

TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2009 – 2012 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN SURVEY

Concerned with dramatic economic changes at the local, state and national levels, the Transylvania County Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) recommended to the County Commissioners that the County accelerate the planning process for a new economic development strategic plan covering fiscal years 2009 – 2012. The EDAB, working with County staff, determined that a new business and community survey would be extremely helpful to better understand the concerns and opportunities that exist in Transylvania County. This type of tool was used to develop the 2006 – 2009 economic development strategic plan, but the results were hand tabulated by staff and Senior Resource Network members.

This year, the EDAB and staff decided to use SurveyMonkey, an on-line electronic survey process, to create and administer a 23-question survey. In addition to EDAB members, a number of individuals and businesses helped to develop the survey questions, including the Transylvania County School System, Blue Ridge Community College, Transylvania Regional Hospital and others. The survey was emailed to more than 600 distinct contacts, advertised as an URL listing in *The Transylvania Times*, posted on the Transylvania County Library public computers and the Planning and Economic Development website. A total of 168 business owners and individuals responded to the survey. Below is a brief summary of the responses, followed by a complete compilation of all write-in responses to the different questions.

Question 1. This question asked basic contact information: name of respondent, company, address, email address and phone number.

Questions 2 – 3. These questions related to the 2006 – 2009 Economic Development Strategic Plan (<http://econdev.transylvaniacounty.org>). Fifty-six (56.3%) of the respondents had not read the plan that was adopted by the County Commissioners in 2006. Of those who had read the plan, nearly 35% rated it as **excellent** and another 58% rated it as **good**.

Question 4. **Of the items below, please rate your opinion of the County's economic development efforts during the past three years (2005 – 2008).** In general, the responses to the survey were positive and a majority of respondents thought that the County's overall efforts to promote economic development over the last three years were good, with high marks given for its efforts to assist existing businesses and entrepreneurs. Lower marks were given for recruiting new business/industry and in identifying new industrial sites.

Question 5. **The County is attempting to establish priorities for economic and community development actions to be included in the 2009 – 2012 strategic plan. Please rank the items below in order of priority.** Aggressively **marketing the County** to new businesses and finding

ways to help our existing businesses identify ways to improve health care costs and coverage are viewed as a “very high priority.” Other “high priorities” were:

- Improving infrastructure (roads, water/sewer, natural gas and, importantly, broadband)
- Helping existing businesses secure financing
- Providing financial incentives for existing and new businesses
- Improving community appearance

Question 6. When asked to evaluate the impact that different economic development organizations have on Transylvania County, the highest ranked organizations were **Blue Ridge Community College, Brevard College, the Chamber of Commerce, Transylvania County Planning and Economic Development, Transylvania County Schools and the Senior Resource Network.** Economic entities identified as having some impact included: NC Employment Security Commission, Heart of Brevard, Land-of-Sky, SCORE and SBA. Not surprisingly, most economic organizations located outside the County were identified as having low or no impact.

Question 7. What could Transylvania County do to be more competitive with other locations in attracting new businesses and employers? Surprisingly, 127 individuals provided written input. The greatest number of responses related to six subject areas:

- City and County to focus on being much more business-friendly
- Provide small business with incentives
- Develop a business or certified industrial site and focus on smaller and “green” related manufacturers
- Expand our tourism efforts (although almost an equal number opposed this)
- Invest more dollars in our local schools
- Improve broadband (cost and speed)

Question 8. To the question “What are the *unique* aspects of the County that should be protected and preserved, the top three responses were

- #1. Natural Environment/Waterfalls (92% of respondents)
- #2. Main Street Appeal (73.7%)
- #3. Diversified Economy (73.1%) and Tourism (73.1%)

Question 9. Prioritizing what the County should focus on in order to strengthen the local economy promoted interesting as well as contradictory responses. In general, respondents want the County to focus on just about everything...something that is easy to say, but difficult to implement. Priorities receiving the greatest support (**Very High Priority**) were:

- Helping EXISTING manufacturers expand and grow
- Attracting NEW manufacturers

- Supporting Tourism and related activities

High Priority areas that the County should focus on are

- Supporting new non-manufacturing companies (service and retail)
- Small business startups by local people
- Training to improve the workforce

Looking at the same question, but focusing on the **Rating Average** (the arithmetic mean of all the different priorities ranging from “Very High” to “Very Low”) the response is slightly different.

- Small business startups by local people
- Helping EXISTING manufacturers expand and grow
- Supporting tourism and related activities

Question 10. Looking at **education as a tool** to support economic development, survey respondents were asked what Transylvania County Schools, BRCC and Brevard College could do to have a greater impact on economic development. The top three responses were: 1) arrange for student internships; 2) encourage the business community to be more actively involved with education; and 3) help provide more workforce training opportunities.

Question 11. When asked what the **medical community**, including Transylvania Regional Hospital, could do to have a greater impact on economic and community development, the overwhelming number of responders noted that more services were needed (51.4%). Specific written responses ranged from reducing health care costs to complaints about the hospital changing its name to increasing the number of doctors. Nearly 47% of all responders want to see the medical community develop wellness programs and health services for employers.

Question 12. The oldest businesses represented in the survey, Brevard College, Transylvania County Schools and **The Transylvania Times**, were established in 1853, 1861 and 1887, respectively. A large number of businesses, a total of 16, were established in 2006.

<u>Year Started</u>	<u>Number of Businesses</u>
1850 – 1899	3
1900 – 1950	3
1951 – 2000	62
2001 – 2009	49

Question 13. Currently, how many people do your employ?

	1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21-50	51-100	101 or more	Rating Average	Response Count
Full-time	29.4% (35)	37.0% (44)	12.6% (15)	7.6% (9)	3.4% (4)	2.5% (3)	7.6% (9)	2.56	119
Part-time	35.3% (30)	40.0% (34)	7.1% (6)	4.7% (4)	5.9% (5)	3.5% (3)	3.5% (3)	2.31	85
							<i>answered question</i>		138
							<i>skipped question</i>		30

Question 14. Looking at employment trends, almost two-thirds (61.4%) of the respondents indicated that the total number of employees in their business would remain the same in the next year. This compared with 18.9% stating that their business was likely to increase employment and 23.6% noting that there would likely be a decrease.

Question 15. “Looking at next year, what will be the greatest challenge to your business?” received many similar responses. Working through/surviving the current economic downturn and the impact of reduced cash flow were the two most frequently cited. Next most frequent responses were:

- Lack of financing and funding
- More government involvement and higher taxes
- Growing the business / managing growth
- Downturn in the local real estate and construction businesses
- Finding qualified/skilled employees

Question 16. When asked what are *the three most important actions that the County can take to assist your business in 2009*, respondents provided a variety of responses from very specific actions to assist individual business owners to general ideas on how to market Transylvania County. In general, the following broad categories were identified:

- 1) Business Assistance/Support, 2) County-wide Marketing; 3) Reduce Taxes
- 1) Business Assistance/Support, 2) County-wide Marketing, 3) Recruit New Businesses
- 1) Business Assistance/Support, 2) County-wide Marketing, 3) Reduce Taxes

Question 17. When asked what new business sectors the County should focus its recruiting efforts on, the most frequent response was ***green products companies***, followed by ***agriculture/farming, information technology, alternative energy and biotechnology***.

Questions 18 - 19. Slightly more than half of the respondents responded that they had accessed the Planning and Economic Development website (<http://econdev.transylvaniacounty.org>). Of those who had done so, most read it either monthly (32.6%) or quarterly (31.5%).

Questions 20 – 22. Individuals who receive the Planning and Economic Development monthly electronic newsletter (59.6%) versus those who do not (40.4%) find the information to be interesting and informative. Of those who do not currently receive the monthly electronic newsletter, 86.4% requested a subscription.

Question 23. Seventy-three individuals provided other written comments or suggestions.