like Highway 14 goes through, it almost serves as a bypass and the old areas just fade out. We are doing all we can to keep the Main Street and the south end of town vibrant,

with our new City Hall, economic development building, parks and recreation, library, and the police/municipal court building. We are also in the process of building a new Senior Center in this area. We are buying up every bit of property we can to try to keep Main Street vibrant for the future.”

A unique and exciting project currently underway in Millbrook is The Fields at 17 Springs, a \$45 million mega sports complex. The project, which is in its first phase, includes several multi-purpose rectangular sports fields, a tennis complex, pickle ball courts, a high school stadium/track, ballfields, open air pavilions, and a 100,000 square foot multiplex for indoor sports year-round and other large events such as conventions and trade shows. “It is unusual to get five organizations to band together,” says Kelley, “but the City of Millbrook, Elmore County Commission, Elmore County Economic Development Authority, Elmore County Board of



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MILLBROOK, ALABAMA

Education, and Grandview Family YMCA came together and formed a partnership. It's going to be a great economic driver for us."

The name of the complex was inspired by the 17 springs that are on the YMCA property and have been enjoyed by members of the community for generations. Previously, the same location was home to the annual 17 Springs Arts and Crafts Festival, a Millbrook favorite. The springs will also play a role in feeding the irrigations system and pond features throughout the property. Located in the fastest growing area of the city, near two major highways (I-65 and Highway 14), the project is expected to increase traffic to this already growing area. "Millbrook is the gateway to Elmore County from the west and showcases our great county," says Cox. "The City's leadership, vision, but most importantly their partnership is invaluable to developing the Highway 14 corridor."



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With a goal of attracting new businesses to the community, Millbrook is the only city in Elmore County designated as an opportunity zone, a designation which carries tax advantages for investors. “We want to make life as convenient in Millbrook as possible,” says Harper, “and to do that we want to attract businesses, so people who live here, buy here. We also want to have plenty of dining options. We have attractive sites for future development– accessible by three Interstate 65 exits. The right project would benefit the investor, the developer, and the city.” Currently the city is hoping to attract a major grocery chain to Millbrook creating more visibility to entice other development. Mayor Kelley says, “That is going to open up a tremendous world of commercial development that is highly visible. In three to five years, we expect the area to explode, and with that comes good and bad. I grew up here and it was kind of nice back when you would ride down the road and everybody you saw you knew. It’s not like

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that anymore. I think in three to five years we are going to see lights and signs everywhere.”

Growth is happening in Millbrook, and the city is ready for it. Cox sums it up well, explaining, “There is tremendous interest here; our job now is strategic growth. We don’t want to have somebody come in that’s not going to be good in the market, or not fit our plan. We are going to grow, whether we do things right or wrong, so our job is to do it in the right way.” As they move forward, the goal is to continue building a prosperous city that represents Millbrook’s very apt tagline, which is: Comfort, convenience and community.





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BROUSSA LOUISIANA



Courtesy of Cecil Fuselier



Where Infrastructure is Key

If you want to run a successful city, you first have to take care of its residents. That's the mantra for Broussard, Louisiana Mayor Ray Bourque, who shares, "We want to make sure we are supportive of our residents, and supportive of our businesses that are here, because they are what is important for our city if we are going to look at growth in the future. We have to be a healthy place for people to work and live."

And he believes the best way to accomplish that is through infrastructure. "Infrastructure in my opinion is key," says Bourque. "Because for healthy growth you have to keep the pace up and having a well thought out plan for the city is something we work on constantly. We take the time to plan projects and where we want to go. We want to continue efforts for quality of life in our city."

Located in the Lafayette parish of Louisiana, the city of approximately 12,000 residents, as estimated by the US Census, has undergone many infrastructure improvements in recent years. Following major flooding that hit Southern Louisiana in 2016, Broussard made a big commitment to improve drainage infrastructure and that has continued ever since. They have also been upgrading and expanding capabilities for clean drinking water, the city's ability to handle and process wastewater, as well as road improvements.

Bourque emphasizes, "If our city is going to be able to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves for economic growth and quality of life improvements, we have to have the most stable base that we can and those infrastructure improvements

AT A GLANCE

BROUSSARD, LOUISIANA

WHAT: A growing city of 12,000

WHERE: Located in the Lafayette parish of Louisiana along highway I-90

WEBSITE: www.cityofbroussard.com

LOCATIONS IN: LAFAYETTE / B



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Many super successful start-up companies had their humble beginnings in somebody's garage – and Don's Automotive Group is a great example. In 2004, owners Don and Danielle Mendoza took a leap of faith and opened for business with a single car in a rented shop – with very little traffic. Today, through hard work and persistence, Don's Automotive Group has become one of the prominent independent automotive dealer groups in Louisiana. Their dealership has grown to include retail locations in Broussard, Lafayette, and Breaux Bridge, a parts/service/accessories/paint and body shop, and a large accounting department. The umbrella group Don's Automotive features multiple brands – Mendoza Ford, POSH Preowned, Legacy GMC, Auto Rentals, Don Buys, DW Accessories, DW Service Center – names well known throughout the southern Louisiana region.

With a deep sense of community pride and commitment, and strong spiritual beliefs, the Mendozas share their good fortune by giving back to help others. In his personal and business life, Don operates with the philosophy: "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary." In that regard, he helps in causes such as the Down's Syndrome Association and the families involved in Maddie's Footprints, Trinity Outdoors, and more. That involvement has not gone unrecognized, as Don's Automotive Group was recognized by the local government as a distinguished business and given the key to the City of Lafayette.

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are vital. When a company is looking at moving here, we want to be in a position that we can handle that growth. It's part of quality of life for our citizens. It's just a fundamental responsibility of municipal government to be able to supply infrastructure needs so people can be successful, live here, work here, go to school here and have success in those things and not have to always play the game of catch up."

In addition to underground infrastructure, Broussard has been investing in above-ground recreation options for its citizens. A 122-acre, state-of-the-art sports complex was completed four years ago, giving residents access to baseball diamonds, and soccer/football fields, as well as a professional disc golf course, splash pad, and walking trails. "These things are at home in Broussard for our residents and it just makes us a more attractive place to live," says Bourque. "These kind of things help us grow because people want to live in our city. If you supply quality of life for your residents, then

a tourism initiative is natural. People want to come and see what you have to offer and they want to enjoy the spaces you have created."

Broussard's next major infrastructure project has turned into a major revitalization opportunity for the city's downtown core. Envision Downtown Broussard, the city's main street corridor master plan to rejuvenate the downtown coincides with infrastructure updates that needed to be done on the city's main street. Bourque explains, "It gave us the opportunity to do something on a higher level for Broussard. We thought about, if we are going to open up the earth to change water lines and sewer lines, how are we going to put it back? What can we do for our city? In the downtown area, which is the heart of the city, beautifying it and making it more useable for our residents and creating some economic opportunities for businesses to come in and supply new services like restaurants and shops, seemed like a natural path for us."





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Courtesy of Cecil Fuselier

In addition to water lines, sewer lines and increased drainage, Broussard's downtown will get a new grand entrance featuring a fresh gateway entrance sign. Historic oak trees will be protected, lit, and cleaned up, and a 10-foot walking path for pedestrians and bikers will be created to increase walkability. There will be places for public art, more parking, and electric car charging. They will also aim to define the historic downtown area to increase the charm and will be highlighting their historic homes and buildings with historic markers to help tell the story of Broussard's history.

"Broussard has been looking at downtown improvements for many years," says Bourque. "There haven't been any significant improvements in that area in my lifetime, which is 49 years. What I'm hearing from some of the folks that are older than I am is that it's been 60 plus years. People were very interested in our history and highlighting our downtown area, but they were also interested in having it refreshed;



trying to create a destination where you can spend a Sunday afternoon and a business can supply lunch, dinner, having new shops and just making it more useable for our residents. Since planning and public input began, we've seen private investors and property owners begin to improve existing buildings and build new ones. Which is just what we want – to create opportunity and excitement in Downtown Broussard.”

Broussard has also taken over the lease of Arceneaux Park from its parish. The 30-acre park sits in the heart of downtown and will become the ideal spot for festivals and events. The city has also purchased 10 acres of land adjacent to the park to build a new facility for its fire and police departments in the future. Bourque acknowledges, “They have many needs to keep up with the growth of Broussard, so we have to be supportive of our first responders and what they are dealing with every day. Space and technology is a real need for them, so we are happy that we are able to do these things



in our downtown area, because it's all going to be fitting in with our master plan. We work really hard to make these opportunities happen in a positive way for us.”

Broussard's efforts to create a successful city have been working. Since the 2010 census the city has seen a significant amount of growth, and they are estimating a 60 per cent increase in population when the new census numbers arrive. The city has also proven itself to be an attractive place for businesses. Broussard is currently home to approximately 1,000 businesses of all sizes. Their large businesses include Doerle Food Service and Slemco Electrical, as well as large

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oilfield companies like WHC Energy Services and Halliburton.

“We have a healthy business sector here, but we are fortunate enough to be in the heart of the oil field area, so that’s been good for us,” Bourque says, adding, “Small businesses, including many shops and restaurants, give the city its charm. We have a lot of supportive businesses, which gives us a quaintness in Broussard. Restaurants do well here. Cajun food is popular; people love us for our food.”

The city is attractive to businesses looking for a home because of its many amenities, but also because there is no city-charged property tax. Broussard makes all of its tax revenue through its sales tax – it has to be earned before it’s collected, which is a great economic advantage when it comes to selling the city to potential businesses that want to locate here to supply services or manufacture products. Whatever the reason they come to Broussard, every person

and business will be received with a general attitude of welcoming. “It’s their choice if they want to be here and we make it a point to thank people for making the investment, for choosing us,” says Bourque. “Whether they are a resident or business, it’s their choice, so it’s our job to be easy to do business with and to be the kind of place people want to do business with.”

Looking to the future, the city plans to keep on going as they have been, continuing to invest in infrastructure. But wherever Broussard goes from here, you can be assured that it will be well thought out. “It’s very important to me as the mayor that Broussard is following a plan,” Bourque shares. “I’m not a person that likes to do things off the cuff. Creating a plan, getting input from our council, our residents, our businesses, whoever we can, to make sure that we’re making the right decisions long term for the city and then following that plan.



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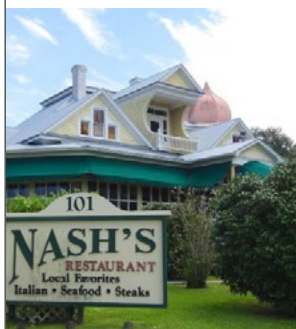
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A community
that cares

With a population of approximately 29,000, the family-friendly city of Central, Louisiana is a rural suburb of Baton Rouge. Maintaining the delicate balance of country charm with easily accessible amenities is what the community prides itself on.

The young municipality was incorporated in July 2005. Prior to that, the area was mostly agricultural and was always known locally as “Central.” Mayor David Barrow explains, “We already had Central High School, so when we were incorporated, it was decided Central was the best name. A lot of the community is still rural, particularly in the northern section where residents have large tracts of land.” Located on one of these properties is Trade Construction





AT A GLANCE

CENTRAL, LOUISIANA

- WHAT:** A charming, rural suburb; population 29,000
- WHERE:** Approximately 10 miles northeast of Baton Rouge, LA
- WEBSITE:** www.centralgov.com

Company, a family-owned pipe fabrication business. Nearby is Custom Metal Works, a manufacturer of metal parts. Together, both companies form the city's industrial section, although, there are plans for a more official area in the future. As Barrow states, "We are working on developing zones where we might have an industrial park with warehouse-type work. We already have several possible locations in the city identified on our masterplan for growth."

This northern area of Central has a broad selection of housing to choose from, with even more choice throughout the rest of the community. It could be a house in a new development, like one of the modern subdivisions with single-family units, or a pre-existing multifamily home. According to Barrow, "Despite the age or type of house, property values out here have maintained their worth and have increased since we incorporated. They are very good right now. Lately, residents have put houses up for sale and they aren't on the market long. That is a good sign."

Slow growth is a big focus for the community because that's what the majority of residents want. Many choose to live in Central because of its rural suburban charm and they want the city to remain as it is – a place that is safe, secure, and where people look out for each other. Local businesses are encouraged to grow and the many young families in the area help boost the economy. The younger generation also benefits from the Central Community School

CENTRAL, LOUISIANA

System, ranked in the top 10 of Louisiana school systems. The schools are one of the biggest employers in the area, employing about 2,000 workers. Other major employers include the corporate headquarters of DEMCO, a regional utility provider with hundreds of employees, and Walmart, Winn-Dixie, and Oak Point Fresh Market which also employ a good number of people.

An area which has become a commercial hub for the community is the beautiful Central Square, located in the heart of the city near Sullivan and Wax Roads. The development was constructed 10 years ago and houses a pavilion, park, and The Quarters – a two-phase shopping center with architecture reminiscent of the French Quarter in New Orleans. There is also a Walmart across the street from the Central Square for even more convenience. “We don’t really have an official downtown in Central,” says Barrow, “but the Central Square area of the city is considered a smaller alternative. A traditional neighborhood development (TND) is even planned for the area.





It's called The Settlement on Shoe Creek and it was approved under the previous administration with some controversy. When finished in several years, it's going to have over 400 homes and 210 apartments, as well as a large commercial development. The first houses are being built now. It's a major development that's going to change the face of Central."

The city has been partnering with The Central Chamber of Commerce for assistance with its economic development; helping local businesses with retention and promotion. The majority of the city's businesses are locally owned mom and pop stores. Barrow shares, "Especially in 2020 with COVID-19, we try to support our local businesses and remind people to shop local. We are proud that in the months since the pandemic began in March 2020, our sales tax revenues are up year-on-year 13 percent." There are some exciting new businesses on the way, too. The community is always looking for ways to attract more and to increase sales revenues.

"We rely on those revenues because we run our city differently than the majority of others," says Barrow. "We privatize most of our city services to the Institute for Building Technology and Safety (IBTS), a nationwide company that assists local government agencies. They handle all of our permitting, public works, planning and zoning, licensing, and the day-to-day operations of the city. We have been privatized since being incorporated. We really only have three full-time city employees: myself, my assistant (our administrative officer), and the Police Chief Roger Corcoran. Privatizing the majority of our services has saved us a lot of money over the years, and in the future with longevity costs."

Saving money is essential, especially with city infrastructure improvements to consider. Highway 64 goes from East Baton Rouge Parish into Livingston Parish and part of that highway, Magnolia Bridge, is located in Central. Livingston Parish has been rapidly growing, so Central experiences high traffic volumes.



Mayor, David Barrow

Since people have to drive through the city to get to Livingston Parish, widening the roads has become a priority. Barrow reports, “A lot of our major roadways are the same two-lane highways which have been around for decades, so they aren’t very pedestrian or cyclist friendly. In addition to widening the highways, we are installing sidewalks and making some of the outside lanes wider for bicycle lanes. That’s a priority on all new road construction. Several years ago, we installed miles of new sidewalk around the schools and surrounding neighborhoods. Now it’s required to have sidewalks in residential neighborhoods. We’re trying to address these road issues by having a shoulder or dedicated bike lanes, as well as including sidewalks on future projects.”

Drainage is another major concern for the city. Central lies between two rivers – the Comite River on the western side and the Amite River on the eastern side, with both converging at the bottom of the city. In August 2016, South Louisiana was devastated by catastrophic floods, with over 24 inches of rain falling in two days. This caused a near tidal wave to overflow the rivers. Half of the city’s homes were flooded. “As a result, we have stepped up our game on the maintenance of the ditches and canals,” says Barrow. “Two of our major channels are now part of a \$70-million federal project that the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is undertaking because of the flooding. We’re also addressing the drainage issues in our codes for new developments. We can’t do anything about the houses that are built now, but we can control our future developments and we have tightened our regulations on that.”

Improvements to the community haven’t been restricted solely to infrastructure, but also involve outdoor spaces, parks, and conservation areas. These upgrades have greatly increased the quality of life for all residents and have been possible through the city’s valuable partnership with The Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC). Over





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the past couple of years, BREC constructed the Central Sports Park, which has eight baseball fields currently being turfed so there is future potential for baseball tournaments to be held in the city. Several parks are also being revitalized with new equipment and even new fishing ponds.

Thinking ahead to the future, Barrow is firm on continuing all the improvements currently being done in the city. Goals numbers one and two are continual maintenance on the roadways and refining the city's development code. But always top of mind with any decisions going forward will be that the residents want Central to remain a rural suburb. "At the same time they also want commercial development to satisfy their needs," says Barrow. "It's about getting the right balance – maintaining the rural suburb but still having commercial amenities for our citizens. That's what people want out here so that will always be key."

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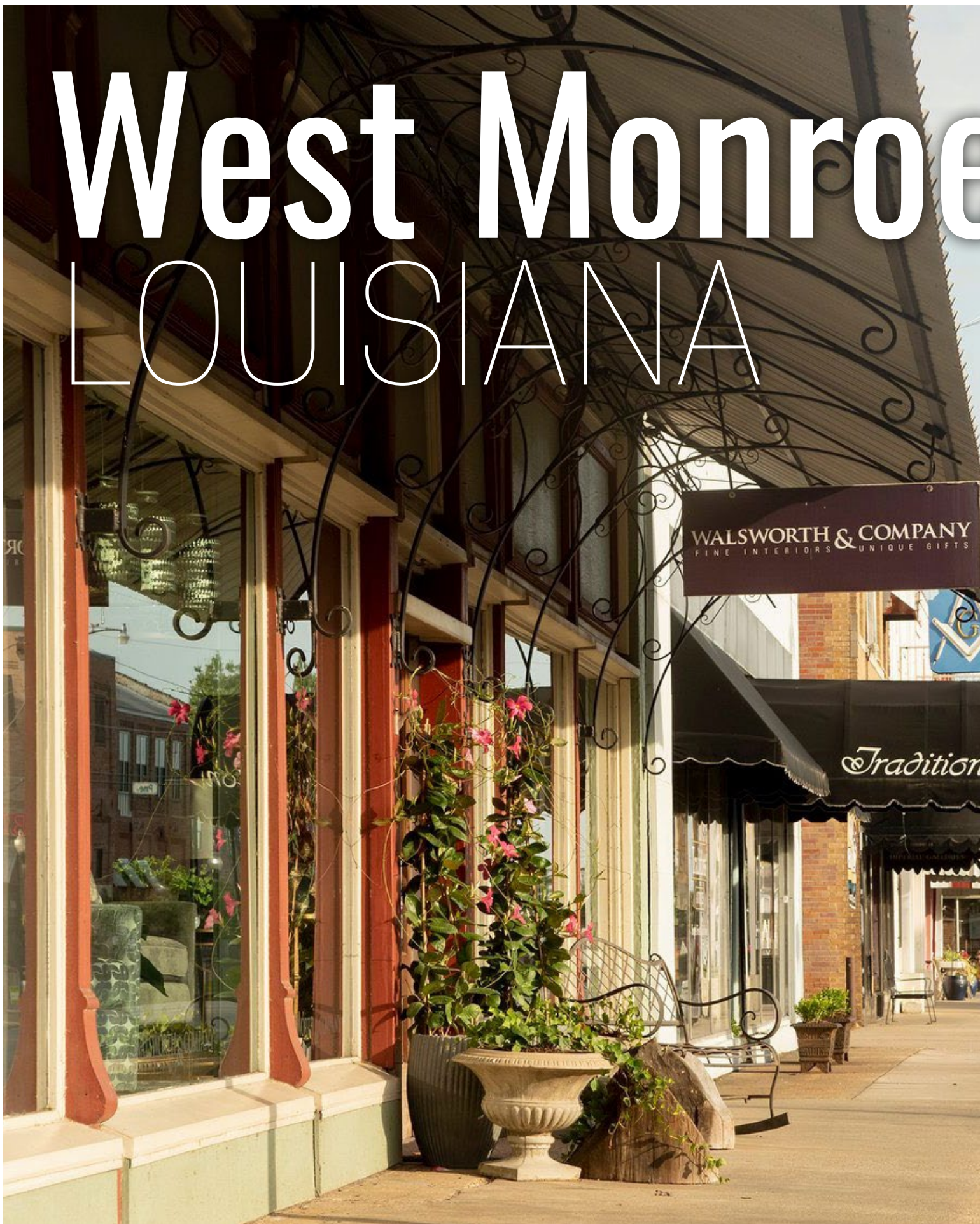
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West Monroe

LOUISIANA





SO MUCH TO LOVE

Located in Ouachita Parish, West Monroe is a small city in the hub of northeast Louisiana. Not to be confused with Monroe, the neighbouring community on the opposite side of the Ouachita River... the two are often referred to as Louisiana's twin cities. Originally known as Cotton Port, the town of West Monroe was born in 1854 when a Virginian doctor, Christopher Dabbs, purchased the land. The arrival of a railroad and construction of a bridge over the river created a perfect environment for the community to thrive. In 1880 Railroad officials used the name West Monroe for a depot in the area, which became the official name of the city.

West Monroe's 12,800 residents enjoy an enviable quality of life. As Mayor Staci Albritton Mitchell shares, "We have a small-town feel, but we have a lot of amenities of a city much bigger than us. We have a large faith-based community. It is a beautiful place to live, work and raise kids."

There are multiple employment opportunities on both sides of the river that benefit all of

AT A GLANCE

WEST MONROE, LOUISIANA

- WHAT:** A small, historic city; population 12,800
- WHERE:** Ouachita Parish, northeast LA
- WEBSITE:** www.cityofwestmonroe.com

Ouachita Parish. In West Monroe, Glenwood Regional Medical Center employs more than 950 people. The hospital, a 278-bed, state-of-the-art facility, offers a wide range of emergency and other comprehensive healthcare services. The Ouachita Parish School System with its 36 public schools is another major employer. Graphic Packaging International, manufacturers of packaging for consumer products, has over 800 employees in West Monroe. They are also connected to several smaller businesses that provide employment in the city. Lumen Technologies, a telecommunications company formerly known as Century Link, has their headquarters in Monroe, but is a main employer for Northeast Louisiana. University of Louisiana at Monroe is also a regional draw and a source of opportunity for West Monroe citizens.

The city supports its over-55 population through the West Ouachita Senior Center. The facility has received National Senior Center Accreditation – the first of its kind in Louisiana. The prestigious award is given by the National Council on Aging to less than two percent of centers nationally, who meet specific standards of excellence. The popular facility has more than 5,000 visits per year from seniors in West Monroe and throughout the parish, and offers a range of social and exercise activities, including art classes, yoga, and line dancing. Courtney Hornsby, the Mayor's Chief of Staff reports, "This year has been different because of COVID-19 restrictions. We've not been allowed to open and allow them inside, but the center is still providing services to the seniors externally. We are being safe and doing everything we can to serve them, even though they're desperate to get back in there."

One innovative project in the works for West Monroe is Highland Park, a 60-acre former golf course owned by the city that is currently being redesigned as a multi-use property. Mitchell explains, "The middle 30 acres are wetlands, there are ponds and trees on them and it is very low. We will keep the wetlands and use a small portion, just south, as a detention basin

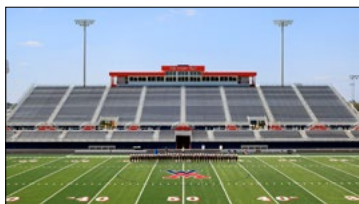


Mayor Staci Albritton Mitchell

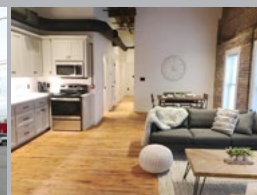


to relieve some of the flooding and drainage problems in the Highland Park neighborhood. There are about eight acres on the east end of the property that has an elevation that's suitable to be developed. We're looking at a residential developer that can add a small neighborhood there, because we need newer homes inside the city. The west side of that property will be for commercial development, and we are looking for things that generate commerce and sales tax for the city." The remaining areas will feature walking and bike paths for the enjoyment of residents.

Kiroli Park, another city facility, spans 150 acres and is the biggest in the region. Visitors to the park enjoy scenic walking trails, complete with covered bridges, an observation tower, and beautiful gardens. An event lodge is available for indoor events, as well as an outdoor amphitheater, fishing ponds, a dog park, and several playgrounds. "It has been voted several



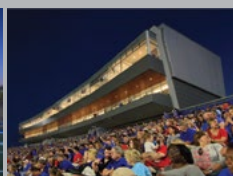
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times regionally as best park, best place for children's events, best venue," says Hornsby. "It is certainly viewed as a regional draw, not just a local draw. We have been working on enhancing that with different programming and activities that will get people there. This spring, we are hoping to have a contract with a provider to do weekend kayak rentals for kayaking on our pond. If COVID has shown us anything, it's that people feel a need to get outdoors and they want those experiences. That's what we've been trying to focus on this year." A main attraction of Kiroli Park is the Civitan Smiles Playground, an accessible park built through the donations of the West Monroe Civitan Club. The inclusive playground provides opportunities for children of all ages and abilities to play together and is one of the only parks of its kind in the state of Louisiana.

Infrastructure improvements in the community include a focus on active transportation options that implement sidewalks on neighborhood streets, and bike lanes on major roadways. Hornsby notes, "We have a strong biking community. COVID really shone a light on that. A lot of our neighborhoods were bicycling, and that just showed another reason why bike paths are incredibly important. We're working hard to identify grants and other dollars to support those efforts." The city has also invested in the addition of a soft kayak launch in a park along the Ouachita River to allow kayakers access to the river. "We got a lot of positive feedback on that, and it wasn't a terribly expensive venture," adds Hornsby. "People are wanting those outdoor experiences and that was an easy way we were able to meet that need."

A recent addition of a recycling center has been a successful green project for West Monroe, offering residents a place to drop off and sort their recyclable items. And a non-profit organization, Ouachita Green, has a home in West Monroe's Restoration Park – a former gravel pit and dump site. The park has been transformed into a wooded area, with an office used by the





organization. Ouachita Green places a large focus on environmental education, as well recycling, litter abatement, and beautification. West Monroe Parks & Recreation also plays a role in the city's environmentally-friendly efforts. "Our Parks and Rec Department prides themselves on sustainability," says Hornsby. "They compost, they reuse, they chop up wood and mulch it and reuse it, as they do with the Christmas trees. They also have their own greenhouse. For being as small as we are, I think we're very focused on green initiatives in our community. There's always room for improvement, but I think we have done a really good job in that area."

The city's historic downtown, often referred to as 'Antique Alley', has recently undergone a transformation with the help of the Downtown West Monroe Revitalization Group. The group formed six years ago to raise money for the beautification of this heritage area. Mitchell recalls, "It was a way for us to raise capital to put back into things downtown that the city was



not currently doing. I was not Mayor at the time, I was an alderman. With the six years of effort, and the momentum that is going, we have just finished a comprehensive downtown master plan. The new businesses and the interest in downtown right now is just phenomenal.” The thriving city core currently has more than 70 small businesses, including antique shops, restaurants, retail, salons, and spas.

“It is pretty amazing to see, and I think that the growth is very much grassroots driven,” adds Hornsby. “Now that the Mayor is in office, there is municipal support for downtown. We are very excited about what the future holds once we can fundraise and write grants and do some of the implementation of the master plan. It is amazing already that we have that many businesses, but we want to make it a true hub, not just of economic activity, but also a social and cultural component for festivals, events, and gatherings.” Flying Heart Brewery is now in the construction

phase of their downtown location. With a community-minded approach to business, they are expected to be a huge draw to the area. The family-friendly brewery, which sells craft beer and craft pizza, also features outdoor space for live entertainment and games.

Summing up what makes West Monroe so special, the Mayor shares, “It is the people that make you want to live somewhere and we want this to be the best small town it can be. It’s a beautiful place. A good, friendly, faith-based place to live, where you can go places and know people and feel at home. Or if you need help, you can get it.” West Monroe, a Louisiana treasure, so much to love.





PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ TBA Studio

www.tbastudio.com

TBA Studio, located in West Monroe and Bossier City, employs 14 professionals. The firm is a full-service architectural planning and design firm specializing in Educational, Commercial, Religious, Healthcare, Institutional, Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse Architecture, with an emphasis on Sports Architecture.



All photos courtesy of Chad Austin



Hickory, NORTH CAROLINA

Life. Well Crafted

Sitting picture perfect in Catawba County, North Carolina, the City of Hickory offers the scenic beauty of parks and trails, lakes, and mountain views in all four seasons. The community traces its roots back to 1850, when Henry Robinson built a log tavern under a hickory tree in the area. The town was first known as Hickory Tavern, officially becoming the city of Hickory in 1889. A forward-thinking community, Hickory would go on to be the first city in North Carolina to have a council-manager government in 1913. The city was also ahead of the times by installing electric lights in 1888 and a complete sewer system in 1904. In 1944, during a major polio outbreak, the town of Hickory joined forces with the March of Dimes to build a hospital which could adequately care for the region's affected children. Within 54 hours of making the agreement to build the hospital, doctors were already inside, with equipment, treating patients.

Hickory's population of 41,000 swells to over 80,000 during the day. As City Manager Warren Wood explains, "We are the hub of the greater Hickory metro area, which is a four-county region, encompassing about 365,000 people. We are the geographic center of that region, the employment hub. We abut the Charlotte metro area and refer to ourselves as Charlotte's great northwest, although we are our

AT A GLANCE

HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA

- WHAT:** A scenic progressive city; population 40,000
- WHERE:** At the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, an hour from Charlotte, NC
- WEBSITE:** www.hickorync.gov

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First and foremost, champions are born in the classroom. Through our K-64 initiative, we are preparing future generations, connecting students of all ages in our local school systems with employers and making sure their coursework aligns with the profession they seek, paving a way for them to build not only a successful career, but a successful life.

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Finally, champions come from community. They work to foster a sense of belonging in the areas they serve, and they work tirelessly to make sure that culture is maintained and carries on for generations to come. We are committed to not only creating quality students, but also creating leaders in our communities for the future. We are proud of all of our alumni who are making that difference in our local community and all of the communities that they serve.

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We are Catawba Valley Community College, and we are bridging the gap from this generation to the next.

.....

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own metro area.” Hickory has an ideal location on Interstate 40, which spans eight states from North Carolina to California and is the third longest highway system in the U.S. And Charlotte Douglas International Airport is a short drive from Hickory, another advantage for residents and visitors to the area.

With the tagline ‘Life. Well Crafted’, the City of Hickory gives a nod to its long history of entrepreneurial spirit. Many of the community’s major corporations are homegrown, along with a variety of small businesses within the city. Family-owned Hickory Springs Manufacturing (HSM), a leading supplier to the bed industry, has been a part of Hickory since 1944. For many years, the city relied heavily on manufacturing, which made up 50 percent of its employment base. With intentional effort, Hickory has diversified its workforce, which is now 28 percent manufacturing based, still four times the national average.

Trivium Corporate Center, an advanced manufacturing business park in the city, has recently announced the addition of American Fuji Seal. The manufacturers of shrink sleeve labels for consumer products are investing \$52

million into their new facility, employing more than 100 people. Other Trivium tenants include ITM, manufacturers of radiopharmaceuticals for cancer treatment; Cataler, a Japanese company specializing in automotive catalysts; and Corning Incorporated, manufacturers of optical cable systems. While these projects are in various stages of development in the Trivium location, there is continued interest and growth expected. Wood admits, “The problem is going to be, now that we have three or four parcels left, we are going to have to start thinking about expansion. That means either buying additional property or recreating that concept somewhere else.”

Aside from manufacturing, Hickory has other large companies who bring employment to the city, including the corporate headquarters of CommScope, a fortune 250 company, specializing in communications technology. Logistics management specialists, Transportation Insight, is one of the largest privately owned companies in North Carolina. They are based in Hickory, along with Merchant Distributors Incorporated (MDI), a grocery store distribution company. “MDI is one of the largest companies in the state, and they are doing \$120 million expansion, which is the largest single economic development project



we've had," says Wood.

Catawba Valley Community College, one of the top five community colleges in the U.S., has built an 80,000 square foot workforce development complex, offering training programs in the areas of computer engineering, electrical engineering, computer integrated machining, electronics engineering technology, automotive systems technology, welding, mechanical engineering, mechatronics and robotics, and heating/ventilation. Wood reports, "They are set up to train the workforce. They even work with individual industries to train workers on specific equipment within that business. They do a tremendous job at that facility, and they are a vital piece of our economic development efforts. The beauty of it is they are about a mile down the road from the Trivium Corporate Center. And that's one of the reasons we've been so successful landing businesses out there."

Hickory is also home to Lenoir-Rhyne University,

a private Lutheran university offering a range of undergraduate, graduate, and continuing study options with a focus on liberal arts and sciences. Starting with only 12 students, in a one room school in 1891, the university has grown to an enrollment of more than 1800 students, and a campus spanning 100 acres. They are also a valuable contributor to community development.

Along with Hickory's determination to build a skilled workforce comes a rising demand for housing, especially single-family homes. With several developments in the works, home values are going up and houses are moving quickly. Currently the average for home sales is 30 days



City Manager Warren Wood



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Neill Grading and Construction Co., Inc. is a third-generation, family-owned business. The company originated in May of 1966 in Hickory, NC and throughout the years has grown with the community around them. In 2011, Neill began to broaden their services beyond grading and utilities with the utilization of their General Contractors License for the historical restoration of Hollar Hosiery Mill, Moretz Mill and Lyerly Mill. These mills house small businesses, corporate offices, event and work space, breweries and much more for people to enjoy.

Neill Construction has also been a part of many Business Development projects for the City of Hickory for decades. Neill Grading and Construction headed the renovations of Historic Union Square. Neill is once again the lead contractor on major projects for the City of Hickory with the construction of the 2-mile-long City Walk trail and addition and renovation of Ridgeview Branch Library, as well as heading the site work for the new Trivium Corporate Park and Bruce Meisner Park.



HICKORY, NORTH CAROLINA



on the market. Wood acknowledges, “We have available land. We have a very strong water and sewer utility system that is regional, we have great infrastructure. Our city council is very pro growth, and we are focused on three things, growing the population, growing the workforce, and growing our tax base. We have to have quality of life. We have to have housing, and we have to have jobs. We are creating the jobs, so we just need to make sure we are creating housing.”

Development in the city’s downtown is another way that Hickory is creating more housing for its residents. The One North Center project is currently underway across the street from City Hall. The mixed-use building will include commercial space for retail and restaurants on the main floor, with 100 apartment units on the five floors above. With many onsite amenities, this upscale development will be the first of its kind in downtown Hickory. A block away, another project under construction includes a 50-unit apartment complex, further meeting the demand

for housing in the city.

Downtown Hickory’s central business district has a unique variety of shops, eating establishments, and entertainment venues. Among the retail and restaurants are professional office spaces, such as the corporate headquarters of Transportation Insight, whose offices are in a renovated mill in the city core. The scenic, park-like setting of the CBD has seen recent improvements thanks to a \$40 million investment in streetscapes and the city’s Union Square. This investment was possible due to a community bond referendum. As Wood explains, “In 2014, the voters passed a \$40 million bond referendum which focused on a number of things. One was building a 10-foot wide, multimodal path downtown that you can walk, bike, or jog on. That has generated a tremendous amount of interest and people are buying property along that path. We took the \$40 million and leveraged it and got several grants and now we have about \$100 million in improvement projects that we’re implementing.



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There's a lot of activity in the downtown area, and we're excited about all the redevelopments."

The multimodal path system, now in progress, will extend throughout the city. Two projects – the Riverwalk and the City Walk – will connect various neighborhoods in a series of walking and biking trails that are 10 feet wide and fully accessible. These paths will continue along Lake Hickory and the Catawba River, driving other development in this area. Wood reports, "From University, you can go all the way down to Lake Hickory, which is part of the Catawba River chain. There are spurs off into various neighborhoods and a spur that goes out to the airport. All those projects are either under construction or under design and will be bid out shortly. The first piece that goes through the downtown is almost done. We have been making great headway on that." The trail design also includes adding conduit for broadband fiber, another benefit to city residents.

As Hickory continues to grow, the city would like

to draw more diverse businesses to the area, which historically has been based in furniture, hosiery, and textiles. They are now targeting pharmaceutical, research and development, and advanced manufacturing industries. "We have the ability to train a workforce," says Wood. "What we are doing with our bond program and quality of life initiatives, that is what will set us apart from other jurisdictions that we're competing with. With the proximity to a larger city, Hickory can easily stand on its own. We've got a lot of things you wouldn't typically find in a city of 40,000. We have community theater, we have a symphony, a choral society, all the things you would find in a city more than twice our size. We feel like we've got a lot to offer."

With so much diversity and innovation, Hickory has everything required to build a quality life. A life – well crafted.



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Catawba Valley Community College is an accredited comprehensive community college serving Catawba and Alexander counties in North Carolina. Approximately 4,500 students are enrolled in college credit courses and more than 10,000 students are enrolled in short-term and occupational training opportunities.

- **Neill Grading and Construction Co., Inc.**

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- **Lenoir-Rhyne University**

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- **Dane Construction**

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La Vergne



AT A GLANCE

LA VERGNE, TENNESSEE

- WHAT:** A growing bedroom community; population 42,000
- WHERE:** Twenty miles southeast of Nashville, TN
- WEBSITE:** www.lavergnetn.gov



TENNESSEE

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE

La Vergne, Tennessee has evolved from a small rural community to a bedroom community and is now becoming a thriving urban centre that is constantly adding to its arsenal of programming, quality of life, and amenities and growing its infrastructure to accommodate explosive growth.

Over the last decade La Vergne has added more than 10,000 residents and has grown more, and faster, than any other municipality in middle Tennessee because of its location and the warm community atmosphere. That growth has caused industry to flock to the city's industrial area and retailers are clamoring for space to provide goods to residents within walking distance of La Vergne's subdivisions. Although retail is a sector the city needs to improve on, it is working toward building the infrastructure and relationships to welcome those businesses.

Mayor Jason Cole has worked hard to bring every aspect of the municipality together to help improve the quality of life for residents. He boasts, "We have a good mixture of homes, industry, retail – La Vergne is a just a great community for people outside of Nashville that want to come and enjoy life."



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WASCON, Incorporated was founded by Gerald and Jerry Cravins in 1979 in Livingston, TN to supply service to water and waste water customers located throughout the United States. Once the business started growing and the need for service locally grew, WASCON focused only on the cities and utilities in Tennessee and Kentucky. From the beginning, Gerald and Jerry stressed putting the customer first as the foundation for the business. As a result of this foundation, WASCON has grown into the standard for water and waste water service companies not only in Tennessee, but nationwide.

As the business evolved and customers and manufacturers started taking note of who WASCON was and what our capabilities were, manufacturers started approaching WASCON to market their products in Tennessee and Kentucky. The first manufacturer WASCON started marketing in the mid 1980s was Roots blowers. Today, Roots is still being sold and marketed by WASCON, along with several other quality manufacturers.



BLOWERS ▪ PLC ▪ BASIC CONTROL PANELS ▪ VALVES ▪ FILTER CONTROLS ▪ SEWAGE PUMP STATIONS

WASCON continues to call Livingston, TN home and currently employs over twenty-five people. In 2006, WASCON opened up a 10,000+ square foot warehouse, service facility and sales headquarters. The new renovation includes a machine shop, motor oven and a submersible pump test pit.

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WASCON

SALES and SERVICE

WASCON, Incorporated was founded by Gerald and Jerry Cravins in 1979 in Livingston, Tennessee with an ambitious mission to supply service to water and wastewater customers located throughout the United States. As the business started growing and the need for service increased locally, WASCON focused only on the cities and utilities in Tennessee and Kentucky. Jerry and Gerald built their business on a foundation of putting the customer first, a mantra that continues to this day. As a result, WASCON has become the standard for water and wastewater service companies not only in Tennessee, but nationwide.

As the business evolved and customers began taking note of who WASCON was and the scope of their capabilities, manufacturers started approaching WASCON to market their products in Tennessee and Kentucky. The first manufacturer they took on was Roots blowers – that was in the mid-1980s. Today, Roots is still being sold and marketed by WASCON, as are several other quality manufacturers.

WASCON is a proud family business, where every customer is treated as family, too. Drawing on three generations of experience, knowledge, and skills development, the WASCON team handles every request with the utmost care and professionalism. All the company's technicians are well trained and certified to guarantee satisfaction on every project.

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- Filter Control Troubleshooting/Repair/Upgrade
 - Sewage Pump Station Rehab

WASCON continues to call Livingston home, where they employ a dedicated staff in their 10,000+ square foot warehouse, service facility, and sales headquarters. Rest assured, the WASCON team will never cut corners or take shortcuts. Customer satisfaction is their top priority and they are always available to give you the highest quality service for projects big or small.

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Located in Rutherford County, La Vergne is only 20 miles southeast of Nashville and directly borders Antioch to the northwest, Smyrna to the southeast, and Percy Priest Lake on the northeast. Interstate 24 and U.S. Routes 41 and 70S run through the community and the Percy Priest Reservoir on the Stones River sits north of the municipality. La Vergne's proximity to the world's country music capital, plus its wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities, has boosted the city's population from just over 32,000 in the 2010 census to more than 42,000 in a special census taken in 2019.

Economic Development Specialist, Thomas Broeker, reports, "The growth that has already happened and the growth we are expecting has caused the city to jump into action. Estimates project that we'll go as high as 65-70,000 in the next 10-15 years. I would say in the current Nashville region we're pretty much experiencing explosive growth."

To help accommodate that growth, Mayor Cole and city aldermen have spent two years developing a new master plan: updating zoning regulations, finishing a major thoroughfare project, completing parks and recreation master plans and have come up with a strategic plan spanning the next 20 years to ensure infrastructure keeps up with growth. Because, as Cole attests, "It's important for our municipal government to try to pilot this city. We're land-locked, so our growth is limited to what we already have, and we have to use that wisely."

Fine tuning the ordinances is something the city has worked hard on to spur the growth. Broeker states, "We know it's coming, it's coming all around us. It's just being part of the Nashville region, but the current and the previous Mayor and aldermen have worked very hard on updating ordinances that are getting us on the same page as other cities and other municipalities around us. While we don't like to



Mayor, Jason Cole



Economic Development Specialist, Thomas Broeker

compete, is it obvious that we will compete for residents, industry, and commercial business, so it's important to plan for the future.”

Water management is a vital infrastructure component. In that regard, Inframark and the City of La Vergne work together to identify improvements to the water treatment facility. A recent example is the Filter Rehabilitation Project that is scheduled to be completed in the first quarter of 2021. Inframark has a strong relationship with the La Vergne Public Works department to assure water system integrity and the reliability of the city's valuable assets.

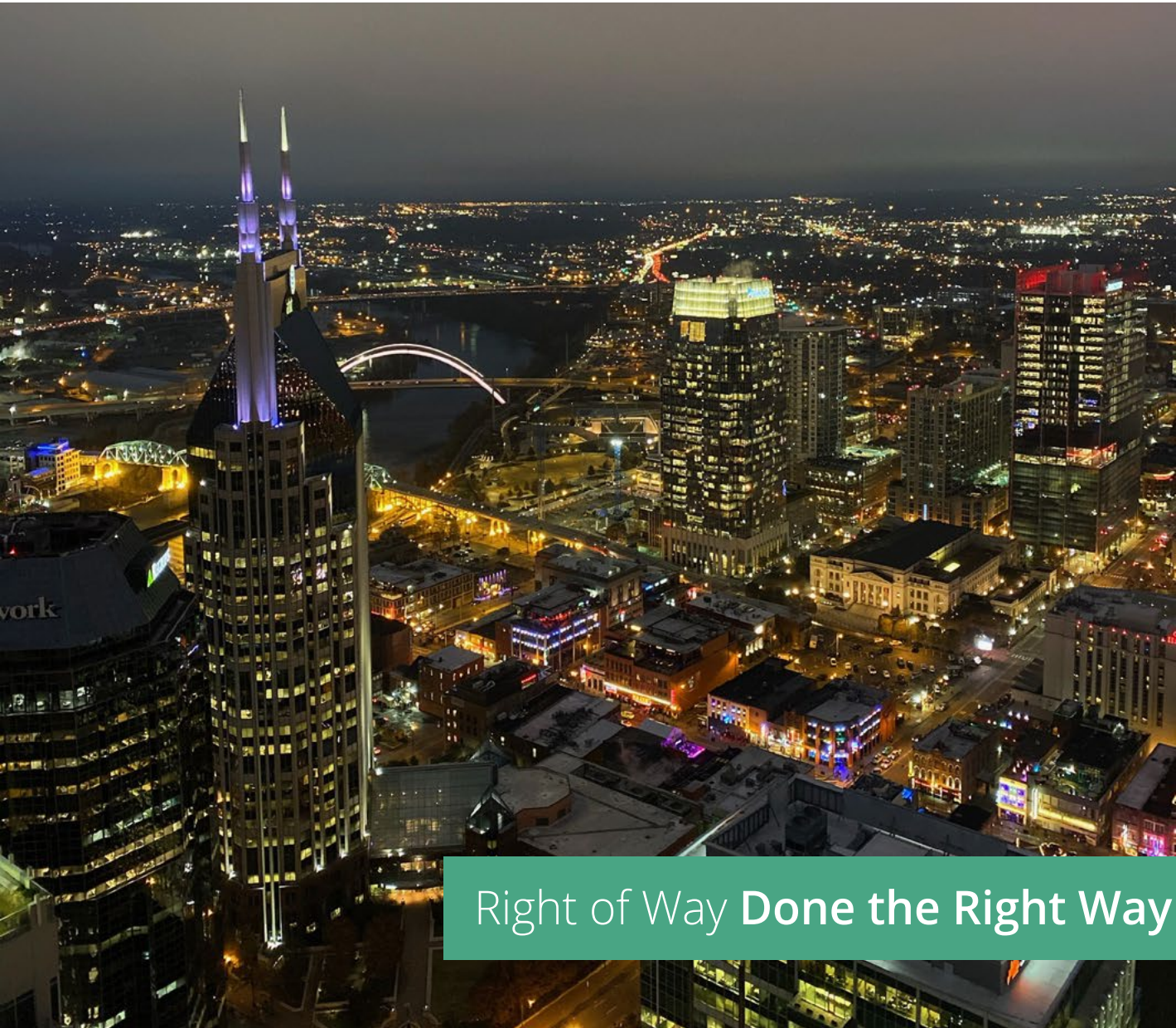
La Vergne is home to the largest subdivision in the state, and possibly the country, Lake Forest Estates. It is adding new homes all the time and creating new subdivisions with townhomes, single family homes, and villas. One development that is already underway is slated for 600 homes on 200 acres. The city was

ranked number one by Homes.org for the most affordable place to live in Tennessee in 2020. Broeker reflects, “At one time we might have been a rural community and we might have grown to a bedroom community, but now there are so many more amenities and what we're trying to do with our vision is make it great for people to come live here, to work here, and pretty much do everything within a very short radius of their home.”

The safety of citizens is uppermost in the minds of city officials. They are in the process of adding two new fire stations to ensure the community is protected. One station will go on Lake Road and the other will be more centrally located. After many years of trying from different administrations, Cole was successful in getting a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant to construct a tornado safe room in the middle of town next to the seniors' center. It will be used as a community



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Croft and Associates LLC is proud to work with the City of La Vergne on notable projects, including:

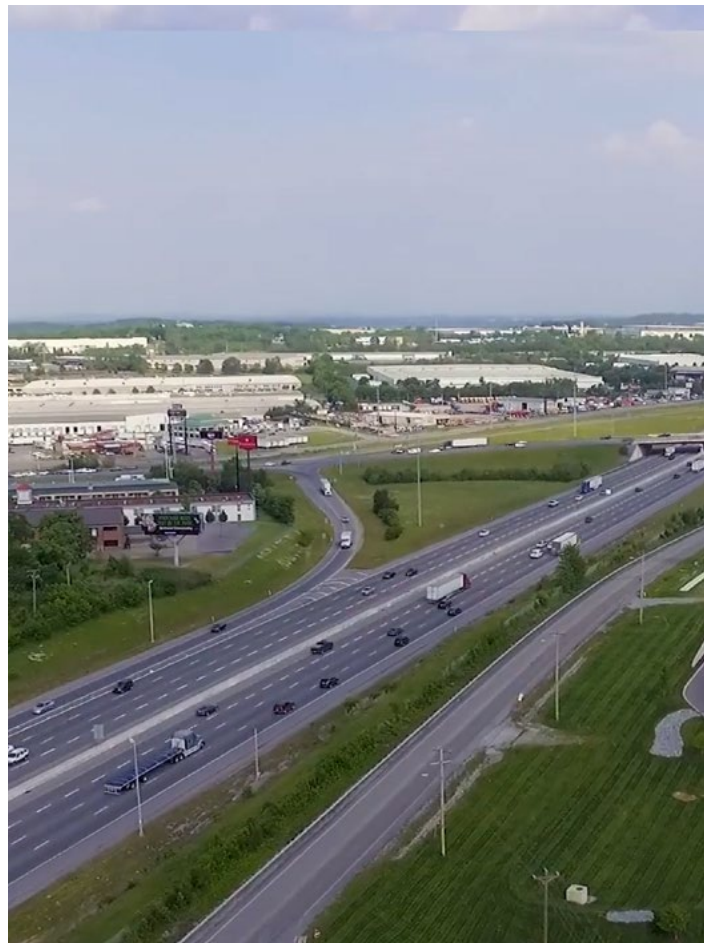
1. Waldron Road: Widening of major roadway into city from I-24
2. Upper Chaney Woods: Sewer Improvement project
3. Lower East Hurricane Creek Interceptor: Sewer Project

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center while there is no emergency and will have a kitchen, office space, storage space, and more. When the weather does look grim, there is a 1,140 sq ft tornado safe room. The city still needs to be approved for phase two of the project and will have to pay \$1.8 million toward its completion, which they estimate could be done as early as the end of 2021.

La Vergne also received a grant from the Randy Boyd Foundation to create a three-acre dog park in the city. There will be two sections separated by a parking lot, one for large dogs and one for small dogs. Broeker notes, “We are also now talking about adding in a memorial for a fallen canine unit dog, Jacques, who was killed in the line of duty here just a few months ago.”

They’ve also secured a \$2.6 million grant to help make the community more walkable by adding sidewalks on both sides of their major thoroughfare, Murfreesboro Road, from Davidson County to Smyrna. Also, each intersection with a stoplight will get a crosswalk. The city will have

to contribute just over \$86,000 to complete the project. Cole explains, “A sizable part of our community walks in different areas depending how close they are, the proximity between their home and the retail, so this will project will facilitate that. Making the city a more walkable area for everybody really helps to establish that cityscape. Considering what were getting, it’s not a huge amount to match... again, it’s a result of partnerships with our state and federal officials to get this done and improve the look and feel for the whole city.”

The city has a large industrial area that houses a diverse array of businesses and is home to Amazon and ICEE headquarters. The state has made Tennessee very business friendly with low taxes and incentives and La Vergne tries to keep that trend alive and well. Broeker reports, “We’re perfectly centrally located in mid-America. You can be to all 48 mainland states in fast order – I’ve heard numbers say 95 percent of the states within 48 hours in a truck.” Local industries employ more than 28,000 workers that either live in La Vergne, or come into the city on a daily basis, and the goal is to encourage more people to live and work in the community.

In the future, the city will continue to focus on attracting more retail to keep people in La Vergne and add to the quality of life for residents. “We are losing millions of dollars by



not having that retail,” says Broeker, “and the city has a large demographic that could definitely sustain a wide variety of retail sectors.” They will also put an emphasis on updating infrastructure and emergency services. “Everything in the city is connected,” says Cole. “Retail actually grows our tax revenue and helps the city provide more services, such as better police and fire, better streets, and so on. It all works hand in hand. So, I think that’s one of the big goals.”

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A photograph of two cyclists riding across a bridge with a prominent rust-colored steel truss structure. The cyclist in the foreground is a man with a beard, wearing a grey t-shirt, blue shorts, and a white and black helmet. He is smiling at the camera. The second cyclist is partially visible behind him. The bridge has a wooden deck and a wooden handrail. The background shows a clear sky and some distant structures.

FREEPORT

AT A GLANCE

FREEPORT, ILLINOIS

- WHAT:** A diverse, business-friendly city; population approx. 25,000
- WHERE:** County seat of Stephenson County, Illinois
- WEBSITE:** www.cityoffreeport.org



FREEPORT, ILLINOIS

‘MECCA’ FOR COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURING

The City of Freeport, Illinois is a regional center in a rural part of the state. With a population of 25,000, it is the largest city between Rockford, Illinois and Dubuque, Iowa – a definite draw for people from the surrounding area who are looking for employment and entertainment. “We’re a mecca for commerce and manufacturing in the northwest area of Illinois,” boasts Freeport City Manager, Randy Bukas. “We’re approximately 15 miles

south of the Wisconsin border and about 45 miles east of Iowa, so we’re tucked right in the northwest corner of the state.”

Freeport’s economic strength comes from its diversity of businesses, including local entrepreneurs who have opened about half a dozen new businesses in the city over the last year. Major manufacturers include Honeywell International, which announced plans to bring about 125 more workers to

its Freeport plant in 2019. About 400 people are employed at Met Life Auto & Home Insurance offices, and the largest employer is the Freeport Hospital Network, with about 1,000 people on staff.

The city itself is investing in infrastructure. Freeport is in the process of a five-year, \$54 million water, sewer and street improvement project. In addition, U.S. Cellular is bringing 5G to the community. As it turns out, the City of Freeport also has some pull in the Illinois General Assembly. “I should point out, that our state senator and our state representative that represent our area are both from Freeport,” Bukas reports.

Freeport was founded in 1855 and hosted the second Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858, three years before Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States. It has been referred to as “Pretzel City USA” because of a popular German bakery known for its pretzels in the 1850s. And

the current Freeport High School mascot is a pretzel – a nod to that early heritage.

Today, the city is working toward a bright, sustainable future by encouraging the use of solar energy. Freeport has earned a Gold rating from SolSmart, a national designation program designed to recognize communities that reduce barriers to solar energy and foster growth of solar markets. The city reduced barriers through actions such as creating an online permitting checklist, reviewed local ordinances to address impediments to solar development and allowed solar use in all zones. “We’ve had a tremendous interest and development in solar energy here in town,” says Bukas. “And when somebody brings in a building permit that has anything to do with solar, we make sure that we get building permits issued within three days. So it’s a real quick turnaround time.”

The upgrade to 5G, or fifth generation technology for cellular networks, has already



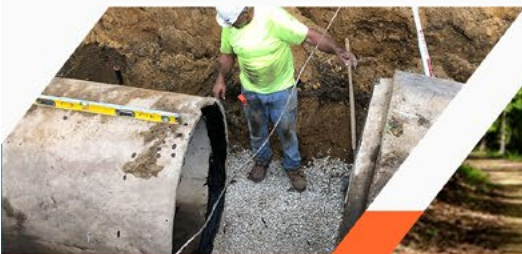
LET'S WORK TOGETHER.

FREEPORT. WHERE IT ALL STARTED.

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Fehr Graham is a leading Midwest engineering and environmental firm and is proud to call Freeport home. Working alongside City of Freeport leaders has been a privilege to help create places and spaces to live, work and play.

Working with the City of Freeport to revitalize some of its water and sewer systems, parks and infrastructure is critical to the health and wellbeing of every resident. It demonstrates the City's commitment to public health, open space and sustainability. That happens with thorough and thoughtful input from community leaders.

"We're excited about the possibilities on the horizon for Freeport," said Adam Holder, one of Fehr Graham's eight owners and Freeport native. "City officials are providing the foundation on which we can build a thriving town. We have an incredible, decades-long connection with the City that leads to great project results and strengthens our community. Our partnership means an unbreakable trust to make small and substantial decisions together."

Fehr Graham has been in Freeport since 1973 and has grown exponentially. Firm leaders are happy to keep investing in the community where it has set deep roots.

"We know and love Freeport – we're invested in its outcome, safety and beauty," Holder said. "It is very rewarding to see our staff grow and prosper along with the City."

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begun. Chicago-based mobile network operator U.S. Cellular is in the process of installing conduit throughout Freeport. “And as part of our agreement with them, they’re also giving us a couple strands of fiber for our use as well,” Bukas acknowledges. “We could either use it for our own community, our own needs, or we can lease it to other businesses. So we’re excited about that.”

In downtown Freeport, the city is spending about \$3.2 million on its Chicago Avenue streetscape project. This will involve the replacement of underground infrastructure, as well as repaving the roads and redoing sidewalks to make them compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Adams Corridor project will expand sidewalks and create bicycle lanes in one of the city’s main thoroughfares. That initiative is expected to cost about \$4 million. In other infrastructure updates, a new well is being drilled and a new water treatment plant will be built next to it for a total cost of about \$9

million. Some \$6 million is being spent on the replacement of about 2,500 old lead service lines leading to people’s homes. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is providing a grant for the service line replacement, and a 25% forgivable loan from the agency is being used to help finance the combined well and water treatment plant project.

To accommodate residential growth, Freeport is open to new housing developments. The city has an adequate number of apartments and condominiums but could use some more single-family homes. Employment-wise, the local economy has plenty of job opportunities that allow people to progress in their careers while staying settled in the same location. Met Life has been renovating its downtown building and considering increasing the number of people it employs in Freeport. And Tri Star Metals recently expanded its facility by 150,000 square feet. The \$3.8 million project coincided with the addition of about 35 new jobs.

“There are some opportunities within our existing companies to climb the ladder, so to speak, and build wealth,” says Mark Williams, Executive Director of the Greater Freeport Partnership. “There are U.S. manufacturing companies that really try to recruit based on that opportunity and create the perfect job and income for somebody to raise a family with. If they come to work for that company, they can stay there and build a career.” One such company is Furst-McNess. Frank E. Furst and Frederick W. McNess founded the company in Freeport in 1908. For more than a century the company has delivered customized commercial livestock feed, feed ingredients and consulting to clients. Today, Furst-McNess is a multinational family business in its fourth generation.

But not every business in Freeport is big and established. “In addition to the larger companies that we have, we have a lot of local entrepreneurs in the community,” explains Kirstin Hinds, Community and Economic Development Director for the City of Freeport. “Just in the past year, surprisingly, even with COVID, we’ve had six ribbon cuttings for small local businesses opening up.”

The city is trying to grow responsibly by taking advantage of its existing infrastructure. This is done by encouraging the reuse of existing facilities, whether that be for manufacturing, offices or housing. “We have all the major tools that are available to redevelop, as well as develop, from the ground up,” Williams reports. “Enterprise zones, tax-increment finance districts for financing, hospitality zone areas, any kind of tool that can help reduce the cost of doing business here. We have industrial sites, as well as commercial and retail sites. Some are existing facilities as well.”

Freeport is also part of the Northern Illinois Land Bank, a government entity focused on helping communities eliminate blight by providing clear titles to new purchasers of property. Land banks are created to strategically





acquire problem properties and convert them into assets. They have special powers that enable them to undertake these activities more effectively and efficiently than other public or nonprofit entities. The partnership between Freeport and the Northern Illinois Land Banks is a relatively new one, but two properties have already been sold through the Land Bank. The hope is that this will build momentum and aid in the city's revitalization efforts over the next few years.

It's part of an overall plan to keep Freeport prosperous well into the future. "We're looking at trying to keep our tax base strong with our current manufacturers and retailers," Bukas says. "And we're looking to make Freeport a destination for people to come visit. We've got lots of great things to do here. And our goal is to just continue to make a strong, strong community. A place where people want to come visit, work, and live."

PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

- **Fehr Graham Engineering & Environmental**
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WASHINGTON

AT A GLANCE

WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

- WHAT:** Desirable bedroom community of Peoria; population 16,566
- WHERE:** Tazewell County, Illinois
- WEBSITE:** www.ci.washington.il.us



WASHINGTON, ILLINOIS

Safe, smart, and special

Ideally located in Tazewell County on U.S. Route 24 and Illinois Route 8, Washington, Illinois, is a family-oriented city that offers a high quality of life with many amenities. Its status as a vibrant, welcoming community is supported by excellent schools and a diverse parks system with a bevy of recreational activities available. The municipality also boasts safe neighborhoods where community members are actively involved and work alongside the

municipal government to ensure the city thrives. Known for being fiscally responsible, the local administration focuses on balancing quality of life improvements with smart financial management to keep taxes low.

Jon Oliphant, Washington's Planning and Development Director, believes the city has so much to offer current and potential residents and businesses because of its diverse offerings



already in place and those they are planning to finish. He acknowledges, “We’ve got a really strong mix of amenities that families look for when searching for a place to live, and so we like to keep building on those, but maybe more importantly from our standpoint is to be able to find some of those amenities a community like ours typically doesn’t have.” The unique community is one of the oldest in the state and has a historic downtown that brings the core area to life with boutique shops, restaurants, and other small businesses. The city is also a retail hub for surrounding small communities and Oliphant believes that’s one of the many reasons Washington has become “a community that people throughout the region have looked to as a desirable place to live.”

The city was founded in 1825 by North Carolina-native William Holland, Sr., who came to the Peoria area (then called Fort Clark) after being hired by the U.S. government to provide blacksmith services to the local Indigenous

community. During his life, Holland was married three times, and was the father of 21 children: 14 by his first wife and seven by his second wife. He had 82 grandchildren and 50 great grandchildren and died in Washington, Illinois on November 27, 1871 at the ripe old age of 91. The post office (and later the city) was originally named Holland’s Grove in 1833 before it was renamed in honor of the first U.S. President, George Washington, in 1837. In the 1920s, George Heyl put Washington on the map as the home of the famous Heyl Pony Farm. Some of the original barns still exist on North Main Street. The Heyl Pony Farm supplied Shetland Ponies to buyers around the world. When Heyl died in 1932, it was recorded as one of the largest funerals ever held in the city.

Fast forward to 2021... Washington is home to about 16,600 residents and is a bedroom community for Peoria. The municipality is now working to create a 20-year comprehensive plan for the city, including its infrastructure,



trails, green energy, economic development, growth strategy, and residential development. Input from the community, consultants, and local stakeholders will come together to give the municipal government a guiding document to help steer the city. Some projects had previously been put on hold and those will be part of the plan going forward.

Olipphant emphasizes that the community wants to see growth done in a responsible way. He relates, “For the most part people are generally willing and wanting of some growth, certainly the comprehensive plan will help identify that. Where they want to grow, to what degree they want to grow. It’s been 20 years since we’ve had a plan done and in that time we’ve had a substantial amount of growth, more so during the first half of the life of that plan as compared to this decade, but overall there’s still been a lot of growth here. And I think there is a desire for the community to grow, but I think the big question is going to be how are we going to grow? How are we going to manage growth and do it in a way that is going to be sustainable both from a land use, as well as a financial perspective. So, it’s really a good time for us to be considering this.”

Civic Art Works, a consulting firm out of suburban Chicago, is leading the creation of the comprehensive plan with a team of five other consulting firms that specialize in everything from architecture and economic development to planning and communications. The company intends to consult with community members, business owners, and all interested parties to find out more about the direction that the community sees Washington going. The municipality also uses Davis and Campbell for their legal needs and Olipphant touts them as “doing a really good job for us.”

The city has three large infrastructure projects on the go right now, including working toward getting a 223-acre section of city owned property shovel-ready for development with

waterlines, grid service, and building roads to access the entire property. The second project is happening on Freedom Parkway, which is the large-scale corporate retail sector. The city is in the midst of plans to prepare a site for development for light industrial and/or more retail in that area.

From an environmental sustainability aspect, Oliphant acknowledges, “The City Council has been very supportive of staff creating green projects with trails and multi-modal connections. These initiatives have connected our neighborhoods with trail systems. Those neighborhoods are now very safe places to live and were rated by Neighborhoodscout.com as having a crime rate lower than 44 percent of other communities in Illinois. When the site compared Washington to other cities of a similar size, it found Washington has a crime rate that is noticeably lower than the average.” The city has so many trails that Oliphant knows his staff struggle to come up with more park and

trail projects. But he notes, “Our recreation trail network is intended to be green, old school green.”

The city has also encouraged residents to do their part by participating in residential solar and green energy projects. According to Ray Forsythe, City Administrator, “Within the Freedom Parkway project they’ve incorporated many sustainable aspects, including bioswales. So I think we’re making a diligent effort to look after the environment.” Bioswales are vegetated open channels designed to concentrate and convey stormwater runoff while removing debris and pollution and prove an effective asset for stormwater management.

The third project is reconstructing the US Business 24 retail corridor and likely removing the median to allow access to businesses on both sides of the road. Oliphant believes this is going to make a great difference for the city and local businesses. He states, “It’s now a matter of



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when, and not if, that road is reconstructed and it's a significant project. Beck Oil has also located along that stretch of road and is constructing a new gas station and convenience store where two derelict structures used to reside. This substantial project should be finished in the spring of 2021. I'm excited to see how it changes the look of the road."

Over the next three to five years, the city hopes to have those infrastructure projects completed and implement a significant economic development plan to offer more companies incentives to locate in Washington. The goal is to also welcome new citizens to embrace the progressive and diverse flavor of this growing community.

PREFERRED VENDOR/ PARTNER

- **Davis & Campbell, L.L.C.**
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TOWN OF ESSEX & ESSEX JUNCTION, VERMONT

Finding a common path for the future

In the heart of Chittenden County, Vermont, just north of the Winooski River, lies an offbeat municipality scenario with both a village and a town government. Five Selectboard Members oversee the town of Essex as a whole, including 33 additional square miles of suburbs and farmland, while five Trustees govern the village of Essex Junction, where nearly half the town's population lives. Each government does its own planning and zoning. They share the same school district, but each operates its own fire department and library. Each has its own taxing authority. And on March 2, 2021, the town and village residents will vote on whether to adopt the Plan for Merger and the proposed Charter for merged communities.

“Over the course of decades, we’ve debated about whether to merge or separate, divide or consolidate in some way,” says Elaine Haney, Chair of the Essex Town Selectboard. “There’s always been contention about a merger due to taxation issues.” Given the complications that can arise when managing two municipalities under the banner of one community, most Vermont towns have done away with their villages. It’s why half of the state’s 76 previously incorporated villages have

AT A GLANCE

TOWN OF ESSEX & VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION, VERMONT

WHAT: Unique town and village planning to merge their communities

WHERE: Chittendon County, VT

WEBSITE: www.essexvt.org
www.essexjunction.org

since merged, been dissolved, or have separated from their associated town. The upcoming vote will represent Essex Junction's 19th attempt at joining that statistic since 1958.

Essex Junction was formed in 1892 to give "downtown" services (sidewalks, water, and sewers) to the villagers; services that residents in the rural areas didn't need or want to pay for. As both town and village grew, the territorial divide led to some duplication, but it also created tangled linkages, such as Essex's shared police department, which upholds different rules and ordinances on behalf of each municipality.

"What we're anticipating, should merger pass, is the ability to have one development code and a unified vision moving forward," says Haney. "Each region – the town and the village – have their own comprehensive plans, with specific details about how the town and village centers are to grow. Those aren't going to change; they're just going to be devised under a single plan. We can





maintain the density where the density is, build the density in the town where it's able to be built, and leave everything else to be rural, which is the character that our residents prefer."

"The village center faces the same kinds of challenges that little old downtowns around New England all have – a lot of constrained property lines, criss-crossing boundaries, and lots of dense traffic," says George Tyler, Vice President of the Essex Junction Board of Trustees. "The important thing would be for the town and the village to work more closely together in terms of economic development. Because the fact of the matter is, whether we like it or not, we're in a very competitive environment in Chittenden County. We're competing with Burlington, South Burlington, and Williston for investment dollars."

Tyler says he's been committed to the merger since 2014, when IBM Microelectronics – Essex's largest employer at the time, at around 4,000 employees – started shedding jobs at



its microchip manufacturing facility, sparking rumors of a plant shutdown. “IBM was in the village, but it benefited the town as well,” Tyler explains. “The Chair of the Town Selectboard and I worked very closely together because we understood the gravity of the situation; if all those jobs were lost, what it was going to mean for the community. We did a lot of hand wringing. We called a lot of meetings with state officials, non-profits, and IBM people. Thankfully, GlobalFoundries took over at the very last minute, but that taught me the absolute necessity for the village and the town to approach economic development from a united front.”

GlobalFoundries, a privately held, California-based multinational company, is Vermont’s largest private manufacturer, with 2,300 workers. Its “Fab 9” facility, the Essex Junction foundry, still prints microchips that power consumer and commercial electronics. “In the town, we’re fortunate to have light manufacturing and





industrial areas, which is not super common for Chittenden County communities,” says Owiso Makuku, Community Development Director for the Town of Essex. “We have companies like Blodgett Ovens, Gordini, Autumn Harp, and Revision. Glavel, whose product is a sustainable foam glass aggregate, will soon open its flagship manufacturing plant here.”

The town has also just completed an overhaul of its Master Plan for the town center in collaboration with the multi-disciplinary planning and consulting firm, SE Group. Building on the original 1991 Master Plan, the new “ETC Next” proposal foresees a future where the Town Center and now-rebranded Essex Experience (formerly the Essex Shoppes and Cinema) will have the groundwork laid for a denser, more walkable urban environment. Planning Commission members have already approved a new, 22,500-square-foot building for the Essex Experience location. Housing an immersive and interactive arts space playfully called “Babaroosa”, the venue will provide a big boost to the region’s creative economy. “It’s being modeled after the work of the Meow Wolf collective from Santa Fe, NM, but with a Vermont flavor and approach,” Makuku says. “It’s going to be about a \$25 million investment.”

From a housing perspective, Essex values both its urban and rural components and would like to see balanced future growth, with an appropriate range and mix of housing types and densities. “We just jointly formed our community’s first Housing Commission,” says Haney. “They’re in the education and assessment phase right now, but the goal is for us to be in concert in terms of what kinds of housing needs to go where. Chittenden County itself has a housing goal of 3000 units by 2025. All that housing shouldn’t just be happening in Essex. It should be spread across the county but we have a vision for what needs to happen.”

Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), a local housing non-profit, is helping them get there. “We have



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more affordable housing with a capital ‘A’ now because of the CHT,” Haney says. “We overlapped the village center area with a neighborhood designation, which incentivizes developers to provide affordable housing as part of their proposal,” adds Robin Pierce, Community Development Director for Essex Junction. “One of the Chittenden Crossing buildings is actually being developed in unison with the CHT. It’s all going to be affordable housing.”

Essex Junction’s famous Five Corners intersection marks the site of the Chittenden Crossing project, a pedestrian-friendly, five-building, multi-use complex with 225 new apartment units and 29,600 square feet of commercial/retail space. “There’s a new road, the Crescent Connector bypass, which is going to reduce congestion at the Five Corners,” notes Pierce. “We also have a new crossing across the Amtrak main line. That’s sort of what inspired the name ‘Chittenden Crossing.’” The village center’s Amtrak station is the busiest train station in Vermont. It’s also the closest

one to Burlington – the state’s most populous municipality. “We’ve been through a charrette design process to come up with a new design for Essex Junction station,” Pierce says. “It’s currently being reviewed by some of the representatives from Vermont, who are in Congress to see if they can obtain some funding for us.”

In addition to growing residential density and improving accessibility in the village’s downtown, the Chittenden Crossing development could solve some significant environmental issues. “The land that Chittenden Crossing will be built on is just a massive, expansive stretch of asphalt, all of which causes stormwater runoff, which we have to deal with,” Tyler explains. “When you get a new development like that on pre-existing asphalt, it comes with a really good stormwater plan. We can over-build stormwater capacity. There’s all kinds of good things besides more places for apartments and more economic activity.”

“Also, with our new town center plan, we’re



focused on building the density without going beyond the capacity of our sewer core, and without breaking the boundaries of where our open space is preserved,” says Haney. “Our community is deeply attached to a lot of the open spaces we have, so we want to make the best of those areas where we can develop. We have to be very thoughtful about it.”

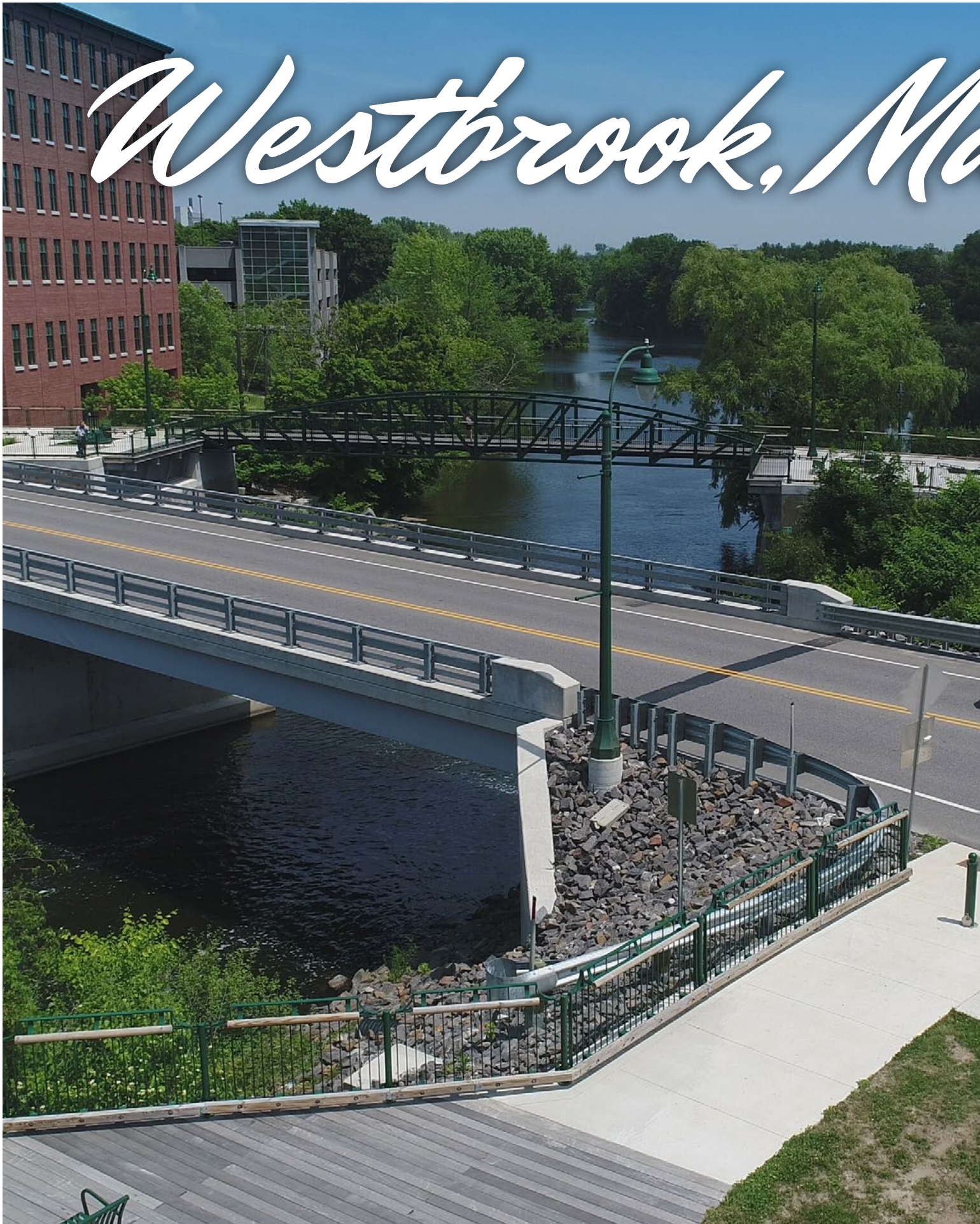
“There’s a real way for the town and the village to complement each other in terms of the development to go after, and the development they’ve already approved” adds Pierce. “For the first time in a long time, the village center is vibrant at night. And the town has the space for industrial, manufacturing, and commercial. They’re beefing up their downtown as well. It’s going to be like two ends of a barbell, where we have the New Town Center and the Old Town Center, compact settlements in the village, and single-family homes in the town. All with enough space to provide for incoming businesses.”

Irrespective of the outcome of the March 2 vote, the Selectboard members and Trustees are confident in Essex’s ability to support a quality of life between the town and the village that will be highly desirable, both for living and for the local economy.

PREFERRED VENDOR/ PARTNER

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Westbrook, Me





Planning for prosperity

Westbrook, Maine is a suburb city west of Portland, with a proud identity all its own. Rather than sitting back in the shadow of the nearby urban center, this former mill City has grown significantly, over the last two decades, to become a residential hub and business center for the region. Westbrook benefits from having two exits located on the Maine Turnpike and only minutes from the Portland International Jetport. Westbrook makes an ideal ‘home base’ to live and do business in the Southern Maine, Greater Portland area due to its close proximity to lakes, beaches, and mountains.

Although adjacent to Portland, Westbrook has always had its own economic base. City Administrator, Jerre Bryant, explains, “Westbrook was an industrialized area of Greater Portland and self-sufficient in a way that most suburbs weren’t when it comes to employment and other factors where they rely on a nearby city. While mill towns across the region have seen a declining economic base since the 1980s, Westbrook has aggressively pursued and built its new economy through renovation of some mill facilities and development of business parks within the city. At the same time, it has become an attractive residential location.”

Westbrook also has a growing life sciences & biotech sector with several national and international headquarters located in the city. According to Mayor, Michael Foley, “IDEXX Laboratories, a global leader in veterinary diagnostics, software, and water

AT A GLANCE

WESTBROOK, MAINE

WHAT:	Attractive small city for residential and business; population 20,000
WHERE:	Greater Portland Area, southern Maine
WEBSITE:	www.westbrookmaine.com

microbiology, is headquartered in one of our industrial parks and is producing much of the COVID-19 testing for the entire state. They are joined by Artel Inc., and Abbott Labs – a medical devices and healthcare company that recently expanded to the city – and they are developing and manufacturing COVID-19 tests.” According to Daniel Stevenson, Economic Development Director for the City, “We’re really growing our life sciences & biotech cluster. Clear H2O, also located in the park uses a gel technology to prioritize animal health & welfare, improve medical research, and optimize animal agriculture. We have a really good mix of manufacturing and professional service industries in the rest of our commercial and industrial parks.”

Bryant reports, “There is some available capacity in reuse of existing commercial and industrial structures. Initially, we had a lot of transportation-based, warehousing and transit hubs for moving goods and products that are now being converted to life sciences & biotech businesses.” Westbrook also has new development projects that are creating mixed-use opportunities for commercial and light industry.

Westbrook has a population of approximately 20,000 and is prepared for residential and commercial growth in the near future. To accommodate the influx of new residents and businesses, the city has many residential and mixed-use development projects in the pipeline. Including Rock Row, the largest mixed-use project in Maine. Both public and private sector investment will exceed \$500 million in redeveloping a former old rock quarry site at the gateway to the city. At full absorption, the project will consist of two million square feet of mixed-used space that includes retail, dining, office, hotels, a convention center and other tourist related amenities, a medical campus, and innovation district. “We’re experiencing growth opportunities in new industries, requiring specialized education that result in





higher wages”, says Bryant. Rock Row owners, Waterstone Properties, are “in it for the long game” and anticipate more than five million visitors per year, and creation of 3,000 to 5,000 jobs. Given the immense boost the development will bring to the community, the city has partnered with Waterstone Properties securing tax incentives, a contract zone, and other initiatives.

Westbrook has launched Maine’s first Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program. As Stevenson explains, “The purpose of BRE is to focus on our existing businesses by industry sector to address their needs, help solve problems, and develop collaborative relationships and partnerships which include workforce training and talent recruitment.”

In other good news, Mayor Foley shares, “We’re really excited about our Vertical Harvest downtown project, which I feel is critical to continue as the Rock Row development comes



Mayor Michael T. Foley
Courtesy of Scott Linscott Photography



into play. This \$60 million dollar investment will replace a city-owned parking lot with a mixed-use development that includes, construction of a multi-story, 70000 square foot hydroponic greenhouse that will produce 1.2 million pounds of fresh produce annually for our local communities, 62 market rate apartments, and a 430-space parking garage offering free parking. We're thrilled to add the residential component as part of the project, because it brings a critical mass of people into the downtown."

"This is a true public-private partnership with TDB, LLC that will build capacity with parking to grow the downtown, and the Vertical Harvest



City Administrator,
Jerre Bryant



project is only the second one of its kind in the Country. The benefit of this particular project is that the design is 21st century,” says Stevenson. In addition to the Vertical Harvest project, the city is reconstructing Westbrook Common – a pedestrian mall that will host concerts and events, a two -mile river walk around the Presumpscot river that flows through our downtown (currently in the planning stage), and a four-season open air pavilion located adjacent to the falls in our downtown for year round festivities. Foley notes, “This is really important because these are investments that the city is making to stimulate private sector investment in our downtown. These combined projects make our downtown destination oriented for residents and visitors supporting our local economy”.

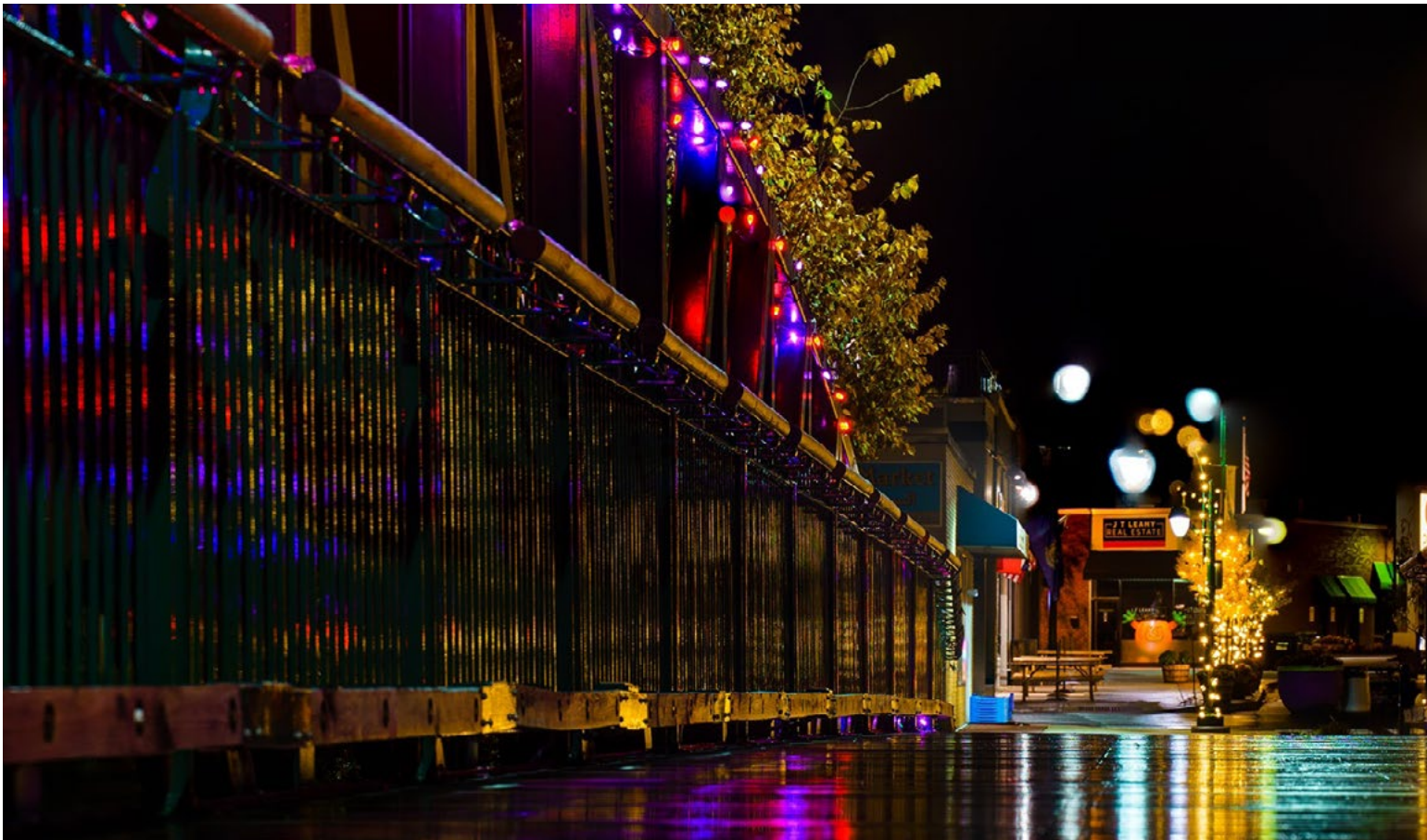
Westbrook is committed to sustainability and is in the process of researching a municipal solar project located on a city-owned landfill that, when constructed, will power all city and school facilities. “We’re working on



*Economic Development Director,
Daniel Stevenson*



*Deputy Director of Economic Development,
Ashley Rand*



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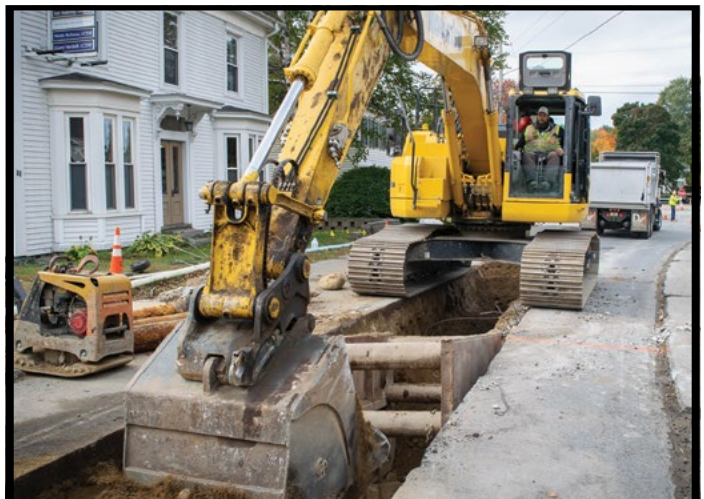


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revising our ordinances to better support solar development,” says Foley. Overall, Westbrook is putting everything in place to secure a vibrant, prosperous future for the community.

If you have interest in the City of Westbrook, please contact the Economic Development Department at:

Ashley Rand, Deputy Economic Development Director arand@westbrook.me.us 207-591-8111

PREFERRED VENDORS/PARTNERS

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All photos courtesy of Rick Belcher

Bristol, Virginia

A UNIQUE CITY WITH A ROCKIN' FUTURE

Opening a Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Bristol, Virginia, blends the city's heritage with a vision for the future. Known as the birthplace of country music, the city was incorporated in the mid-19th century when two different railroads met at the border of Virginia and Tennessee. This location fostered a culture of cooperation that helped a mountain valley community become the commerce and entertainment destination of a five-state region.

With voters having approved the Hard Rock project in November, Bristol, Virginia is ready to show the world its unique combination of natural beauty, big city amenities, and modern infrastructure. "Hard Rock is an internationally known brand and they've decided that Bristol really is a good place to be," says Mayor, Bill Hartley. "Then, I think it helps us attract other businesses that may now give us a second look and say, 'wait a minute, Hard Rock saw

something there in the quality of life, in the cost of doing business, in the workforce; and if they saw something, we don't want to overlook it either, so let's look at this.'"

There is certainly plenty to see in and around Bristol, Virginia. The city is home to about 17,000 residents and the 24,000-square-foot Birthplace of Country Music Museum, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. It's about 20 minutes from the Appalachian Trail, as well as some of the best trout fishing in the world. And for those who want something a little more fast paced, the 162,000-seat Bristol Motor Speedway is just 15 minutes from downtown.

Together, Bristol, Virginia, and Bristol, Tennessee, are home to about 45,000 people. "In fact, we're unique in that the main street of our city is the state line between Virginia and Tennessee," explains Hartley. "So we are really

AT A GLANCE

BRISTOL, VIRGINIA

- WHAT:** The birthplace of country music; population 17,000
- WHERE:** On the state line separating Virginia and Tennessee
- WEBSITE:** www.bristolva.org

one community that is split into two states and two cities. And because of that, each side of town has its own city government, its own police department, its own fire department, its own school system. There are different state laws that affect a lot of things, different systems of taxation, but yet when it comes to tourism and economic development and promoting the region, particularly anything in our downtown which straddles that state line, we try to work together as best we can as one community for the benefit of all.”

Coming together is literally what the community was built on. The Virginia and Tennessee Railroads reached the state lines in 1856. That once incongruous convergence is what led to early development. Originally the railroads used different gauges. Trains would have to stop so their cargo could be unloaded and reloaded on a different train on the other side. Entrepreneurs saw an opportunity and Bristol became the





biggest commercial hub within a 100-mile radius. The community still benefits from transportation infrastructure. It's located within an eight-hour drive of about 75 percent of the U.S. population thanks to the Interstate highway system. Bristol sits right along Interstate 81, which runs north all the way to the Canadian border. I-81 also provides access to a number of other highways that help connect the region.

Businesses that need large tracts of land tend to locate in the area around Bristol, because the city itself is only 13 square miles. But there are a few major manufacturing operations within those limits. One is Strongwell, a company started in 1965 that now produces fiber reinforced polymer products for customers across the globe. Strongwell has four locations, but its headquarters and largest manufacturing facility is located in Bristol. Dominion Carton, a full-service box design, fabrication, printing, and fulfillment company, is headquartered in Bristol. Air purification company Aerus LLC, formerly Electrolux, has a location in the city, as does the snack food manufacturing company, Shearer's.

There is also an array of small businesses in and around Bristol. The region is a haven for artisans that produce handcrafted goods. The city is known for its restaurants, breweries, and even a distillery. Owners of those businesses meet with city and state officials on a monthly basis to discuss workforce development. Partnerships extend into the local education system, where high schools try to develop curriculums that can teach the skills and provide the certifications needed in the region.

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When it comes to post-secondary education, Virginia Highlands Community College is located about 15 minutes from downtown Bristol. King University, a private Presbyterian-affiliated institution, is just over the state line in Bristol, Tennessee. At the four-year level, East Tennessee State University is about 40 minutes away in Johnson City, Tennessee and University of Virginia-Wise is about 75 minutes to the north. Several of those institutions have heeded Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam's call to address the state's need for information technology professionals.

"At the high school level they have classes and certifications in cyber security," reports Hartley. "You can go on to the community college and get a two-year degree, an associate degree, in that. Then you can go up to the University of Virginia-Wise and get one of the four-year degrees that they currently have in cyber security. So you can stay right here in this region and get that kind of training." Those who want to

live in the area can expect a choice of housing options from new subdivisions, as well as mixed-use developments.

The city's historic commercial district downtown is undergoing a redevelopment that's 20 years in the making. In many cases, the availability of a historic property tax credit has helped make renovation more popular than demolition. This has led to creative reuse projects, such as the Hotel Bristol that was built in a converted office building next to the Birthplace of Country Music Museum. And the Sessions Hotel repurposed an old flower mill and incorporated that history into its decor with pillows that resemble old flower sacks.

As with most projects in Bristol, the city has had numerous partnerships to facilitate this redevelopment.

"Interstate Realty has worked on development here in Bristol for a number of years," recalls



City Manager, Randall Eads. “They have been instrumental in helping economic development within the city. And they continue every single day. They work hand in hand with us for opportunities to bring businesses here to Bristol.”

The Hard Rock project is a partnership between United Company and Par Ventures that will repurpose an old shopping mall. Once it’s finished in a few years, it’s expected to create somewhere in the neighborhood of 2,000 jobs. That has residential developers eyeing Bristol, along with people who may be looking for the benefits of rural America while still having some of the entertainment options of a big city.

“There are two things that attract people here to Bristol,” says Eads. “You have the low cost of living, comparable to a lot of the metropolitan areas where we see people moving from, but yet you also have a lot of those city amenities that they may be used to. Not to the degree that you’re going to find in large metropolitan areas, but when you combine everything that we have through our entire community of southwest Virginia, and with east Tennessee, you have a variety of things that people can spend their time on and enjoy.”

PREFERRED VENDOR/ PARTNER

- **Interstate Property Development**
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Amherst, NOVA SCOTIA

“Create a life you love!”

Often seen as the geographical center of the Maritimes, the delightful town of Amherst, Nova Scotia is located on the border between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick – a narrow piece of land that is the only physical connection between the two provinces, as well as being a short half-hour drive to the bridge to Prince Edward Island. Amherst boasts that within two hours you can drive to almost every major city in three provinces.

“That is who we are, first and foremost,” says Amherst Mayor, David Kogon. “We are a border community. We are also the gateway to Nova Scotia for anyone coming from the rest of the country. Our population right in the urban centre is 9400, but we are also the urban hub for Cumberland County as a whole, which is a rather large geographical area. I would say the population doubles when you look at all the people who see Amherst as the center of



AT A GLANCE

AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA

- WHAT:** A charming, small Maritime town; population 9400
- WHERE:** Cumberland County, NS
- WEBSITE:** www.amherst.ca





their lives, coming here for groceries, shopping, Walmart, things like that.”

He goes on to describe it as an old Victorian town with beautiful old sandstone architecture and a significant industrial community, including an industrial park and one of only seven Tier 2 Hospitals in the province. Recreation-wise, the town is filled with parks, playgrounds, walking trails, two splash pads, an off-leash dog park, a stadium, a skate park, a ball field, and a brand new tennis court. There is also a YMCA and a highly regarded 18-hole golf course.

First settled in 1764 by immigrants from Yorkshire following the expulsion of the Acadians, they were joined by United Empire Loyalists fleeing the American colonies during the revolutionary war. Amherst then went on to become a local center of shipbuilding and commerce. The industrialists of this period were responsible for many of the stunning Victorian and Edwardian homes built in the area. With the construction of the Intercolonial Railway of Canada in 1872, which ran the main line from Halifax to Quebec City, the town took off and became a true hub of industry and commercial activity.

“The fact that we are in the geographic center of the Maritimes is really one of the main economic driving forces for our community,” adds Greg Herrett, CAO for the town. “You drive two hours in any direction and you are hitting a major city. There are over a million people in that radius when you count Halifax, Moncton, Charlottetown, and Saint John. We are also on the train route through those cities and a two-hour drive from two seaports and two international airports.”





“Let’s not forget that we are 20 minutes from the ocean as well,” chimes in Tamara Porter, Business Development Officer, “so that is also one of our main attractions. We do get a lot of seasonal residents that come stay at the cottages for the summer and will do their services and shopping in town. We are 10 minutes from the Bay of Fundy and 20 from the Northumberland Strait and that really impacts your lifestyle – you can finish up work and head to the beach 20 minutes later. If you look at a wider circle of what is available around the county, there are activities like fossil cliffs, dozens of waterfalls, lots of ATV trails, hiking trails, fishing, off-road or recreation activities, and don’t forget your camera.”

No wonder the slogan for Amherst is “Create a Life You Love!” and it seems many people are doing just that. This has been especially true over the last year, where a lot of folks throughout the country are seeing that the Maritime provinces, with their smaller, rural

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nature, are great places to be during a pandemic. “We have only had a few cases of COVID-19 in Cumberland County since this all began,” says Kogon, “and we are seeing growth in housing and real estate transactions because of that. We have so much to offer, and we are also a really safe place to live.” The retail housing market has been on fire for the last six to eight months, and there is nothing but an upward trajectory from where they started. In part due to a lot of recent effort in terms of attracting new residents, as well as new businesses.

“Here is the thing,” says Kogon, “We certainly have people here who are willing to work, and people from the local area have a great reputation for that and a great work ethic. But we are actively looking at attracting a larger workforce. Some industries set up here because of location and we want to be able to get the people to work in those industries, but we recognize that must be an intentional focus. Encouraging people to move here is one of the

key strategies for our business growth. We have all the infrastructure in place, from broadband to natural gas. We have even been recognized for having one of the best municipal water sources in the country. Tamara, Eileen, Jenn, and Cheryl (the marketing team) promote Amherst as a great place to live, work, and play – and I really think that is true, you can even work remotely here and beat the big city rat race!”

Herrett acknowledges, “The infrastructure is second to none for our size and location. The town of Amherst has spent significant money upgrading sewer and water, we’ve switched all municipal lighting to LED for a green initiative... we’ve spent millions of dollars on the infrastructure in the last few years.”

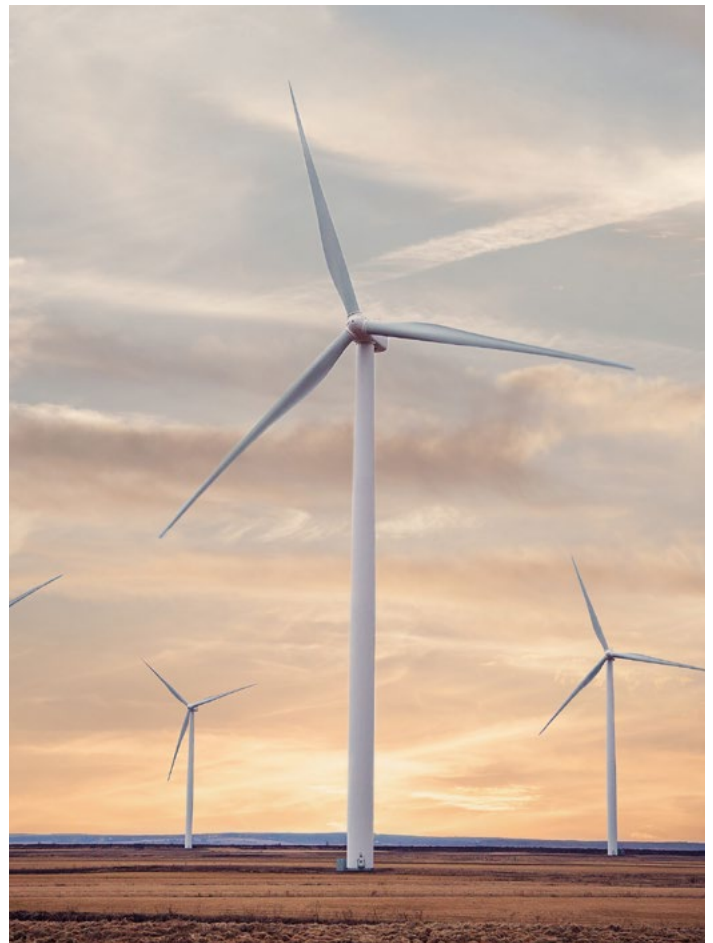
“The environment has been a big issue here,” Kogon adds. “About a year ago, we declared a climate emergency and have been working on everything through that lens. We have just begun a solar power project for the hockey arena and, after that, we are going to be doing



the Fire and Police Stations. We are currently partnering with Nova Scotia Power who is in the process of constructing a large solar farm out in our industrial park area. This is a pretty green province, but we see ourselves as one of the greenest communities.”

Some large employers are utilizing the industrial park already. Gordon Food Services has its Atlantic distribution center there, Emmerson Packaging is on-site, as well as IMP Aerostructures that manufacture aircraft components. “There is room for expansion,” says Porter, “and we are working on that. We have a commercial development bylaw as well, which offers any business that’s expanding with a minimum of \$25,000 investment, a tax rebate for 10 years. Essentially they can defer up to 50 percent of their taxes and that is a significant incentive.”

“Amherst is constantly improving,” says Kogon,



“We did some work a few years ago revitalizing our downtown. It was mostly cosmetic and what I would call “streetscaping” but COVID has hit our smaller mom and pop businesses pretty hard. We need to do some work attracting new types of businesses and more mixed-use facilities. One of the other things we have been doing, as we move forward, is increasing and improving our municipal functioning relationships with the other municipalities within Cumberland County. It helps with procurement and infrastructure, as well.”

The town administration often receives compliments on the team approach they take with respect to development inquiries. People who show interest and then get to the development stage are fortunate to deal with business development specialists like Tamara Porter and her associates. At that point, the town’s engineers and planning staff and finance staff also become involved, so that everyone

understands upfront what is possible and how the town can help and what it might cost.

“I think Amherst is and should be attractive for businesses who are looking to invest here but also to folks who are looking to relocate here,” says Herrett, “Our quality of life is incredible. We have wonderful schools, a wonderful hospital, lots of recreation assets, and housing prices that are very attractive, especially if you come from some of the larger cities, where effectively you can cash out and have money left over when you move here. And if those larger cities are your thing, they are only an hour away. You literally have the best of all worlds here.”





PREFERRED VENDOR/PARTNER

■ **Taylor Ford Amherst**

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TOWN OF TRURO

Nova Scotia

ROLLING WITH THE CHANGES

The towns and cities of the Atlantic provinces are the oldest in the country. They have seen hundreds of years of progress and change, each one inventing and re-inventing themselves many times over the years. The endearing Town of Truro, Nova Scotia is no exception.

Located on the south side of the Salmon River in the Cobequid Bay region of the Bay of Fundy, today's Truro was originally a Mi'kmaq settlement called "Wagobagitik." Acadian settlers came to the area in the early 1700s but many were forced to leave during the expulsion of the

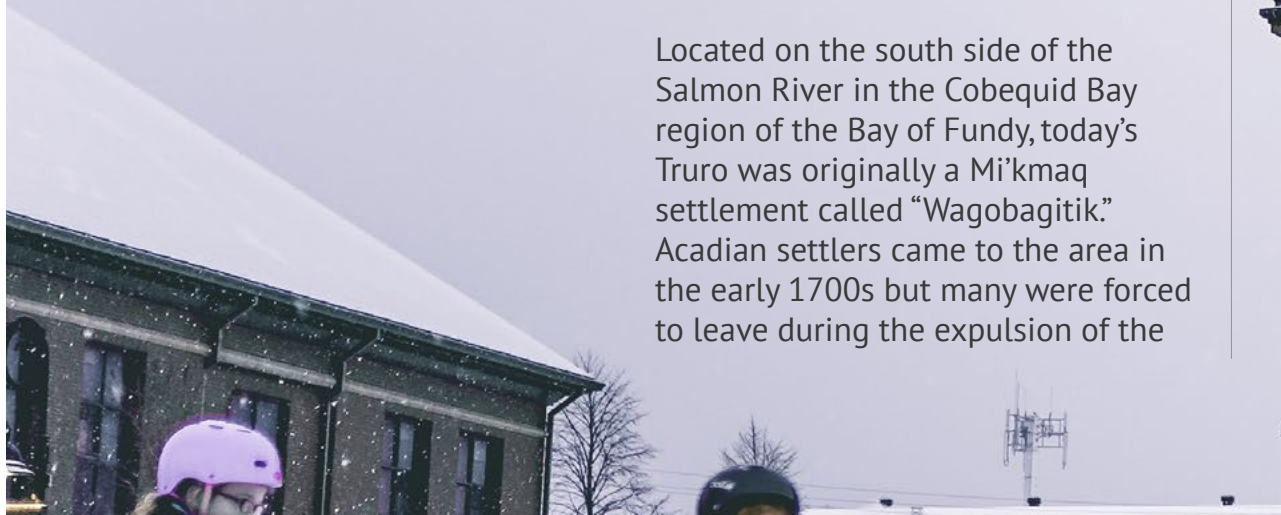
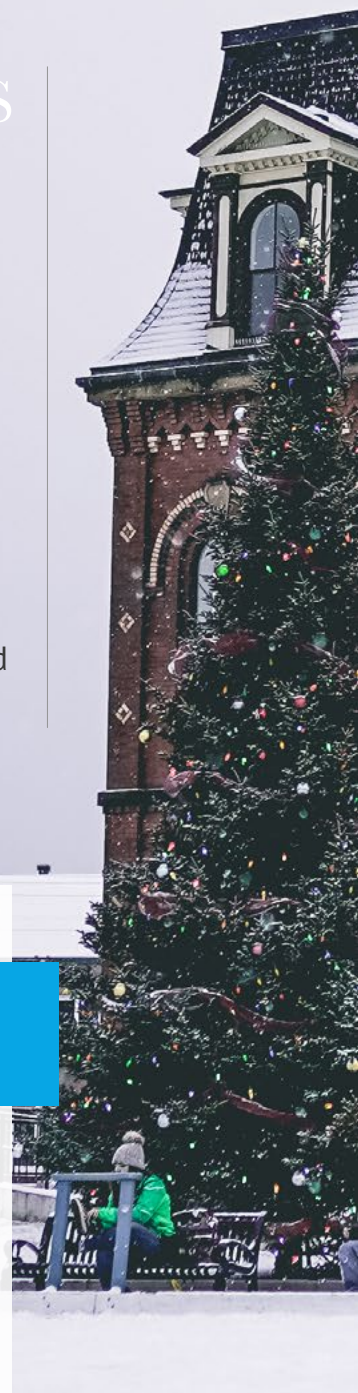
AT A GLANCE

TRURO, NOVA SCOTIA

WHAT: A progressive 'hub' town; population 13,000

WHERE: Colchester County, Central Nova Scotia

WEBSITE: www.truro.ca



JURO,



TOWN OF TRURO, NOVA SCOTIA

French Acadians in 1755. By 1762, the British had settled in and re-named the settlement Truro, after the city of the same name in Cornwall.

So, from a fishing community to a farming community, the next major change occurred when the Nova Scotia Railway between Halifax and Pictou was built in 1858. Truro became a railway “hub” and this position was only solidified when the Intercolonial Railway to Central Canada was built in 1872. It was also around that time that the Truro Woolen Mills, which later became Stanfield’s Ltd, and other industries were set up to take advantage of the convenient transportation Truro provided.

“We are the largest town in Nova Scotia,” explains Mayor Bill Mills, “and we’re in the centre of the province. We have neighbours right across the bridge of the Salmon River called Bible Hill and combined with us and the smaller settlements, the population for Colchester





County is 50,000 people. Within the town of Truro itself, which is the urban hub to Colchester County, you are looking at close to 13,000 people. We were primarily built on the railroad, but we still also have a strong agricultural base, as well as a very strong academic base with what used to be the Teachers College, now the Nova Scotia Community College, and just across the river we have Dalhousie University's Agricultural Campus which serves people from right across the country and around the world who study in the field of agriculture and food production for the future."

A gem of the community, Stanfield's is a company almost as old as the town itself and is well known throughout Canada and even North America for its quality undergarments, especially 'Long Johns.' "We actually have a pretty diversified economy," chimes in Truro CAO, Mike Dolter, "and a large industrial park, which we are just now looking at expanding because there is no more space. Because of our location, we are an attractive place to set up shop and there are always people looking. Last year we had a carpet manufacturer shut down permanently and that left a 400,000-foot building was left vacant. It resulted in the loss of quite a few jobs, so we were quite concerned. But then, this fall, we were fortunate to have a local company, Asante Logistics Group, purchase and move into the facility and they're providing full-service freight and logistic services across Canada, and even internationally."

It was a testament to Truro's strong economy that when a major employer disappeared, they were replaced in a very short period of time. The town strives to take the steps necessary to support business and create an environment where companies are able to flourish. Dolter notes, "Some of our businesses have gone online, and some have just rolled with the changes. Stanfield's is a good example, they picked up a \$20 million contract to provide PPE during COVID and they kind of retooled and started working with another local company, Intertape



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Polymer that produced the material that went into the gowns Stanfield's were providing. Again, a bit of local business cooperation that landed a pretty major federal contract, so we're very happy about that."

Rolling with the changes has seen Truro once more enter an era of growth in new directions, and COVID-19 actually may have helped. "We did a shift when the pandemic began," explains Manager of Economic Development, Alison Grant. "We started focusing more on our individual businesses, especially our small businesses. Particularly, we wanted to help those that were the worst affected by the pandemic such as our restaurants, our retail sector, and our personal care services. So, along with the Downtown Truro Partnership, we launched a couple of initiatives and some incentive programs. One of those initiatives was to use our own currency, called Downtown Truro Dollars, which are accepted at over 100 local businesses, as an incentive. We encouraged people to shop local by offering





up to 25 percent of their purchase back in Downtown Truro Dollars, up to a maximum of \$100. It helped the businesses but also had the effect of making it more desirable to shop in local stores. Our results show it incentivised about \$20,000 worth of local spending.”

Another project was the implementation of a local delivery service. During the spring of 2020, when COVID was at its worst, the town offered free delivery from local businesses. It covered all of Colchester County, as well as East Hants and Pictou Counties. Between the end of March to mid- June, over 1000 packages were delivered, and that resulted in local spending of over \$50,000. Because of the success of the program, when the second wave hit Nova Scotia in the fall of 2021, the town thought it was crucial to offer a similar program to incentivize shopping locally during the December holiday season. Grant shares, “We widened our partnership on Phase 2 and had our local regional enterprise network, the Truro Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity, and the County of Colchester come on as partners with us. We also expanded Phase 2 into the Halifax market. It ran for eight weeks and we delivered over 600 packages – this resulted in another \$45,000 in local spending. All of those programs were well received, and it made a difference for our local businesses. We even saw a number of new businesses open during the pandemic.”



Truro did a lot of work over the last decade to develop their downtown core, making it more of a hub of activity and a gathering place for cultural events and concerts, with a revitalized library and farmers’ market anchoring the town. The second step has been to move away from single-family housing and focus efforts on multi-unit living within the downtown core. This was a direction that had never been tried in the town and has paid off. “All of what we have invested in, from a revitalization perspective, has made a tremendous difference to the downtown area,” says Dolter, “Right now, we’ve got three major buildings that are under a development



agreement and a fourth coming on board shortly. That will bring some 400 living units to the downtown core, so that'll have a tremendous impact on businesses.”

Education facilities in the town have contributed to successful growth, as it relates to the workforce. Grant reports, “There are businesses and opportunities here for people graduating from the Dalhousie Agricultural Campus or the Nova Scotia Community College. Graduates are able to find opportunities and stay in the community.”

Truro has seen strong private sector growth over the last five years. “Along with the public infrastructure development, we’re also seeing banner years for private construction values. Four of our past five years have been some of our strongest years for private construction values in the Town of Truro. We have over 1000 multi-residential units in the planning process,





approved for construction, or under construction. We expect these to be built over the next 5-10 years,” stated Grant.

“Right now we are focused on making Truro a place where people can, and will, want to work and live,” adds Mills. “This has been our strategy in terms of economic development. We have done a lot of work on recreation projects, such as our parks and trails, including our bike trails, hiking trails, and ski trails. We recently had an all-day session to look at our future planning and our priorities as we move forward. We’ve also seen a significant shift in our Council, bringing on four new Council members this past fall. This brings new ideas and enthusiasm, and want to focus on infrastructure from a quality of life point of view.”

Over the next five years the town will be working on a combination of sustainability, workability, and creating vibrant neighbourhoods with a robust economic base. “We must work with all of our community partners,” says Dolter, “to create a really strong regional feel for the area that’s going to encourage people from all over Canada to be looking at Nova Scotia, and Truro in particular, as a place that you’re going to love living in. We’re not looking for development for the sake of development. We want to do the right thing for the town.”

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COLLINGWOOD

GOOD THINGS ON THE HORIZON

Collingwood, Ontario is known as one of the province's premiere travel destinations for outdoor recreation, rest, and relaxation. The town has something for everyone, from a plethora of boutique-style shops in its charming heritage preserved downtown, to luxurious spas, to hiking, mountain biking, zip lining, and of course those fabulous beaches.

Mayor Brian Saunderson calls the town the

"Oreo cookie" of Simcoe County because it's nestled between The Blue Mountains, home to some of Ontario's most popular ski slopes and resorts, and Wasaga Beach, which has the world's longest freshwater beach. According to Saunderson, "Collingwood is in a unique position, as we don't actually have any ski hills in Collingwood proper. We have ski hills to the west and Wasaga... we're kind of the cream in the middle of the Oreo. So certainly there's a very big component to our economy that is tourism driven, as well as our restaurants, coffee houses, and retail sector."

The town sits on the harbour of Nottawasaga



Photo courtesy of Jeff S.

AT A GLANCE

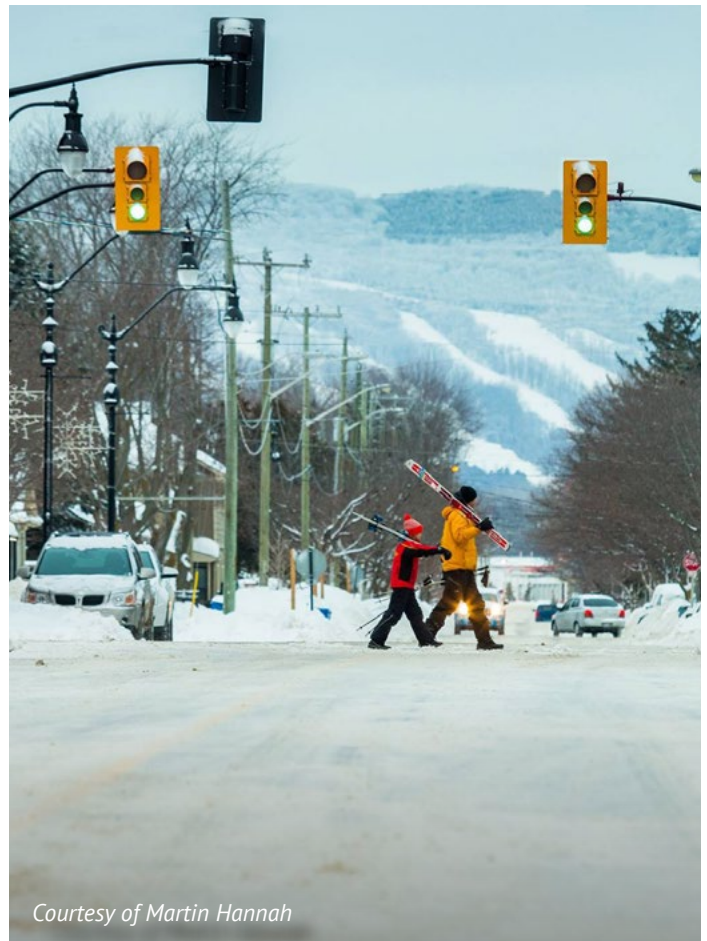
COLLINGWOOD, ONTARIO

- WHAT:** Popular Southern Georgian Bay destination; population 24,000
- WHERE:** Simcoe County, Ontario
- WEBSITE:** www.collingwood.ca
www.techhubnorth.ca

Bay, the southern part of vast Georgian Bay. The center of town is the historic beaux arts-style Collingwood Federal Building. Before the pandemic thousands of travelers from all over Canada and the U.S. would visit annually to enjoy the unique amenities the town has to offer. In addition to those visitors, Collingwood has a population of 24,000 and is also home to about 6,000 seasonal home owners – many of these ‘cottages’ are actually built as four-season accommodations, but enjoyed as vacation homes.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, 2,500 of the town’s residents who are employed at the local ski hills have been out of work, but Saunderson is fighting for those people and the owners of those ski hills. He attended a national Zoom conference organized by mayors in proximity to those outdoor recreation centers that have been left behind by government stimulus. He reports, “It’s difficult for our residents. While a number of federal programs have targeted the employees, I think a blind spot in the provincial package has been our tourism sector. In the ski industry, in particular, there are a vast amount of operating dollars that go into preparing the ski hills and making snow and running and maintain the lift line and the lifts. The sudden closure caught that sector by surprise and they had invested considerable amounts of money. So I think the government needs to look hard at creating programs directed at the tourism sector to help offset these losses.”

During a lull in the pandemic last fall, the town’s tourism and retail sector perked up. And now that a province-wide post-Christmas lockdown has lifted, Saunderson is hopeful businesses and people can get back to work. Meanwhile, the municipal government hasn’t stopped trying to make improvements for local businesses and for full-time residents. They completed their economic action plan that spans from 2020 to 2025 and got ahead of crisis planning with a task force on economic support and recovery last April. Saunderson believes that task force was a large benefit to the community because “it gave



Courtesy of Martin Hannah



us some immediate action items to help our economy as we emerged from the first wave of COVID-19. We had that committee in place in a very short space of time with business leaders from each of economic sector. They came up with 35 recommendations that were extremely helpful in jumpstarting our economy.”

Through June to late November the town enjoyed a fairly strong economic boom for retail outlets, restaurants, and tourism even made a comeback. Saunderson was proud of how the task force helped town officials, noting, “When it came to finalizing the economic action plan, we found that those recommendations from our economic support and recovery task force really dovetailed and highlighted some of the issues that were identified by the economic development task force.”

That report was passed in November and will guide the municipality to focus on three areas

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Courtesy of Jody Wilson

of improvement: Making Collingwood a hub for sustainability and innovation, promoting Collingwood as a great place to live and work, and, thirdly, to ensure that Collingwood is investment ready. Saunderson admits, “Implementing the plan won’t be easy, moving forward we have a number of action items which have been really focused on or heightened by the fact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of our local impacts.”

That being said, Collingwood has experienced some positive outcomes, as well. The town was under “significant pressure” to grow before the pandemic, but as people who work in the corporate setting realize they are no longer shackled to Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area for work, they have started to focus on their quality of life. “We’re now seeing that people are making lifestyle a priority,” says Saunderson. “They’re understanding that offices aren’t necessarily the nerve center of the business world and we’ve seen people telecommuting

and working out of Collingwood.”

The town makes that easy by being one of the only municipalities in the county and surrounding area north of the GTA with an exceptionally strong broadband internet network and very accessible connections. People who already had vacation homes in Collingwood have decided to stay and enrolled their children in the local system. And droves of others have purchased homes and driven up the housing market considerably. Saunderson believes, “It’s been a blessing and also has heightened some of our issues we identified in our planning process, in terms of attainable housing and affordability of our real estate market. It was already very active and has gone off the charts; homes are selling for considerably more than they were a year ago.”

Although that drives property taxes for the town, which in turn helps give more amenities to residents, it also makes it difficult for year-



round residents who are vastly employed in the tourism industry to buy homes or find affordable housing. The municipality has a growing need for subsidized housing and most of their funding for social programs comes from the regional government through provincial grants. Recently, they have built a new affordable housing option with 134 units and a youth shelter with seven beds that will soon be 10. There is also an increasing need for diverse housing like apartments, townhomes, small homes, and semidetached homes. In that regard, the town is in discussion with the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and is hoping for some positive results.



As far as economic development, more than 15 companies have migrated to town to set up in the South Georgian Bay area technology hub, known as 'Tech Hub North', and many companies have spawned because of the pandemic, including one that has developed a

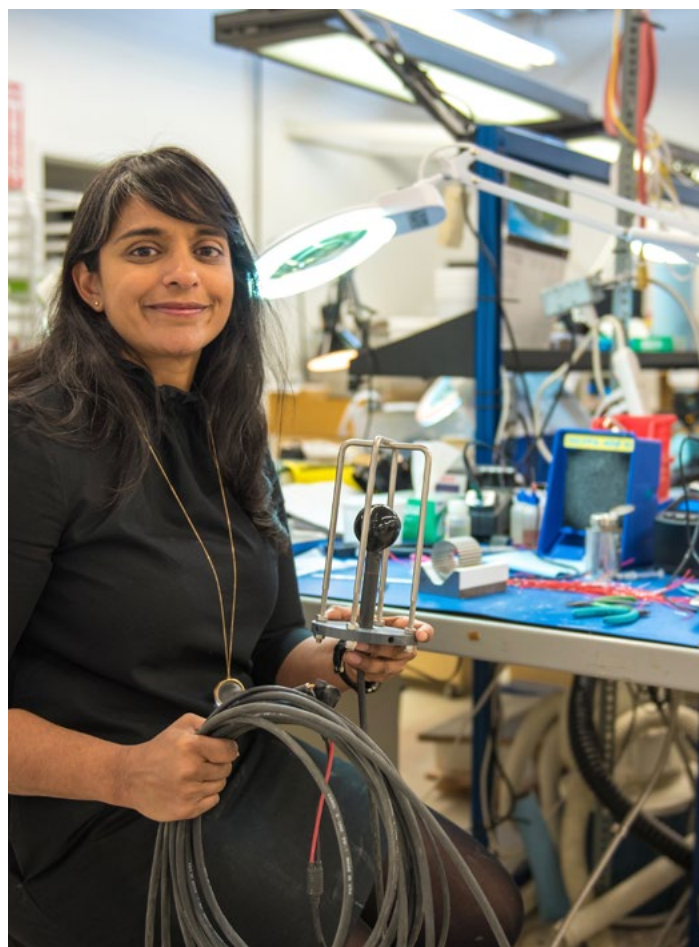
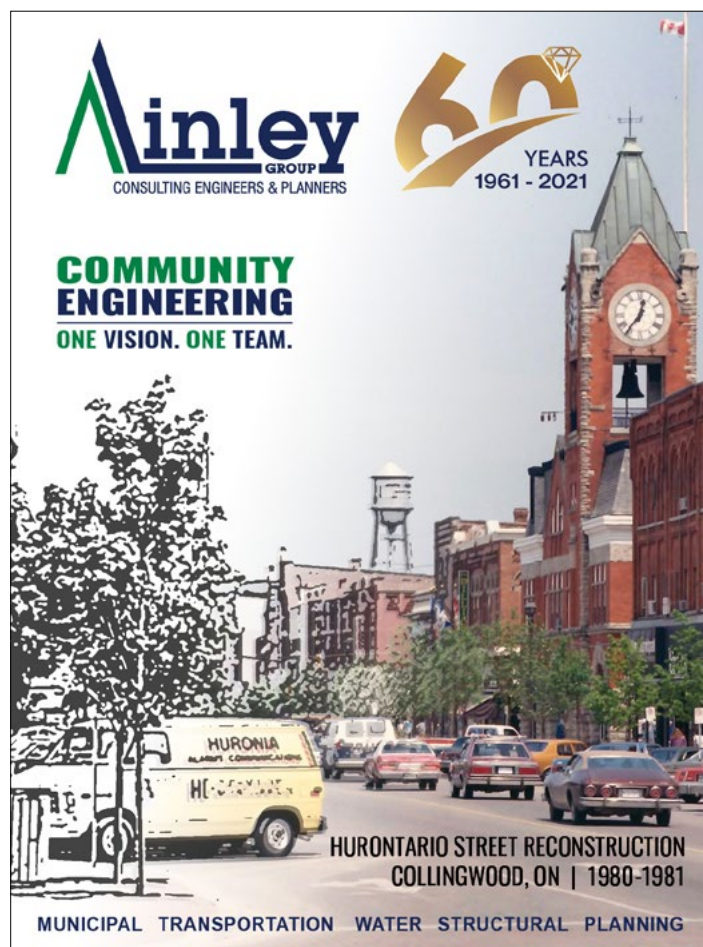


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THE COMMUNITY
OF COLLINGWOOD**

more efficient and comfortable alternative to the N95 mask. And Greenland Engineering is a company that specializes in water mapping and flood mapping but also developing better water management.

After declaring a climate emergency in 2019, the town developed two new positions and now have a climate change specialist and grant writer to help fund climate projects. They have also been given \$500,000 over five years for green initiatives by a private donor. Saunderson says these positions are “to help make sure that we, at the town, are reducing our carbon footprint. We start by benchmarking our greenhouse gas emissions and looking at ways we can reduce that. We’ve also done a forest management study and found that we have 36 percent canopy coverage, which is very good.”

Saunderson knows with hard work, more good things are on the horizon. He shares,





“Collingwood continues to grow and we continue to punch above our weight class in terms of our economic development and our opportunities. I think we’re seen as a viable and attractive alternative to the GTA, where you can get the benefits of a larger community’s amenities and support, but at the same time enjoy the small town lifestyle.”

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Tecumseh, ONTARIO

THE SPIRIT OF 'HOME'

In today's hurried world ruled by social media, it's not often you find a town where people truly care about and take care of community members, but also of strangers. Tecumseh, Ontario is one of the few places left with that neighborly and welcoming spirit. It's the reason long-time Mayor of Tecumseh, Gary McNamara, chose Tecumseh to raise his family, run for town council 30 years ago and assume the top job of Mayor 18 years ago.

McNamara, who hails from Cornwall, Ontario was hired at the Chrysler Factory in Windsor, Ontario in the early 1980s. He was looking for a small town, similar to where he grew up, to raise his family. He'd drive all over Essex County, but always started his weekend search at a small coffee shop in Tecumseh. Over breakfast one morning, a man who happened to be Tecumseh's Fire Chief came to McNamara's table and sat

down, soon joined by the restaurant owner, and both described how wonderful the town was. McNamara recalls, "He told me, "You don't have to go any further. If you want a raise a family in a good town, this is the place to be." That's heartwarming for a total stranger to come up and start talking about why this is a great place to live and how the people are friendly and welcoming... I remember grabbing the phone, calling my wife and saying: I think I found a place."

They moved in and experienced even more warmth from neighbors and because of that welcoming feeling he began to feel responsible to help make the town the best it could be. To this day, he tells people, "You can have and should have amenities to support your residents, but it all starts with the people. If anybody comes into our community and goes into a restaurant or one of our pubs, they will certainly realize the

AT A GLANCE

TECUMSEH, ONTARIO

- WHAT:** A thriving town; population nearing 25,000
- WHERE:** Essex County, southwestern Ontario
- WEBSITE:** www.tecumseh.ca



friendliness of the people.” Proof of its popularity, Tecumseh ranked 10th out of 412 cities in Canada in Maclean Magazine’s 2019 Canada’s Best Community contest.

Tecumseh currently has approximately 24,000 residents who enjoy its ideal scenic location in the Windsor-Essex region, bordered by Lake St. Clair to the north. The town has multiple access points to Highway 401, Southern Ontario’s major artery, which borders its world-class industrial base in Oldcastle. Despite being immediately east of Windsor, Tecumseh is much more than a bedroom community. It is home to a diverse workforce encompassing everything from doctors and lawyers to thriving industrial businesses, right on the doorstep of the U.S.

Between 2008 and 2012, when the recession was at its worst, the community’s industrial base took a hit but rallied to diversify their offerings beyond the automotive industry. Today, many make tool and die cast molds for the automotive industry, but also for aerospace companies and many other sectors. There are companies that have branched into the biomedical sector, are processing marijuana, and much more. McNamara boasts, “These are the employment lands for most of Essex County and as such have regional significance.”

The town is also looking forward to the completion of the Gordie Howe International Bridge to the USA. The bridge, currently under construction, will connect Detroit’s I-75 and I-96 with Highway 401. The multi-billion dollar project is named for Howe, a Canadian hockey player, who was most well-known for his time playing for the Detroit Red Wings. McNamara believes it will spark a lot more growth for the community’s industrial and business sector.



Mayor of Tecumseh, Gary McNamara



He explains, “That gateway is the busiest land border crossing in the world. Almost 25 percent of Canada’s GDP goes through that gateway, so we’ve seen interest in logistics companies seeing this region as a base for commerce with the United States. With a five-minute drive and all the power, natural gas, and amenities, it’s the perfect place to set up shop. In my opinion, if you were going to find anywhere along the 401 that has potential for the next 25 to 30 years of industrial growth, it’s Tecumseh. We really have pushed ourselves since 2008 to be ready for business and I know the future is going to be very, very good in this region.”

The Town recently finished updating its land-use plan and the County has started to update their own - keeping many COVID-19 pandemic outcomes in mind. Tecumseh’s industrial sector has been minimally impacted, but its tourism, restaurant, and small businesses have. The town is taking measures to help them come through the pandemic just as strong as the industrial





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A logo for the St. Clair Green Giants. It features a green cartoon character of a person in a baseball uniform, with the words 'ST. CLAIR GREEN GIANTS' below it.

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sector.

Tecumseh, as part of the County and with Windsor, is helping to fund a new multi-billion dollar regional hospital to serve all of Essex County. According to McNamara, “We’ve been lobbying the Province for funding as this region deserves a 21st-century health care facility. The pandemic really showed our vulnerability. We are feeling confident in recent meetings with the Premier - that he understands this is the top priority for all Mayors in the region. We feel that this is a legacy project.”

McNamara believes the \$2.5 billion project will go far beyond just building a hospital. He notes, “It’s going to generate an economic boom for the surrounding area because hospitals need support systems and supplies. It’s right on our boundaries, so we see great opportunities.” To that end, the Town is finalizing planning documents to guide future development along the Banwell Road corridor between County Roads 22 and 42. These lands will accommodate up to 2,000 housing units, new commercial nodes and parks and trails, all of which will integrate with the existing community. Infrastructure needs and investments are planned to support the anticipated growth.

In 2015, Council adopted the Tecumseh Road Main Street Community Improvement Plan (CIP) which applies to the area that represents Tecumseh’s historical commercial core. The vision is to revitalize the area and encourage private and public investment. Residential intensification has been one of many success stories, with more than 300 apartment style housing planned, under construction or completed in the CIP area.

Tecumseh is looking forward to approximately \$200 million in new and upgraded infrastructure on major roads managed by the County of Essex over the next 20 years. Projects will be happening on County Roads 42 and 43, (Banwell Road area), that ties into the new hospital site, less than five km up the road. Manning Road, the town’s north/south collector connecting to Highways 401 and 3, will also receive upgrades. Manning Road is adjacent to another future residential

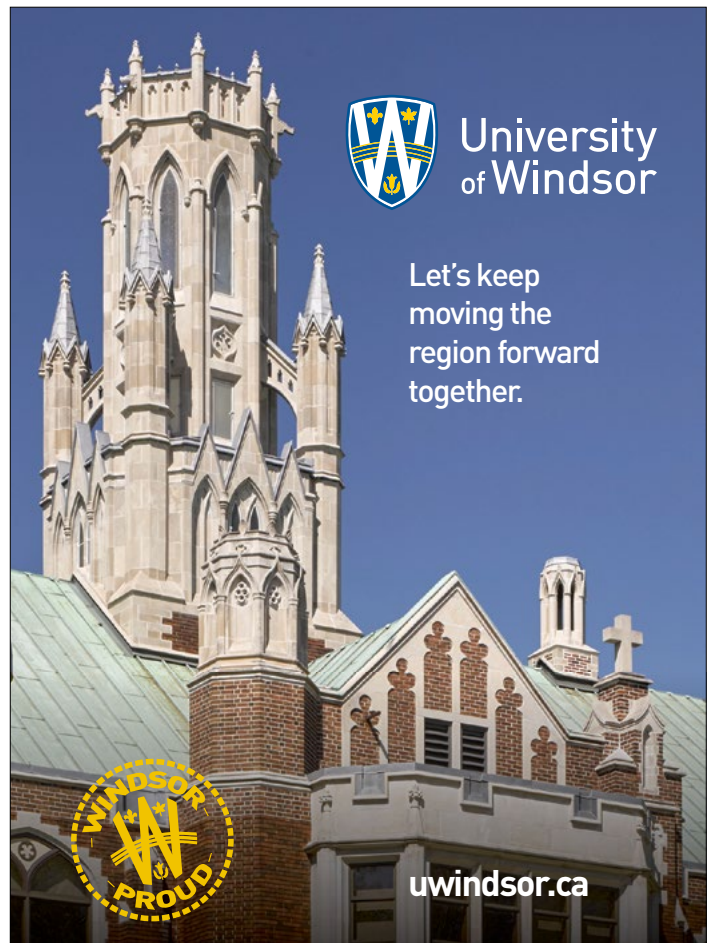




development area with more than 700 homes planned. McNamara states, “We’re just finalizing all of that, so we are on the cusp of some pretty major development in the community.”

Tecumseh is also making major investments in green initiatives and just completed their storm drainage master plan in 2019. Major improvements have been identified, and the town anticipates spending more than \$110 million in the next 15 to 20 years to improve stormwater infrastructure. 2021 will see the start of these projects with a \$27 million investment to replace aging pump stations and adjacent stormwater conveyance, with \$10.7 million coming from Canada’s Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund.

In 2020, Tecumseh declared a climate emergency. Since 2011 more than \$50 million has been spent on improving infrastructure for flood management giving the town more capacity to deal with flooding. This included investing significantly in the purchase of a closed golf course which was



turned into a public park with a 100-meter wide, 30-meter deep drainage canal for stormwater retention. The East Townline Drain watershed will be diverted into the Lakewood Park drainage channel as part of the 2021 capital works program, which then makes its way to a new high-capacity pumping station, where the capacity was increased in 2014 from 1.9 m³/s to 10.0 m³/s. The town also built a wetland for ecological reasons, and created a fish habitat at the edge of the lake. In rural Tecumseh, significant investment has been made in drainage infrastructure to facilitate proper drainage of farmland and reduce the risk of crop damage from flooded fields.

In 2019, the Town adopted new stormwater management standards, collaborating with regional municipalities and the Essex Region Conservation Authority. This new standard will bring a consistent approach to new development across the region to ensure stormwater is managed properly, reducing potential adverse impacts downstream and protecting properties

from flooding. McNamara explains, “The Town’s proactively putting all of these things in place because, as we continue to grow our municipality, there’s going to be heavier demands on infrastructure and we need to protect property.”

The Town is also working on a new Multi-use Sportsplex. The new addition will be attached to the Tecumseh Arena, strategically located on property that currently houses all Town services like Fire, Police and Ambulance. The Town continues to work with the Federal and Provincial Governments seeking grants to move forward with the \$70 million Sportsplex that includes partnership with Hotel Dieu-Grace Healthcare for a cardiac rehabilitation centre. As McNamara reiterates, “Tecumseh is a diverse and extremely welcoming community and we take care of each other and the amenities we have. For us, that means meeting demands for continuous improvement and sustainability of our social infrastructure as well.”

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