



20-6450 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Mecklenburg County

Revised October 2020

Mecklenburg County strives to provide equitable economic opportunity for all its residents. This framework guides programs and decision making to ensure a thriving economy open and equitable to all.

Legistar

Introduction

Mecklenburg County enjoys a robust and growing economy that is one of the strongest in the nation. It has accomplished this through partnerships with key organizations such as the Charlotte Business Alliance, Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority, Center City Partners and the Lake Norman Regional Economic Development Corporation. The seven communities that comprise Mecklenburg County play crucial roles as well by providing a high-quality range of lifestyles and economic opportunities. The County has a vision of continuing and enhancing this strong economy by supporting policies for economic growth that:

- ✓ Create and sustain national and global competitiveness
- ✓ Stimulate business vitality
- ✓ Enhance quality of life in communities and neighborhoods

Together, these three qualities will provide sustainability through economic downturns, enhance economic mobility and opportunities for all residents, and support the stable tax base necessary to continue to deliver high quality services.

Focus Areas

To reach this vision, Mecklenburg County has developed a framework with six Focus Areas to be supported by the Office of Economic Development [OED]. The Focus Areas represent a mixture of enhancing current activity and engaging in new activities.

- New & Existing Business Growth
- Small Business & Entrepreneurial Growth
- Strong Communities & Neighborhoods
- Minority, Women, Small Business Enterprise Opportunities
- Workforce Development
- Tourism, Arts and Culture



Guiding Principles

Implementation strategies for each of the six Focus Areas, will be based upon the following Guiding Principles.

- Collaborative efforts are essential to fostering an economic sustainable community
- Attraction, retention and expansion are equally important
- Increasing opportunities for economic mobility is key to promoting economic justice
- Removing barriers faced by minority, women and small business enterprises and supporting their growth promotes a diverse and balanced economy
- Small businesses and emerging start-ups have an important role in economic growth
- Attractive, inviting and vibrant neighborhoods are fundamental for economic vitality
- Capital investments should be strategic and intentional to enhance quality of life
- Capital investments will be comprehensively evaluated to quantify costs and benefits
- Affordable housing and accessible public transit are needed throughout the County
- Environmental stewardship is critical for economic sustainability
- Workforce development opportunities must align needs of workers and employers
- Arts and culture events are important to creating a quality place for residents and visitors
- Foster a culture that promotes efficiency and excellent customer service.

Focus Area: New & Existing Business Growth

The County has established strong partnerships with several organizations that have resulted in a range of successful economic development projects: from large scale corporate office projects to sophisticated advanced manufacturing projects. Small scale and high-tech corporations help round out the diversity of the Mecklenburg County economy driven by these partnerships. Mecklenburg County will continue and enhance these partnerships while developing new strategic initiatives to remain a leader in economic growth.

Framework Objectives:

1. Attract new investment across a range of industry clusters to ensure a broad and balanced economic base to provide accessible, geographically dispersed employment opportunities for residents and to provide a robust and stable tax base for the County.
2. Maintain close relationships to key employers in the County to become the “first phone call” when considering growth and expansion and to provide ongoing support for existing industries in Mecklenburg County.
3. Maintain a collaborative environment with the seven municipalities of Mecklenburg County to leverage the unique assets of each of the seven communities.

Strategic Initiatives:

1.1 Business Investment Program: While Mecklenburg County is an attractive place to do business, it frequently faces competition from other communities when working to secure investment. OED pursues opportunities to attract new investment through the Business Investment Program [BIP], including offering enhanced grant terms to induce investment in geographic areas of need. OED will strengthen its relationships with investment recruitment partners and seek to establish new relationships for business attraction with all seven municipalities. The guidelines for the BIP Grants are shown below.

	Standard Grant	Large Impact	Headquarters
Jobs	20	150	To be negotiated
Salary	100% of MSA Average	125% of MSA Average	To be negotiated
Investment	\$3 million	\$30 million	To be negotiated
Grant term	3 years	5 years	To be negotiated
Grant percent	50%	50%	To be negotiated

Grant Enhancements

- ✓ Additional two years of grant for existing businesses expanding in County
- ✓ 90% grant for projects locating in County-designated Opportunity Area

- 1.2 Business Attraction: Through the Office of Economic Development, Mecklenburg County will engage in proactive business attraction activities from responding to site selection requests for proposals to collaborating with the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina to identify high value marketing and lead development activities.
- 1.3 Existing Industry Outreach: On average, 80% or more of a community's economic growth as measured in jobs and local gross domestic product comes from existing businesses. Mecklenburg County will strengthen its relationships with BIP grant recipients to ensure they continue to grow and thrive to maximize the County's investment. The County will work collaboratively with the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance, Lake Norman EDC and other local partners to identify key employers that appear to be in growth mode for proactive communication and visits to capture. As part of these visits, the County will leverage partnerships with educational institutions, utility providers, professional organizations and municipal departments to provide meaningful engagement to resolve issues and foster growth.
- 1.4 Industry Roundtables: Mecklenburg County will use cluster and sector analyses to identify natural groupings of companies in growth industries for outreach. The County will facilitate or host the creation of roundtable organizations in the identified industries to address specific concerns such as workforce availability, supply chain growth, and local regulatory environment in order to facilitate industry wide growth.
- 1.5 Regional Partnerships: Mecklenburg County is the heart of a robust regional economic system, consisting of nearly half of the region's residents and workers. The County will maintain strong working relationships with regional economic development agencies in order to promote growth that complements all aspects of the metropolitan area economy. This includes being an active member of: the Charlotte Regional Business Alliance and its Economic Development Advisory Committee; the Centralina Council of Governments and its economic development planning efforts; CharlotteWorks and others. Mecklenburg will engage neighboring counties as partners in shared regional growth.

Focus Area: Small Business and Entrepreneurial Growth

Small Business

Small businesses, along with minority and women owned enterprises, are the life blood of any vibrant local economy with roughly half of U.S. employees working at a company with 50 employees or less. Helping small businesses form, prosper and grow is a high impact strategy that leverages the creativity and drive of Mecklenburg residents. Mecklenburg County will take a proactive role in ensuring a robust, supportive small, women and minority owned business climate that promotes growth across all of the County to provide economic mobility opportunities for all residents.

Entrepreneurial Growth

Nurturing emerging industries and encouraging native high growth companies are crucial for developing a diverse, sustainable local economy. Mecklenburg County is beginning to emerge as hub of innovation and entrepreneurial activity, especially in the energy and payments sectors. UNC-Charlotte's VenturePrise and Charlotte Research Institute, Packard Place, Queen City Forward in particular have been drivers of entrepreneurial activity. Mecklenburg County has a unique opportunity to be a convening body and clearing house for high growth support.

Framework Objectives

1. Develop a robust small business ecosystem in Mecklenburg County by partnering with small business support and resource providers to dismantle barriers faced by minority, women and small business enterprises.
2. Support minority, women and small business enterprises through County enterprise wide purchasing and contracting activities and providing support for continued growth.
3. Nurture the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Mecklenburg County in partnership with high growth support and industry cluster organizations.
4. Prepare the next generation of employees and innovators through partnerships between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, colleges and universities, and emerging sector opportunities.
5. Support emerging market entities and high growth enterprises by connecting them with existing industry leaders.

Strategic Initiatives

- 2.1 Small Business Concierge Service: The County is home to more than 50 small business support providers, and it can be difficult for small businesses to navigate the providers to find the targeted support they need. This service will provide guidance and assistance to owners in identifying their needs and the appropriate support services to grow their businesses. Concierge support will also be made available in locations throughout the county and through weekend and evening meeting times to help small businesses at convenient locations and times.
- 2.2 Scale Up Education Series: Small businesses often struggle to grow to a larger, more sustainable size after the first 2 to 3 years of operation and thus face threats to their continued operation. This County program

will help businesses acquire the tools and skills to grow and thrive and to move past stalled growth. Through on-line seminars, podcasts and other outreach efforts, businesses will be able to access information at times most suited to them.

- 2.3 Small Business Lending and Credit Coaching: Access to capital is the lifeblood of small businesses and while there are many capital providers in Mecklenburg County, loans of less than \$50,000 to \$75,000 are difficult to secure. The County will develop a lending mechanism to make micro-loan capital available. The County will also work to help small businesses ensure they are prepared to approach appropriate lend programs with fully developed business plans and financial projections in order to be more successful in accessing capital.
- 2.4 Mentor Support Program: Many small business owners describe feeling isolated in their struggle to grow their company and not being able to discuss their particular challenges with other small business owners. The County will develop a mentor support program in which a small cohort of small business owners will work through facilitated programming with successful business owners that have achieved growth and sustainability to help meet their own challenges.
- 2.5 Entrepreneurship Competition: To inspire new ideas in small business, the County will support small business entrepreneurship competitions designed to help entrepreneurs develop their ideas into fully developed business plans while competing to secure funding to launch their businesses. The County will seek to partner with organizations with the capability of leveraging private funding to maximize the program potential.
- 2.6 Small Business Promotion and Tracking: The County will work to promote events, media engagement and social media utilization to celebrate small business successes across the County. In addition, the County will develop an annual report on the state of small businesses in the County to track and better understand the successes and challenges of the small business community.
- 2.7 Enterprise-wide small business purchasing and contracting: The County's Minority, Women and Small Business Enterprise [MWSBE] program will take a proactive role in reaching out to the small business community to both advertise opportunities and encourage small businesses to register for certifications. MWSBE will develop and implement internal marketing campaigns designed to promote awareness of the benefits of using small businesses enterprise wide.
- 2.8 Ecosystem enhancements: The County will continually monitor the entrepreneurial ecosystem to identify opportunities to provide resource support to events and organizations that provide mentorship, growth opportunities, coaching and access to capital resources. Rather than concentrating on specific fund or activity with a narrow focus, the County will seek to support those efforts that provide resources and tools to develop entrepreneurial skills.

Focus Area: Strong Communities and Neighborhoods

Mecklenburg County is home to a diverse array of communities and neighborhoods, from rural areas with working farms all the way to the vibrant urban lifestyle of uptown Charlotte and from lakefront living to walkable, family-oriented town centers. Communities and neighborhoods that thrive amid the changes in and around them are key to providing a high quality of life and affordable housing and taxes. Mecklenburg County will work collaboratively with local communities to support quality programming and investment that provide positive long-term economic benefits.

Framework Objectives:

1. Research and implement best practices to promote equity in all actions to support communities and neighborhoods.
2. Continue to provide high quality schools, libraries and park and recreation facilities in all neighborhoods as well as serving communities of need with high quality human services.
3. Collaborate where appropriate with communities and neighborhoods as they implement infrastructure and other investments to advance the goals of the Livable Communities Plan.
4. Leverage County investments in facilities and assets to help communities and neighborhoods grow and prosper in meaningful ways for future generations and secure their long-term stability.
5. Evaluate the costs and benefits of proposed capital investment partnerships by using economic modeling tools to help guide decisions.
6. Encourage corporate stewardship in the private sector to help the County advance the goals of economic mobility and creating opportunity for all residents in Mecklenburg County.

Strategic Initiatives:

- 3.1 Built Environment Enhancements: The County will continue to partner with its municipalities to examine potential partnerships for using incremental taxes to support the construction of infrastructure, recreation space, and transformative developments. These public enhancements should feature the following elements:
 - Accessible to all County residents
 - Provide employment, recreation or public infrastructure opportunities
 - Provide enhancements to the built environment through increased multimodal access, walkability, suitable density, redevelopment of underutilized parcels, and other public goods identified by the County and partner municipalities.
- 3.2 Community Resource Centers: The County will continue to implement the “Bringing Mecklenburg County to You” initiative through the development of Community Resource Centers [CRC] to ensure that County clients have ready access to a full suite of services in conveniently located campuses. By co-locating services, families and households will be able to save time and costs in transportation and accomplish multiple tasks in one visit. The CRC’s will be designed to enhance the built environment and provide a stabilizing investment for surrounding neighborhoods.

3.3 Affordable Housing: The County will use initiatives through multiple departments to help increase the amount of available affordable housing and reduce the impacts of homelessness on the community. These include:

- Preventing homelessness through supportive services and housing assistance programs through Criminal Justice Services and Community Support Services
- Maintaining the availability of affordable housing by supporting Habitat For Humanity’s Critical Home Repair Fund and expanding legal aid services
- Securing stable housing for vulnerable residents by participating in the Rental Housing Subsidy Fund and supporting Community Service Grants that offer wraparound education and employment services
- Repurposing underutilized County-owned assets and partnering with public, private, non-profit, and civic organizations for the development residential housing units
- Acquiring land and property rights through private negotiation and implementing the Tax Foreclosure Affordable Housing Pilot Project

3.4 Greenway and Park Facility Construction: The County will continue to construct greenways and other multimodal recreation facilities that provide opportunities for neighborhoods and residents to connect to jobs, retail, cultural institutions, recreation, schools, parks and libraries.

Focus Area: Minority, Women, Small Business Enterprise Opportunities

Minority, Women, and Small Businesses (MWSBE) are essential for building a diverse and competitive landscape in business opportunities, contracting, and the County-wide economic ecosystem. Mecklenburg County is committed to increase the participation and utilization of MWSBEs in Mecklenburg County business opportunities.

Framework Objectives:

1. Support minority, women and small business enterprises through enterprise wide Mecklenburg County purchasing and contracting activities with a robust compliance and auditing process by collaborating with internal and external stakeholders.
2. Maintain and develop partnerships and a collaborative environment with business resource providers, industry associations, and groups that support MWSBEs, to enhance the tools and network of the businesses we serve and to create best practices.
3. Provide access to opportunities, capital, resources, and networking to help MWSBEs be competitive in the contracting environment through capacity building.
4. Build and nurture relationships with the MWSBE business community, through activities, such as outreach events, program sessions, and one-on-one/group coaching.
5. Address findings and recommendations identified from the FY2020 Mecklenburg County Disparity Study.

Strategic Initiatives:

- 4.1 FY2020 Mecklenburg County Disparity Study: Develop implementation plan to incorporate Mecklenburg County Disparity Study recommendations into County policies and procedures. The full list of recommendations from the Study are shown below:

Recommendation 1: Allocation of Resources, Including Staffing – Evaluate resource allocation including creation of contract compliance program and staff

Recommendation 2: MWSBE Subcontracting Goals – Develop policies and procedures to establish contract by contract MWSBE subcontracting goals and implement compliance programs

Recommendation 3: Robust Good Faith Efforts – Incorporate Good Faith Efforts metrics into bid evaluation process to determine if bidder is responsive/responsible

Recommendation 4: Small Business Reserve Program – Establish a program that reserves contracts exclusively for small businesses

Recommendation 5: Increased Vendor Rotation – Use vendor rotation to limit routine purchases from majority firms, particularly in Professional Services, and to ensure that MWSBEs have an opportunity to bid along with majority firms

Recommendation 6: Mandatory Subcontracting – Establish and implement thresholds for mandatory subcontracting

Recommendation 7: Strengthen Forecasting – Utilize long range planning tactics to allow for longer lead times and planning of outreach efforts

Recommendation 8: Supportive Services – Coordinate a suite of supportive services to increase the number of new MWSBEs and capacity of existing MWSBEs

Recommendation 9: Prompt Pay Ordinance – Adopt ordinance requiring prime contractors to promptly pay all subcontractors, including third party verification systems

Recommendation 10: Encourage Joint Ventures – Use the evaluation criteria of large-scale contract bidding opportunities to encourage joint ventures

Recommendation 11: Data Maintenance Reform – Implement new systems to better track commodity codes, subcontractor participation and award data

Focus Area: Workforce Development

Mecklenburg County enjoys a robust economy with a diverse range of opportunities for employment from high tech and finance sector positions at one end of the spectrum to light manufacturing and service industry positions serving as gateways to advancement on the other end of the spectrum. The ability of residents to have access to this range of opportunities promotes economic stability and helps families become economically secure. Mecklenburg County will utilize its existing programs to promote employment opportunity and help residents develop new skills to adapt to a dynamic economy.

Framework Objectives:

1. Partner with existing workforce development programs in the region to link residents to opportunities created by business attraction and retention activities, and ensure job training programs are matched to actual job opportunities.
2. Leverage the significant efforts of County human services agencies to connect clients with workforce development opportunities and to collect real time information on the specific local barriers to economic mobility.
3. Leverage County purchasing and contracting policies to provide access to employment opportunities for those facing economic mobility challenges.

Strategic Initiatives:

- 5.1 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Workforce Development Collaborative Engagement: The CMWDC is comprised of more than a dozen workforce development agencies and partners. The County will engage the CMWDC Job Coordination Unit when appropriate to help provide a ready pool of applicants for Business Investment Program grant recipients. Connecting new and expanding businesses to existing workforce will promote greater economic mobility for County residents. Additionally, as the Existing Industry program develops industry roundtables, it will be able to provide specific feedback and guidance to the CMWDC members on job vacancies, the skill sets needed for the vacancies and suggestions for curriculum and training opportunities to fill the existing vacancies.
- 5.2 Unified Workforce Development Strategy: The County will leverage its considerable resources across multiple Departments (DSS, CSS, DCC, and CJS) to pilot a program to address clients with multiple barriers to employment. To help ensure their successful transition to the workforce, clients receive comprehensive skills assessments, job readiness coaching, and retention support (i.e. childcare subsidies and transportation assistance). Pilot Participants are referred to Charlotte Works and/or various community partners for skills training if needed. OED will partner with the coordinating agencies to provide a wider range of existing and new businesses for potential placements.

Focus Area: Tourism, Arts, and Culture

Mecklenburg County has become desirable as a convention destination thanks in part to the 2012 Democratic National Convention hosted by the City of Charlotte. Mecklenburg County has made critical investments in attractions such as the Levine Avenue of the Arts, the US National Whitewater Center, Matthews SportPlex, the Carowinds expansion and the new uptown Charlotte Knights baseball stadium to help drive the growth in the tourism industry. Tourism provides a strong tax revenue stream while providing a wide range of flexible job opportunities. Mecklenburg County will invest strategically in its own facilities and in partnerships to help expand tourism as well as provide enhanced arts and culture opportunities for residents.

Framework Objectives:

1. Support existing facilities such as parks, recreation centers and greenways through their lifecycle and refreshes to maintain current tourism growth.
2. Inclusion of new Strategic Initiatives at the recommendation of the Economic Development Committee of Board of County Commissioners comprehensive review of Focus Area.

Strategic Initiatives:

- 6.1 Mecklenburg Culture Blocks: Culture Blocks connects communities with responsive arts, science, and history experiences close to where residents live. The program engages with creative individuals and organizations with a primary mission of arts, science, and/or history to present programs in specific geographic areas. The program supports cultural experiences that are planned with resident involvement and/or take place at libraries, recreation centers, parks, and relevant community spaces
- 6.2 Public Arts Fund: The County will continue to facilitate the creation and installation of public art by setting aside 1% of all public capital projects into a public art account. The Arts and Science Council manages the fund under the direction of the County and the Public Arts Commission.