



SAMPSON COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Strategic Plan 2025-2028



2025



SAMPSON COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic Development Strategic Plan

Sampson County stands at a critical juncture. The county confronts several significant challenges including an aging population, a high poverty rate, residential growth that does not support public services, and a lack of economic diversity. To strengthen Sampson County's economic foundation, there is a clear need to attract new businesses, including value added agricultural processing, which can help diversify the economy, increase tax base, and create job opportunities that broaden earning potential and promote long-term economic mobility for residents.

Vision: A prosperous future powered by strategic partnerships, where economic growth enhances quality of life and preserves the unique character of our community.

Mission: To drive sustainable economic growth by retaining and attracting businesses, supporting entrepreneurship, expanding community capacity, and promoting the county as a vibrant place to live, work, and invest.



Strategic Plan Goals

- Connect Sampson County, Municipalities, and Businesses to Advance Community and Economic Development
- Attract, Retain, Scale, and Support Start-Up Businesses that will Expand Job Opportunities
- Facilitate the Retention, Development, and Attraction of Talent
- Create New Opportunities for Business Development by Expanding Sites and Buildings
- Elevate the Economic development Organization to be a Leader in Southeast North Carolina

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Year 1

- Proactive BRE Program
- Lunch-and-learn programs
- National Manufacturing Week event
- Countywide collaborative
- Makers Market
- Excellence in Workforce event
- Education best practices tour
- Internship toolkit
- Market profiles
- Annual State of Sampson County
- Business roundtables, joint government meetings

2

Year 2

- Long range product development plan including sites with low-cost investment
- Pad-ready site
- Leadership Academy, customer service training, Citizen Academy
- Website updates
- EDPNC tour
- Entrepreneurship guides
- Expand "Dark Horses Fellows" program
- Communications plan for career awareness
- Incubator coalition study
- Increase SCED operating budget, dedicated funding
- Increase staff by one position

3

Year 3+

- Spec building study
- Career awareness marketing campaign
- Brand review and refresh
- Summer work experience program

Recommended annual funding increase \$150,000 for programming, marketing, and eventually an additional staff position.

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Economic Development Strategic Plan



SAMPSON COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sampson County stands at a critical juncture. Some areas of the county are experiencing population growth; others are facing decline—placing uneven demands on infrastructure and public services. The county confronts several significant challenges, including an aging population, a poverty rate approaching 21%, residential growth that does not support public services, and a lack of economic diversity, both within business and agriculture sectors. To strengthen Sampson County’s economic foundation, there is a clear need to attract new businesses, including value added agricultural processing, which can help diversify the economy, increase tax base, and create job opportunities that broaden earning potential and promote long-term economic mobility for residents. Equally important is the need to invest in public education, expand access to quality healthcare, and enhance overall quality of life—key pillars of a healthy, resilient community. These efforts are essential not only for supporting current residents, but also for creating an environment that will retain and attract a talented workforce and build a stronger future for the county.

Many businesses, as well as members of the agriculture community, continue to face challenges in attracting and retaining workers due to a lack of housing options, limited amenities, and concerns about school performance. At the same time, the county is facing severe financial hardship, and many of the organizations that support economic development are struggling with staffing and funding limitations. This strategic plan offers a critical pivot point to address Sampson County’s challenges and to capture emerging opportunities for future growth and long-term prosperity.

Through this strategic planning process, community leaders and residents across Sampson County evaluated strengths, weaknesses, and threats as well as opportunities for public and private investment, and prioritized initiatives to attract industry and business, create jobs, and expand economic opportunities. This strategic plan also helps coordinate efforts among stakeholders, align resources effectively, and adapt to changing economic conditions. By setting these goals and tracking progress on implementation, Sampson County can position itself for long-term economic resilience.

The Sampson County Economic Development (SCED) Strategic Planning Committee established a clear vision for a prosperous future for Sampson County. At the heart of this vision are strong strategic partnerships. SCED and its partners must work collaboratively to achieve goals that enhance quality of life while preserving the unique qualities that make Sampson County not only a special place to live, work, and play—but also to **invest**.

2025-2028 Economic Development Strategic Plan

Vision: A prosperous future powered by strategic partnerships, where economic growth enhances quality of life and preserves the unique character of our community.

Mission: To drive sustainable economic growth by retaining and attracting businesses, supporting entrepreneurship, expanding community capacity, and promoting the county as a vibrant place to live, work, and invest.

Strategic Plan Goals

Sampson County's economic development strategy includes business retention, attraction, expansion, and start up. To support existing business growth, there are strategies to invest in education and workforce development, business sites and buildings, and community capacity building. The goal to form stronger connections across the county is meant to leverage resources which are especially limited in rural communities. Finally, Sampson County Economic Development will need additional resources, partners, and champions to lead the county's economic transformation.

Implementation for the first year includes initiatives that can be included in the current budget while the county seeks additional resources to implement action items in years two and three. The strategic plan recognizes that Sampson County currently has very limited financial resources for economic development. **However, the key to increasing county resources is to grow the tax base which is the purpose of this economic development strategic plan.**

Connect Sampson County, Municipalities, and Businesses to Advance Community and Economic Development

Attract, Retain, Scale, and Support Start-Up Businesses that will Expand Job Opportunities

Facilitate the Retention, Development, and Attraction of Talent

Create New Opportunities for Business Development by Expanding Sites and Buildings

Elevate the Economic Development Organization to be a Leader in Southeast North Carolina

Goal: Connect Sampson County, Municipalities, and Businesses to Advance Community and Economic Development

Community connection is a key economic development strategy because strong local relationships foster collaboration, trust, and a shared vision for growth. Engaged and connected leaders and citizens are more likely to support local businesses, participate in initiatives, and contribute to a vibrant, resilient economy. Sampson County would benefit from stronger governmental, civic, and nonprofit organizations working collaboratively to achieve a common vision. SCED can be a connector and foster collaboration between organizations.

Strategy: Facilitate connections across Sampson County to build relationships.

Action Steps:

- Host quarterly meetings of a county wide collaborative of all of the organizations involved broadly in economic development. The purpose is to share strategies, initiatives, and calendar of events to identify points of cooperation and leverage resources. The collaborative could include organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Center, Sampson Community College, and others.
- Host an annual State of Sampson County/State of the Community event and present an annual report on the economic development program. The program could include an economic forecast or other current economic development topic (similar to the demographic forum held in 2025). Invite leaders from business, government, education, nonprofit, health care, and other segments from across the county.
- Organize an annual joint meeting of the municipal and county governments in Sampson County to share capital improvement projects, community development initiatives, and goals.
- Host a roundtable of local business and community leaders that meet quarterly to discuss economic development challenges and possible solutions.

Strategy: Ensure Sampson County grows in a way that maintains its character and natural resources.

Action Steps:

- Invest in long-range planning by continuing to participate in regular updates to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. A comprehensive land use plan helps build consensus for a long range vision for the county, and it can ensure that the disparate interests of business, residents, agriculture, and commercial development are all represented. SCED can be the liaison to engage a broad base of businesses in planning processes. Align industrial development studies with areas identified in the comprehensive plan.
- Advocate that the county and municipalities invest in studies and plans to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with growth, e.g., transportation, utilities, broadband, and schools.
- Advocate for the county to maintain a grant writer on staff or on contract. Grant writers return many times over their cost to a local government.

Strategy: Encourage municipal, county, and business leader participation in leadership development and training programs.

Action Steps:

- Encourage municipal and county leaders to participate in training programs focused on leadership and rural development. The SCED can promote these in its e-communications and offer to host local programming. Examples:
 - North Carolina Rural Center
 - Leadership North Carolina
 - Leadership Sampson
 - NC League of Municipalities
 - NC Association of County Commissioners
- Restart the Leadership Academy that was managed and supported by UNC-Wilmington. This initiative was started with the first cohort being county department heads. The initiative was paused during COVID. Now is an ideal time to restart given the significant financial hurdles the county is facing and the need for leadership to guide the county through this difficult time. Another initiative that was started pre COVID and paused during the pandemic was a customer service training initiative with county staff. Now is also an ideal time to restart this initiative given the level of outside developer interest in parts of the county.
- Advocate that Sampson County create a Citizen Academy to better inform and engage citizens. The City of Spartanburg, SC, has a model [Citizen Academy](#). Municipalities could also host citizen academies.
- Advocate for citizen and business advisory councils to engage a cross section of diverse people in governmental committees and commissions.
 - A citizen advisory council could provide input on and advocate for amenity development (parks, recreation, library, etc.).
 - A business advisory council could provide input into ordinances and regulatory processes that impact a business starting up and growing. It could also advocate for business support programs.

Strategy: Keep stakeholders, elected leaders, allies, businesses, and the public informed of SCED activities, accomplishments, and strategic plan.

Action Steps:

- Keep the “[News & Events](#)” page on the website current.
- Continue regular posting to Sampson County Economic Development Facebook and LinkedIn pages.
- Make an annual presentation on SCED activities to county commissioners and each municipal board.
- Make presentations on SCED activities to at least two civic groups each year.

Goal: Attract, Retain, Scale, and Support Start-Up Businesses that will Expand Job Opportunities

Diversifying the economy is essential for long-term resilience and prosperity. Historically, Sampson County has depended heavily on a single industry, agriculture, which has left the county vulnerable to market fluctuations and natural disasters and with lower tax revenue. By attracting a mix of sectors—such as manufacturing, tourism, and logistics—Sampson County can create more job opportunities, retain youth, and grow the tax base. Economic diversification also fosters innovation and encourages investment in infrastructure and education, ultimately leading to a stronger, more adaptable local economy.

Strategy: Support the retention and expansion of existing businesses.

Action Steps:

- Implement a proactive Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) visitation program making retention and expansion visits to large employers, fast-growing companies, and target clusters.
- Track information gathered during business visits to ensure efficient follow up and to help form policies that support a pro-business climate. Use a customer relationship management program like Salesforce or ExecutivePulse or a Microsoft Office application.
- Conduct an annual survey of businesses to gather information (e.g., assistance needed, barriers to growth) to inform the BRE program.
- Add information to the “[existing business](#)” page on the website to detail services the SCED provides to existing businesses. The information could also be a downloadable brochure.
- Distribute an e-newsletter specifically to existing businesses. It could contain a “business spotlight,” upcoming events for businesses, and new programs/services offered by the SCED and allies.
- In addition to the Sampson County Manufacturing Council meetings, hold regular lunch-and-learn networking programs that feature a speaker on a topic of importance to a wide range of businesses. These could be in partnership with the Chamber and the Small Business Center.
 - Networking events could also be sector specific, such as for agriculture and related businesses.
- Organize a week of events to celebrate National Manufacturing Week. Example events: facility tours, social media campaign celebrating manufacturing, manufacturing presentations in schools, networking lunch with keynote on a current manufacturing topic, etc. This could also include the annual appreciation event described above.
 - Similar celebrations could be coordinated in recognition of agriculture.

Strategy: Market Sampson County to attract new businesses that will diversify the economy, contribute to the tax base, and provide higher paying jobs.

Action Steps:

- Update the “data” sections of the website to include data in the categories listed (i.e., commuting patterns) and provide more details on information such as labor force, employment, wages, educational attainment, degrees/certificates awarded, etc.
- Add information on target sectors under the “expand | locate” menu option. Include competitive advantages for each cluster. NC’s Southeast has a good [example](#).
 - Target sectors: Agri-Business, Food Processing, Metal & Products, Advanced Textiles, and Aerospace/Defense.
- Continue to participate in the business attraction programs of NC’s Southeast, EDPNC, and other allies where there is alignment with Sampson County’s target sectors.
- Host EDPNC recruiters for a tour of Sampson County’s sites, parks, buildings, and key industries every three years. On alternate years, make a presentation to recruiters.
- Complete a major update of the website. [Charleston Development Regional Alliance](#), although for a regional economic development organization, has best-practice features like testimonials and downloadable brochures. A good example a little closer to home is [NC’s Southeast](#).
 - Include more graphics and videos and less narrative.
 - Update and expand data throughout the website.
 - Add a button to join the newsletter list on the home page.
 - Add video testimonials from existing businesses about their experience in Sampson County.
 - Continue to keep the “News & Events” updated.
- Schedule a third-party marketing review of the brand and website for a potential refresh every three years.
- Regularly review and assess the effectiveness of the county’s incentive policy for business attraction and retention support.

Strategy: Support the scaling of small businesses, including agriculture, and foster the start up of new businesses.

Action Steps:

- Work with NC Cooperative Extension digital skills program to host classes and training to advance the e-commerce and digital skills of small business owners, including farmers and agribusinesses. Most of Sampson County's agricultural sector is concentrated in large scale farming. There is an opportunity to support the startup and growth of small scale farms.
- Conduct a study to identify shared equipment needs of farmers to determine if the SCED can facilitate a regional solution. For example, wineries could share a mobile bottling facility, or there may be a need for shared cold storage, etc. Some economic development groups purchase equipment and set up a “leasing” service.
- In collaboration with the Small Business Center (SBC) and Chamber of Commerce, develop a few “how to start a business” guides that the SCED and the Chamber can post on their websites.

Guides should outline the step-by-step process to open a new business in Sampson County. Examples: How to start a daycare center, how to start a retail store, how to start a hair salon, etc.

- In partnership with the SBC, host an annual Makers Market or Business Expo to highlight local small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, conduct a few “buy local” social media campaigns throughout the year.
- Share information on how small businesses can qualify as a “historically underutilized business” to help them expand contracting opportunities.
- Review the revolving loan program and benchmark it against best practices to ensure it remains an important tool for business startup and expansion.



Goal: Facilitate the Retention, Development, and Attraction of Talent

Talent is the number one concern of all companies. Retaining, developing, and attracting talent is crucial in a rural community because it equips residents with the skills needed to meet current and future demands and helps attract and retain businesses. A skilled local workforce boosts productivity, reduces unemployment, and creates opportunities for economic growth and community stability. During the strategic planning process, we heard from companies that they have a hard time recruiting and retaining talented workers due to a shortage of housing, lack of amenities, and performance metrics of the public school system. We also heard that leaders want to ensure that Sampson County's youth have a wide range of employment opportunities.

Strategy: Connect business and education to strengthen existing talent development efforts and to spark new initiatives.

Action Steps:

- Collaborate with Sampson County and Clinton City Schools and Sampson Community College on a communications plan to connect growing new segments of the population to career awareness, apprenticeship, and education and training programs.
- Work with the public school systems and Sampson Community College to identify a few communities with best-practices in education and training programs and organize a tour for Sampson County leadership to learn about how other places implemented best practice programs including business and education partnerships for economic development.
- In partnership with public schools and Sampson Community College, develop a “how to form an internship program” toolkit and promote to local employers. Make it downloadable from the “existing business” part of the website.
- Host awareness programs on “how to develop an apprenticeship program.” Think beyond traditional industrial apprenticeship programs into health care and agriculture.
- Participate in college career fairs, expos, and other career events and encourage local employers to participate as well.
- Create a Sampson County summer experience program similar to the Giles County, VA, [Summer Youth Work Program](#) which matches high school students with summer employment in local companies. Giles County pays a portion of the students' wages.

Strategy: Promote local career opportunities to retain Sampson County’s talented workers.

Action Steps:

- Partner with local businesses to help expand the “[Dark Horse Fellows](#)” program concept beyond teaching to include other occupations that will benefit the community and strengthen the talent pool.
- Broaden the career awareness of students, educators, and parents through a marketing campaign such as [Be Pro Be Proud](#), CTE availability, local higher education training opportunities, dual enrollment options, and work experience options.
 - Develop a one-page brief for educators. [Go BOLD](#) is an example of a marketing campaign of nontraditional career pathways for young women.
 - Develop social media content that education partners can use.
 - Develop a local job opportunities brochure the schools can distribute to parents.
- Create an annual Excellence in Workforce event that recognizes business-education partnerships and other worthy success stories. This could be presented at the annual State of the County event described above or during Manufacturing Week. The showcase could include speakers from other places Sampson County visited on the best practices tour described above.



Goal: Create New Opportunities for Business Development by Expanding Sites and Buildings

Preparing sites and buildings positions a community to attract new businesses and retain expansions of existing businesses. Having shovel-ready sites, quality buildings, and space for startups reduces development time and risk for investors, making the community more competitive in securing economic opportunities.

Strategy: Invest in sites, buildings, and other spaces needed to retain existing and attract new businesses.

Action Steps:

- Have leadership benchmark and visit other communities for successes and best practices with land and building development.
- Seek funding to prepare a "pad-ready" site in the Sampson Southeast Business Center, there are 120 acres remaining in the park, and complete due diligence so the site can be certified.
- Conduct a site identification study to identify sites that require less investment to make "shovel ready." These sites may be smaller, standalone tracts that can be marketed for faster development while large sites/parks are developed. Also look at:
 - Sites on/near existing water and wastewater.
 - Infill sites in existing industrial/commercial areas where infrastructure is in place.
 - Adaptive reuse of brownfield, vacant, and underutilized properties.
- Develop a phased, long-range Product Development Plan to make existing sites more marketable.
 - Align industrial development planning areas with the comprehensive land use plan.
 - Phase 1 would include completing due diligence on sites and certifying/recertifying sites. Due diligence includes Phase 1, geotechnical, wetlands, historical properties, and endangered species.
 - Prioritize sites that already have some research completed, such as The Joe Britt Warren Business Park.
 - Phase 2 would include installing the last stretch of infrastructure to have water and sewer "on site." The "on site" designation is critical to companies and site location consultants.
 - Phase 3 would include grading "pad-ready" sites.
- Develop a coalition of partners interested in supporting a business incubator to seek grant funding to study the feasibility. Potential partners are Sampson Community College, the City of Clinton, and Thomas Entrepreneurship Hub. U.S. EDA has grant programs for feasibility studies.
- Conduct a feasibility study for a spec building development on a shovel-ready site. Identify a market-driven location and building specifications. Seek out a public-private partnership (PPP) to develop a building.

Strategy: Support public investments in placemaking and tourism assets.

Action Steps:

- Advocate for public investments in recreation and quality of life amenities that support talent, business attraction and retention, and tourism development. Examples: walking paths/greenways, parks and recreation facilities, public art, amphitheater or similar for outdoor events, river access, and cultural programs.
- Maintain a market profile on the website for retail and commercial developers to download.
- Cultivate relationships with commercial developers to encourage diversification of restaurants, retail, services, entertainment businesses, and the development of new hotels and accommodations.
- Maintain a housing market profile on the website for residential developers to download. Sampson County needs more housing affordable for the average Samson County worker.
- Leverage natural resources and amenities in marketing messages.
- Support local governments and tourism agencies in the development of tourism destinations and venues.



Goal: Elevate the Economic Development Organization to be a Leader in Southeast North Carolina

Investing in an economic development organization (EDO) is especially important in a rural community because it provides dedicated leadership and resources to drive strategic growth efforts in areas that often lack private investment and development. The EDO coordinates initiatives, attracts investment, supports businesses, and advocates for a positive business climate.

Sampson County has very limited resources to implement this strategic plan. However, investing in economic development should be part of the county's long range plan to expand the tax base and generate more tax revenue which will provide funding for public services.

Strategy: Ensure Sampson County has the necessary resources to implement the strategic plan.

Action Steps:

- Based on the organizational analysis of peer communities, increase the annual operating budget (not including grants, incentives, and pass-throughs) from approximately \$200,000 to \$350,000. Funds will be used for increased programming, marketing, and eventually an additional staff position.
 - Consider dedicating a specific amount (e.g., one-penny) to fund economic development to streamline annual requests. As the county's tax base grows, so will the operating budget of the Economic Development Department.
- Explore how to establish a dedicated funding source for product development. Some South Carolina counties set aside a percentage of new industrial development tax revenue; Orange County, NC, dedicates a portion of additional sales tax; and some jurisdictions in North Carolina have used general obligation bonds.
- Appeal to regional and state partners and funding organizations to support this strategic plan. Sampson County will need outside funding support to implement some strategies in this strategic plan. Example external funding partners are Golden LEAF, the U.S. Economic Development Administration, and the N.C. General Assembly.

Strategy: Staff the SCED for success.

Action Steps:

- Increase staff to three full-time positions over time to provide support for strategic plan implementation.
 - Executive Director – Business Attraction, Product Development, Community Connections
 - Existing Business – Existing Business Retention and Expansion, Talent Development, Project Management Support
 - Marketing and Research – External and Internal Marketing and Communications, Research Support, Event Coordination, Administration
- Budget for staff professional development and professional certifications to ensure staff stays on the leading edge of economic development.

Strategy: Measure the county's return on investment in economic development projects.

Action Step:

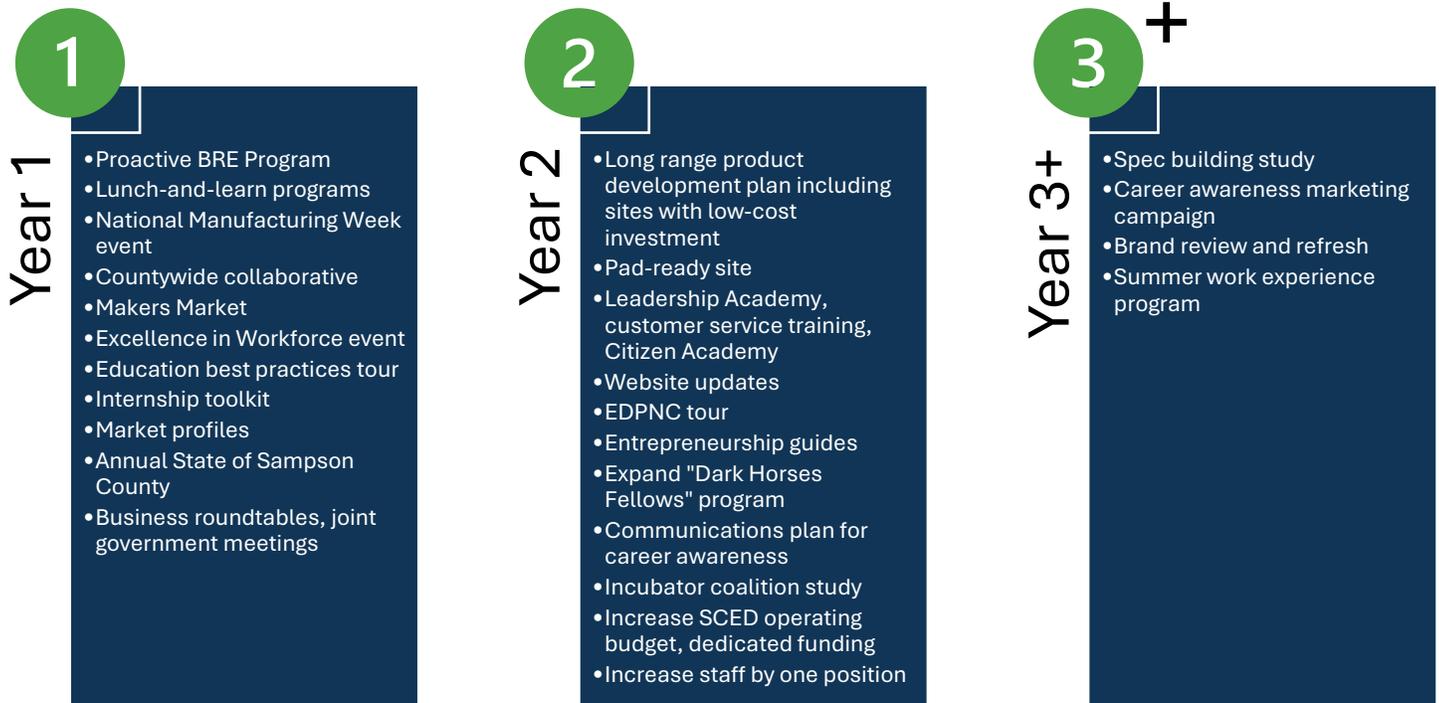
- Conduct an economic impact analysis of projects to ensure the locality receives a positive return on public investments.



Implementation Guide

Implementing a strategic plan for economic development is crucial for fostering long-term economic stability and prosperity within a community or region. It is a roadmap for economic resilience and allows local governments, businesses, and stakeholders to align efforts, reduce inefficiencies, and capitalize on opportunities. Moreover, following a strategic plan enhances competitiveness, supports job creation, and ensures that development initiatives are inclusive and sustainable, ultimately improving the quality of life.

Below is a recommended timeline to implement major initiatives in the strategic plan. The list is not comprehensive, nor does it include the many ongoing activities of the SCED. It includes action items that require the most significant financial and people resources, and many will require expanded partnerships and support of allies.



Metrics

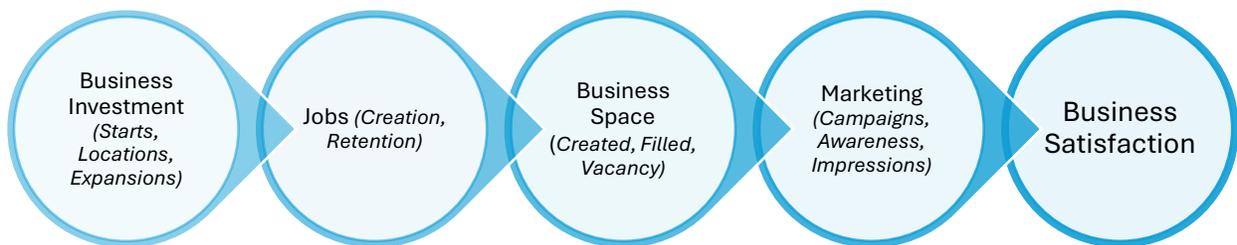
We advocate that economic development organizations track three sets of metrics. Program metrics are outcomes of the activities of the economic development program and measure the effectiveness of strategies. These metrics inform strategic planning and resource allocation. Organizational metrics track the overall stability of the organization. These metrics offer an understanding of how effective and efficient the organization is. Community well-being is a measure of the overall health and well-being of a community. Over time, these metrics influence a wide range of public policies.

Example Metrics

The best way to measure results is to align metrics with the strategic plan. There should be metrics for each goal area.



Recommended Dashboard of Program Metrics



Appendix A: SWOT Analysis

Input into the strategic plan was gathered from a wide range of citizens, business and community leaders, local government staff and elected officials, and Sampson County's allies in economic development. A workshop was held with the local business and community leaders to offer input into the vision for Sampson County's future. Interviews were conducted with Economic Development staff and allies such as North Carolina's Southeast, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, Sampson Community College, Sampson County Small Business Center, and Sampson County Cooperative Extension. The business survey had 47 responses, and the community survey had 296 responses. The response rate on the citizen survey was much higher than anticipated given lack of historical public engagement in planning processes such as this. The SWOT Analysis is a summary of input from more than 400 people.

Interviews = 25

- Shiela Barefoot, Sampson County CVB
- Phillip Bell, Coharie Tribe
- Alice Butler, Mayor, Town of Roseboro
- Chip Crumpler, Sampson County Commissioner
- Nancy Dillman, Sampson County HR
- JP Duncan, City Manager, City of Clinton
- Thaddeus Godwin, Sampson County Commissioner
- Brad Hardison, Sampson County Cooperative Extension
- Jennifer Holcomb, EDPNC
- Shawn Howerton, CEO, Sampson Regional Medical Center
- Jeffrey Hudson, Interim County Manager
- Ronnie Jackson, Sampson County Friends of Agriculture
- Wesley Johnson, Superintendent, Clinton City Schools
- Jamie King, Superintendent, Sampson County Schools
- Michelle Lance, Sampson County Planning Department
- Lethia Lee, Sampson County Commissioner
- Allen McLamb, Chair, Sampson County Board of Commissioners
- Tate Naylor, President, Western Sampson Commerce Group
- Eric Pope, Sampson County Commissioner
- Mary Rose, City of Clinton Planning Department
- Chuck Spell, Director of Manufacturing, Hog Slat, Inc
- Bill Starling, President, Sampson Community College
- Craig Warren, Mayor, Town of Newton Grove
- Joe Warren, Mayor, Town of Salemburg
- Steve Yost, President, NC Southeast Partnership

Economic Development Workshop = 61 participants

Community Survey = 296 responses

Business Survey = 47 responses



Sampson County is known for its strong agricultural roots, thriving agricultural businesses, and established industries. As one of North Carolina's largest counties, it offers a strategic location with access to I-40 and proximity to the ports. Affordable and available land, rural setting, and a diverse community make it attractive for families and businesses.



Challenges that impact Sampson County's growth and competitiveness include attracting and retaining talent due to population decline, brain drain, and competitive salary offerings. The county lacks prepared sites and is struggling to make infrastructure improvements. Insufficient lodging for tourism and local business leakage further strains the community. To make the country more attractive to businesses, they need more health care options, housing across all affordability levels, and unified coordination among stakeholders.



Sampson County has the opportunity for growth and development due to its abundance of land, central location and interstate access. Leveraging the county's strong agricultural base and manufacturing sectors can increase business development opportunities. Strengthening workforce development programs, improving educational pathway readiness, and expanding childcare options would further workforce readiness and improve workforce participation. Encouraging sustainable community growth practices and providing local venues for tourism development will also enrich the quality of life for Sampson County residents.



Sampson County could face a variety of threats that could hinder its economic stability, development, and well-being. U.S. tariffs on agricultural and manufactured goods, county debt service obligations, and revenue negative housing issues are policy-driven and critical to the county's future. An aging population and outmigration of workforce are undermining economic growth. Natural disasters and animal health issues continue to endanger infrastructure, agricultural productivity, and potentially the local economy. Limited resources for wastewater improvement and insufficient growth planning may limit growth potential and lead to further overburdened infrastructure.

Strengths

- County land mass size
- Location in North Carolina and the East Coast
- Strong agriculture industry and community
- I-40 access
- Land available for development
- Sampson Community College
- Competitive land cost
- Proximity to ports/inland ports
- Low crime rates
- Strong base of manufacturing companies
- Diverse demographics
- Natural beauty, ecotourism, outdoor resources
- Low cost of living

Weaknesses

- Brain drain (youth leaving , not returning)
- Population decline, aging population
- Lack of prepared business sites
- Lack of water and wastewater infrastructure planning or growth
- Housing affordability
- Available workforce
- Retail sales leakage to neighboring areas
- Lack of economic/business/employment diversity
- Lack of internet connectivity (rural areas)
- Lack of job opportunities, competitive salaries and benefits
- Healthcare access
- Rail access
- Lack of lodging for sporting events and tourism
- Division in school systems
- K-12 schools performance
- Difficulty engaging business, civic, elected, and community leaders
- Landfill/waste management

Opportunities

- Interstate access
- Value added agriculture
- Improved workforce development
- Developing industrial properties/buildings
- Expanded childcare options
- Expanding education expectation to Pre-K – 14+
- Capitalize on central location
- Rural grant opportunities
- Reshoring of manufacturing
- Airport improvements
- Tourism venues/destinations
- Collaboration with other counties in regional economic development

Threats

- Aging population
- Lack of mental health resources
- Wastewater management
- County debt service impact on resources
- Natural disasters
- Animal disease impact on agriculture businesses
- Lack of planning for growth
- Revenue negative housing, becoming a bedroom community
- Unionization
- Out-bound migration of workforce
- Current tariff uncertainty
- Community disconnect
- Loss of major employers

Appendix B: Economic & Demographic Profile

59,245

Population

84.9%

High School Degree
or Higher

\$53,159

Median HH Income

Manufacturing

Retail

Agriculture

Top Sectors

\$1B

Ag Sales

83.2

Cost of Living

From 2012 to 2023, the median age in Sampson County steadily increased from 38.2 to 39.7 years, reflecting a gradually aging population. Despite this, the county remains younger than many surrounding areas. The 2024 Diversity Index is relatively high at 76.6, indicating a racially and ethnically diverse population. The 2023 racial composition shows that 53.2% identify as White, 24.9% as Black or African American, and 21.3% as Hispanic or Latino.

About 84.9% of Sampson County residents aged 25 or older have at least a high school diploma. Within a 60-minute drive of Clinton, NC, educational institutions produced a strong volume of graduates in two-year and certificate programs. Key programs include Liberal Arts (4,176 awards), Computer Networking (1,752), Registered Nursing (1,698), and Information Technology (1,246).

In 2024, Sampson County had 5,987 housing units, with a modest projected growth of 0.53% by 2029. The housing stock primarily consists of single-family detached homes (64.7%), with mobile homes also notable (7.8%). Median home value stands at \$149,263, and gross rent averages \$827 monthly. The affordability index is 101, indicating slightly less than average housing affordability compared to the national baseline. There are four planned subdivisions totaling almost 400 potential new home sites.

Key industry clusters in Sampson County include Agriculture (with a very high location quotient of 10.85), Food Manufacturing (LQ 6.92), and Metal/Product Manufacturing (LQ 4.16). Despite Agriculture showing a slight projected employment decline (-0.31%), it remains central to the economy. Health care and education sectors are modest but growing. Annual average wages in these sectors range from \$42,000–\$92,000, with Agriculture at the high end.

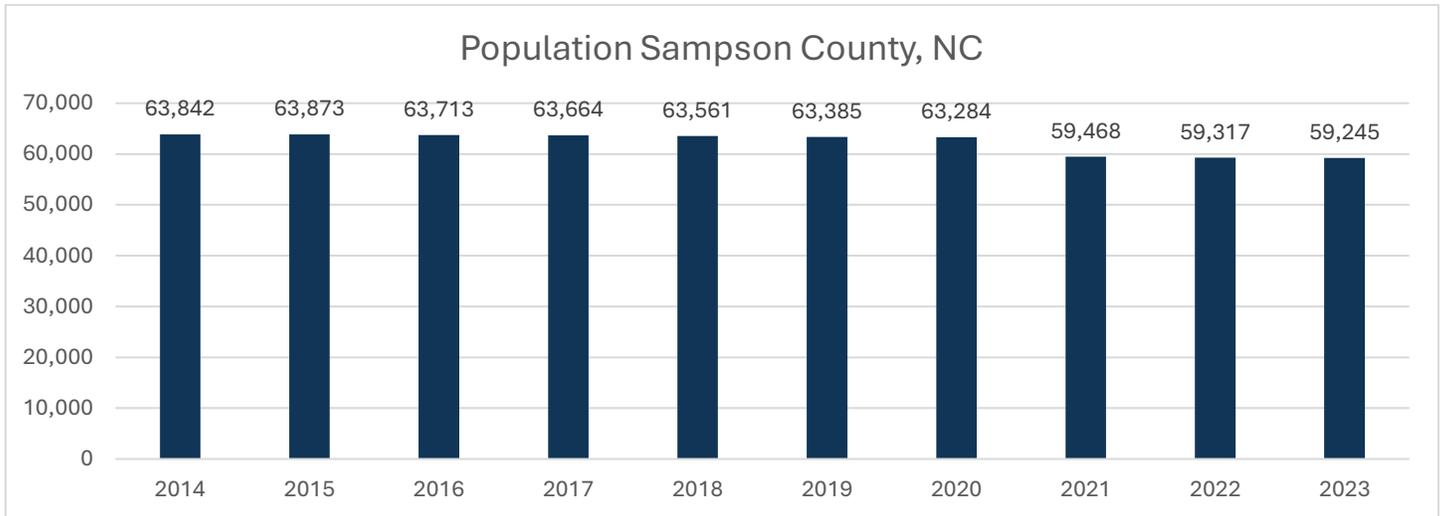
Sampson County offers a low cost of living, indexed at 83.2 (vs. 100 national average), allowing a \$52,481 average salary to equate to \$63,056 in U.S. purchasing power. This makes it more affordable than many neighboring counties and the state average, positioning the area as cost-effective for workers and families.

Target sectors to focus on are Agri-Business, Food Processing, Metal & Products, Advanced Textiles, and Aerospace/Defense, aligning with existing strengths and workforce training outputs.

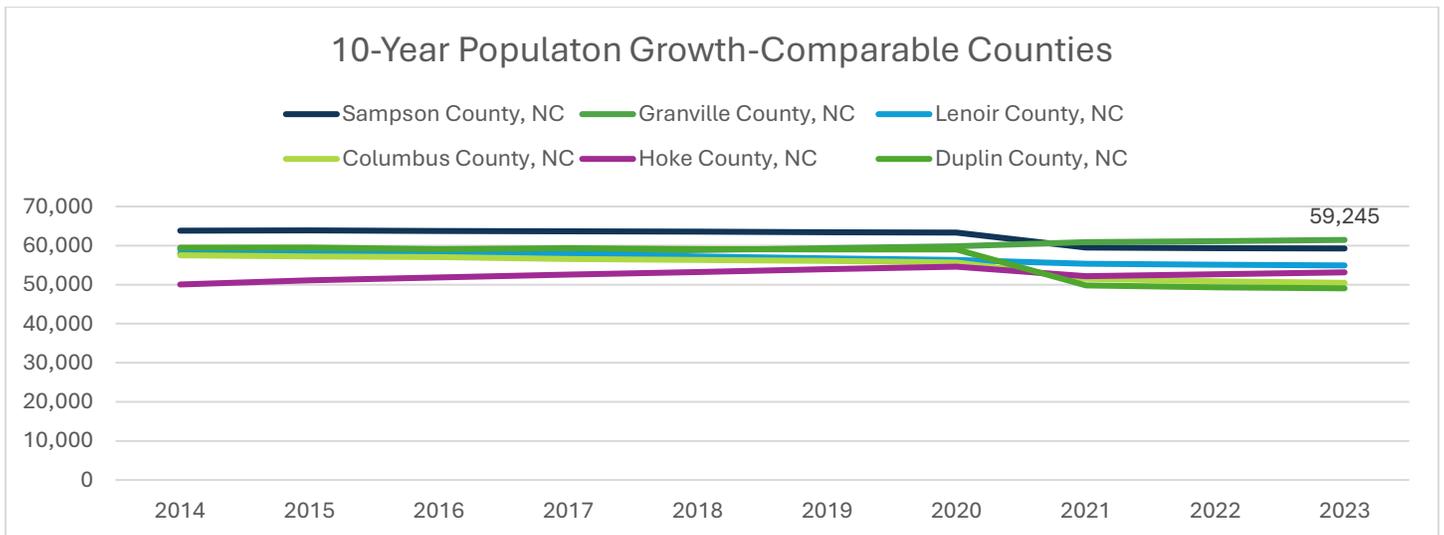
Comparable Communities

Sampson County was benchmarked against Granville, Lenoir, Columbus, Hoke, and Duplin counties because these counties are similar in population and economy to Sampson County. Several of them also have similar transportation access and educational systems as Sampson County. Another similarity with Sampson County is that these counties also have a small economic development staff, limited budget, and focus on similar economic development strategies.

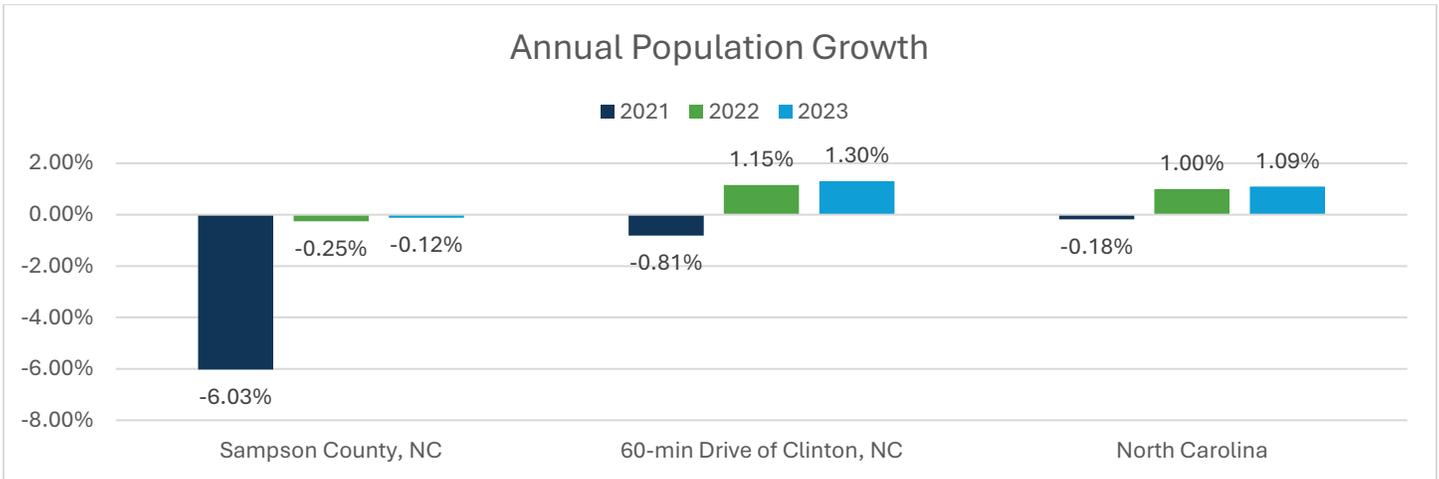
Population & Demographics



Source: JobsEQ®



Source: JobsEQ®



Source: JobsEQ®

Median Age								
	Sampson County, NC	Granville County, NC	Lenoir County, NC	Columbus County, NC	Hoke County, NC	Duplin County, NC	60-min Drive of Clinton, NC	North Carolina
2012	38.2	39.9	41.0	40.4	30.8	37.4	34.7	37.4
2013	38.5	40.2	41.1	40.7	31.0	37.8	34.9	37.6
2014	38.9	41.0	41.3	40.9	31.1	38.1	35.0	37.8
2015	39.2	41.4	42.1	41.5	31.4	38.8	35.3	38.0
2016	39.5	41.9	42.1	41.6	31.7	39.2	35.6	38.3
2017	40.2	42.5	41.9	41.9	31.9	40.0	35.7	38.4
2018	40.3	42.6	42.2	42.0	32.5	40.6	35.9	38.6
2019	40.3	42.7	42.7	41.9	32.8	40.5	36.1	38.7
2020	40.3	43.1	42.3	41.9	33.0	40.7	36.2	38.9
2021	40.2	43.0	42.9	41.8	33.2	40.6	36.4	39.0
2022	39.6	42.5	42.7	41.8	33.5	40.6	36.6	39.1
2023	39.7	42.5	42.2	42.4	33.7	40.7	36.6	Q

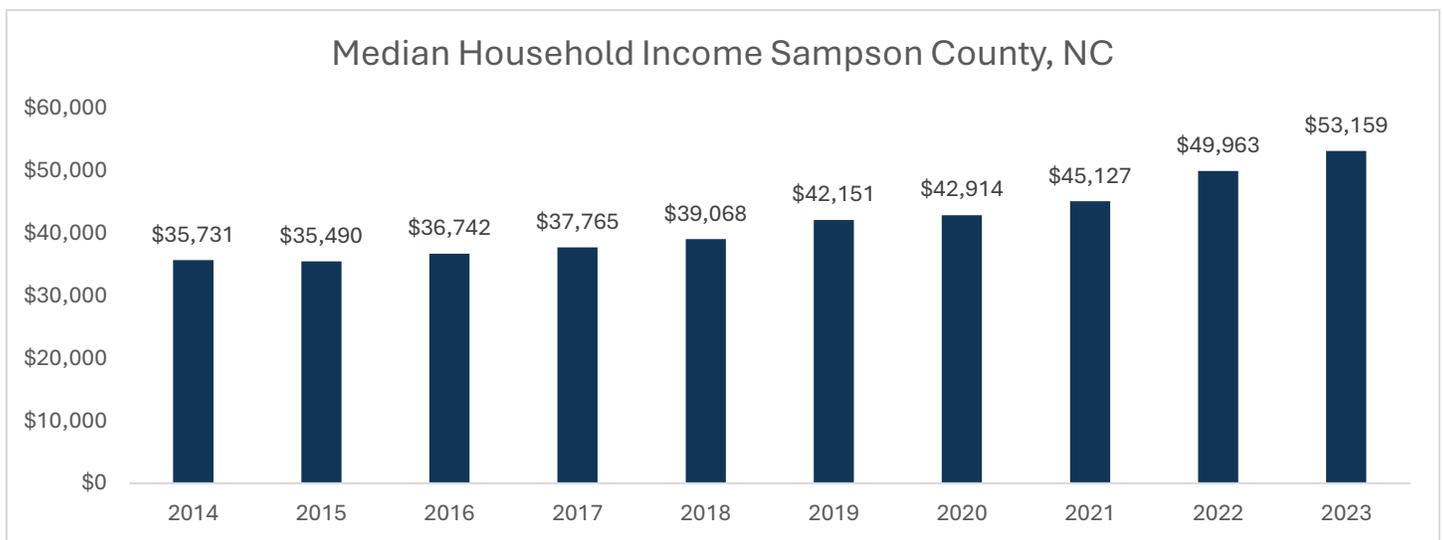
Source: JobsEQ

2024 Diversity Index							
Sampson County, NC	Granville County, NC	Lenoir County, NC	Columbus County, NC	Hoke County, NC	Duplin County, NC	60-min Drive of Clinton, NC	North Carolina
76.6	67.5	66.6	60.9	79.2	76.9	72.8	66.3

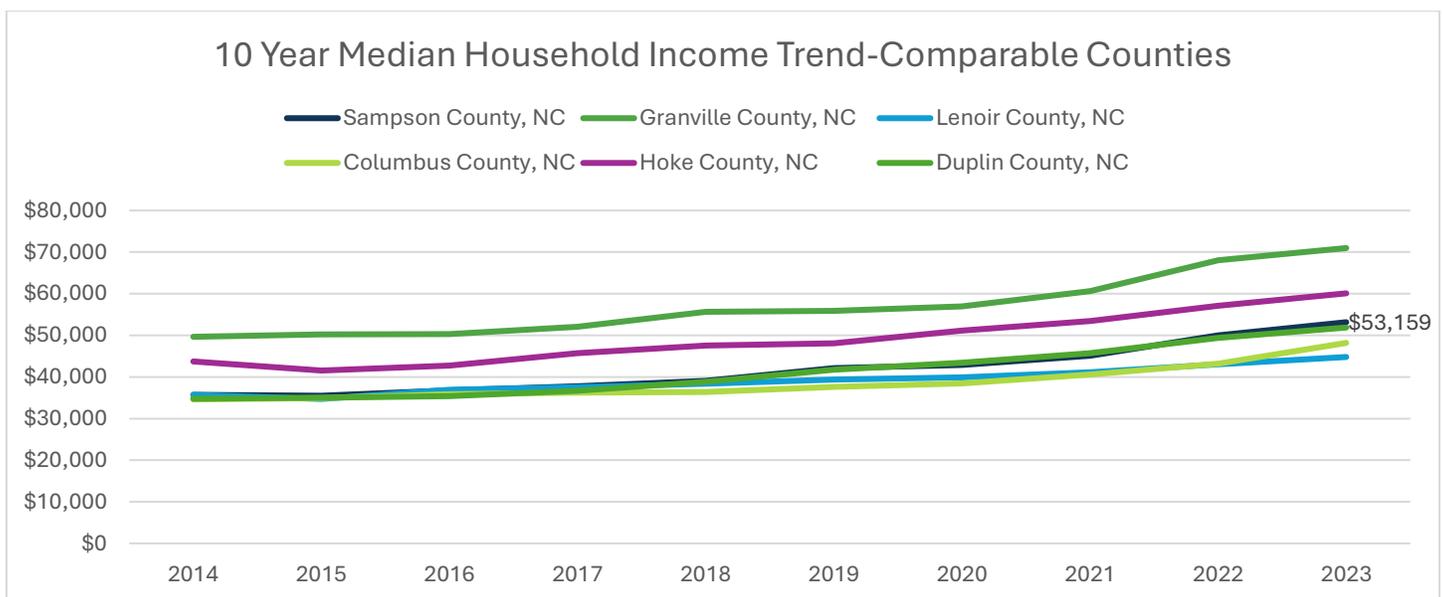
Source: ESRI, The Diversity Index is a measure of racial and ethnic diversity in a geographic area. The index ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating greater diversity.

Sampson County, NC Race and Ethnicity	2023	2010
White	53.2%	66.8%
Black or African American	24.9%	25.5%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	21.3%	22.4%
Some Other Race	14.9%	n/a
Two or More Races	4.3%	2.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	2.2%	4%
Asian	0.5%	0.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.4%
<i>Source: JobsEQ</i>		

Income & Poverty

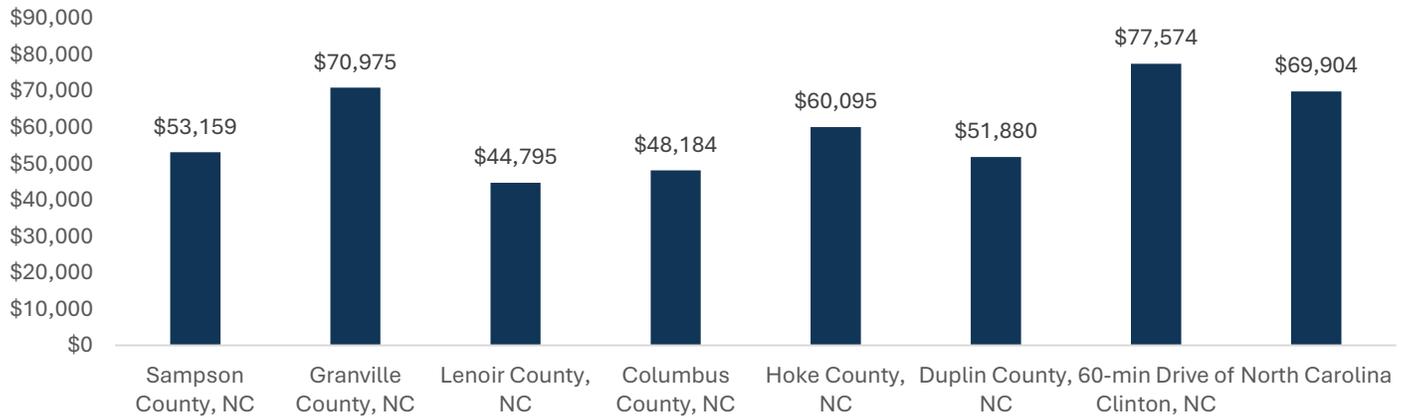


Source: JobsEQ®



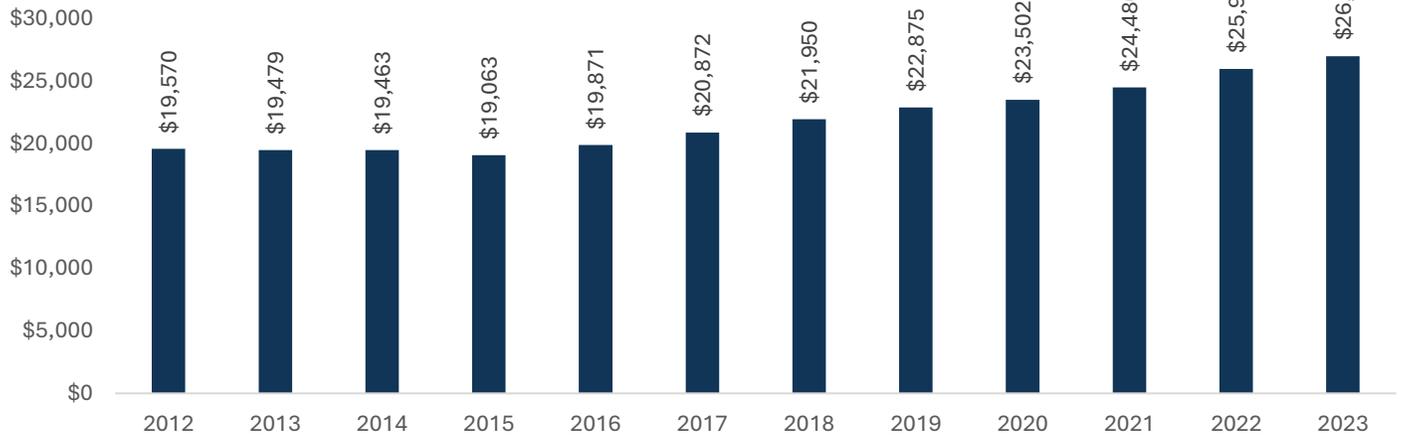
Source: JobsEQ®

2023 Median Household Income by County



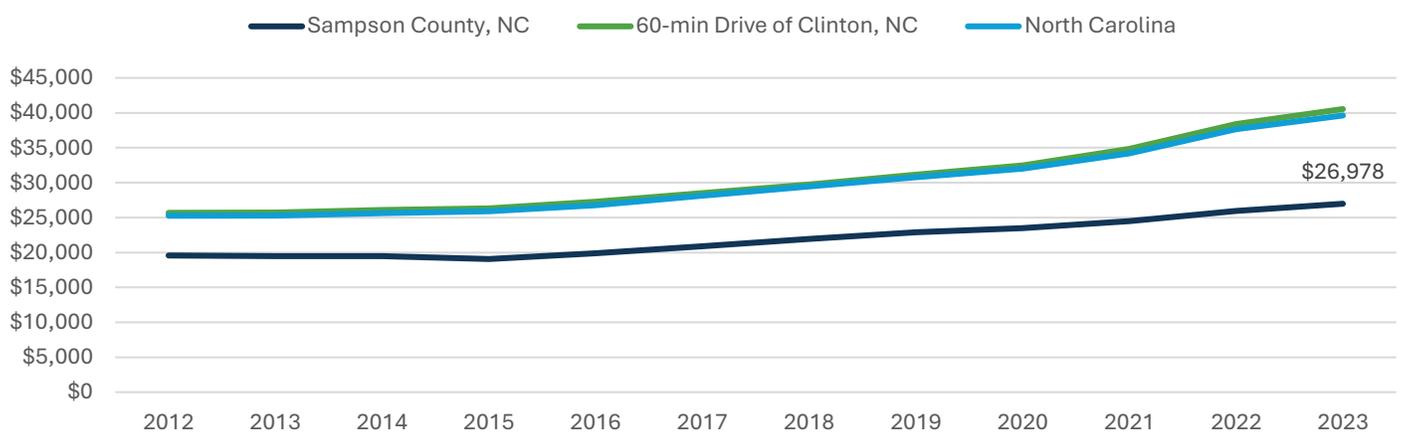
Source: JobsEQ®

Sampson County Per Capita Income



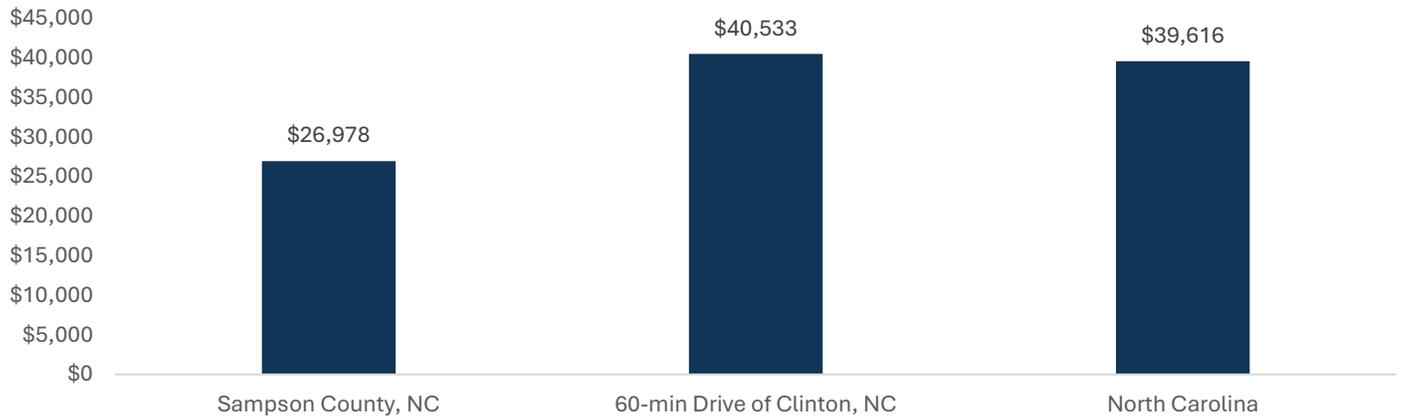
Source: JobsEQ®

10 Year Per Capita Income Trend



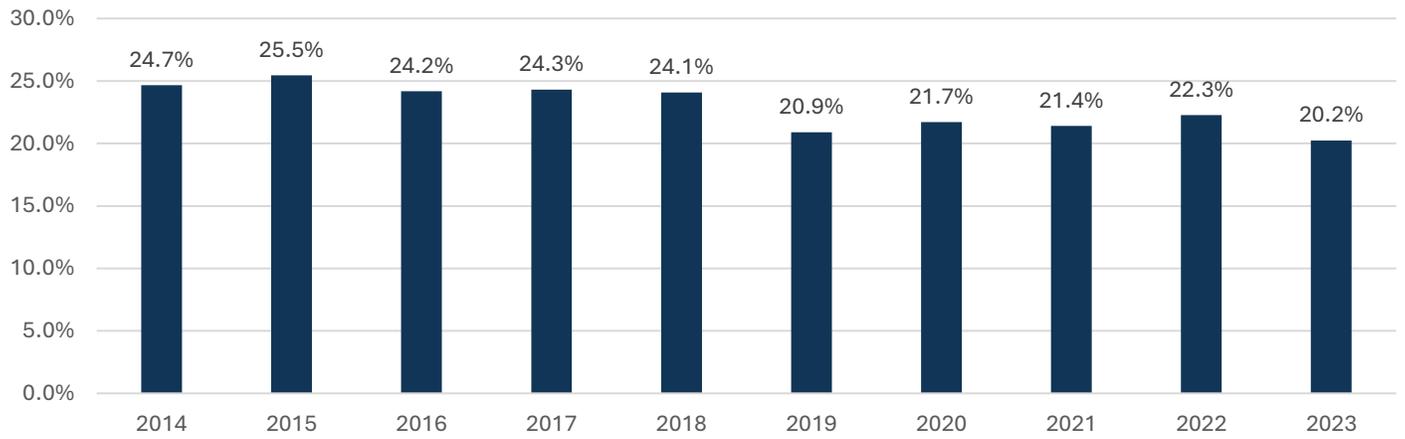
Source: JobsEQ®

2023 Per Capita Income Region and State



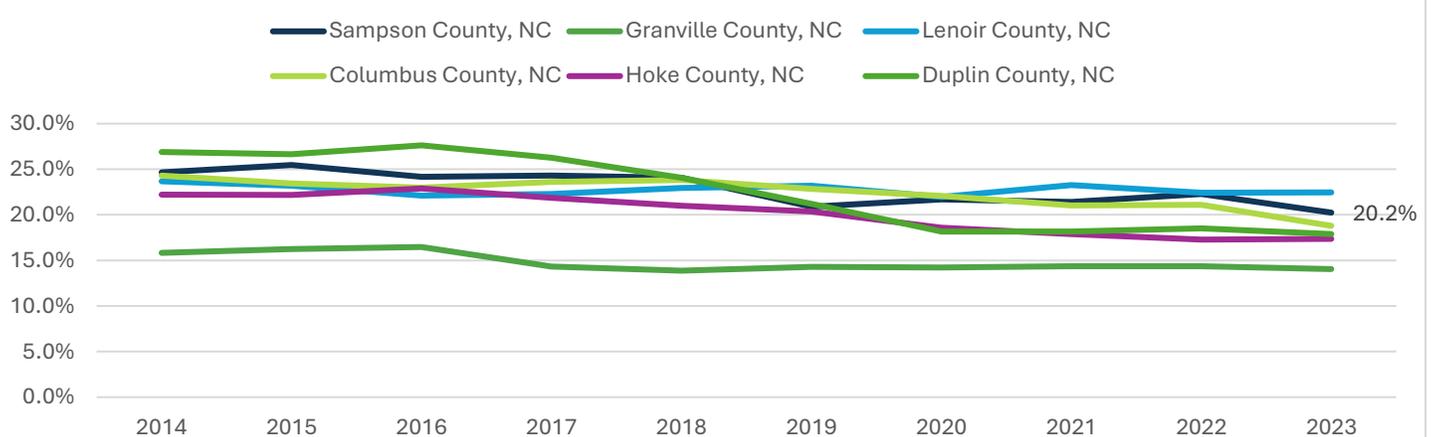
Source: JobsEQ®

Poverty Level Sampson County, NC



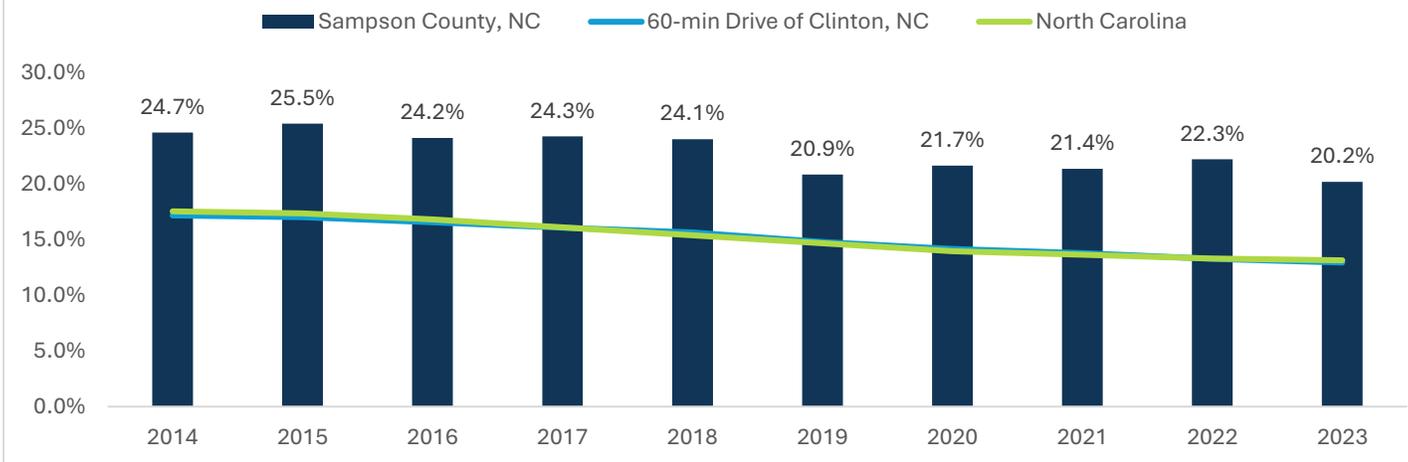
Source: JobsEQ®

10-Year Poverty Trend-Comparable Counties



Source: JobsEQ®

10-Year Poverty Level Trend-Region & State



Source: JobsEQ®

Education

Percent with a High School Degree or Higher							
Sampson County, NC	Granville County, NC	Lenoir County, NC	Columbus County, NC	Hoke County, NC	Duplin County, NC	60-min Drive of Clinton, NC	North Carolina
84.9%	86.5%	83.6%	87.2%	89.5%	82.9%	91.7%	90.4%

Source JobsEQ

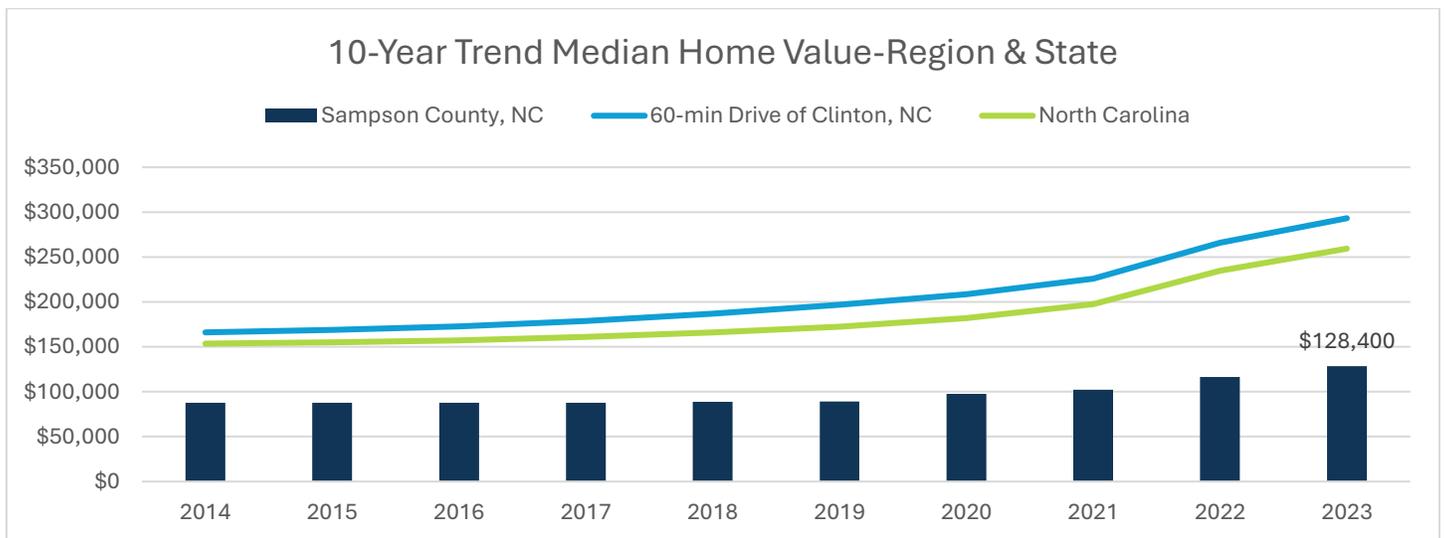
Certificate and Two-Year Programs in 60 min Drive Time of Clinton, NC

CIP Code	Title	Certificates and 2yr Awards	4yr Awards	Postgraduate Awards	Total Awards
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	1,291	2,278	1,052	4,621
24.0101	Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies	4,176	103	16	4,295
11.0901	Computer Systems Networking and Telecommunications	1,712	0	40	1,752
51.3801	Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	608	1,079	11	1,698
11.0103	Information Technology	1,162	84	0	1,246
42.0101	Psychology, General	0	924	94	1,018
26.0101	Biology/Biological Sciences, General	0	906	7	913
11.0701	Computer Science	0	460	422	882
52.0304	Accounting and Finance	647	0	3	650
43.0104	Criminal Justice/Safety Studies	289	314	29	632

Source: JobsEQ

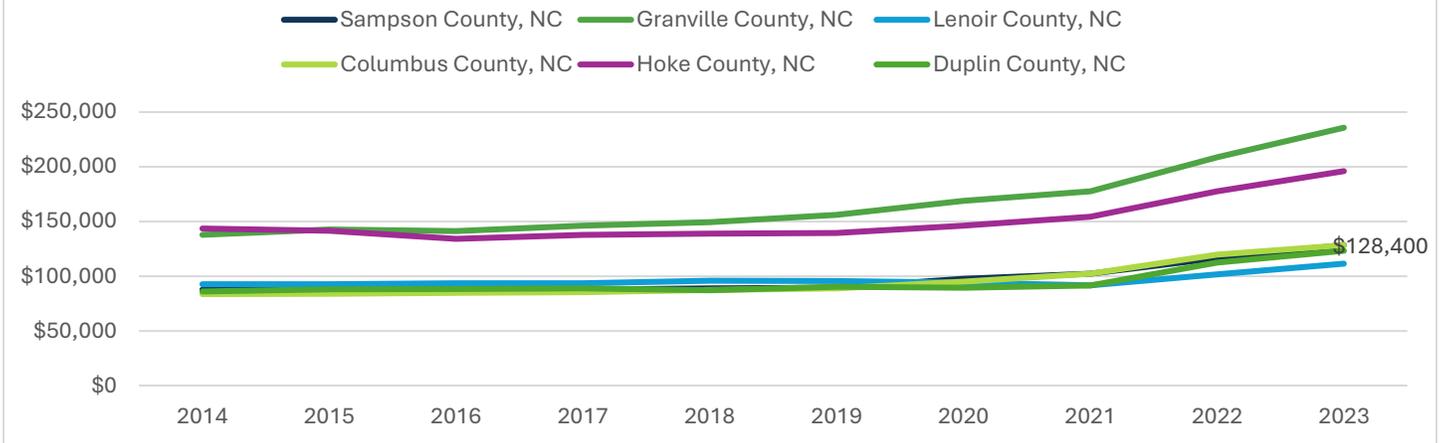
Housing

Sampson County, NC Housing Profile	
Total Housing Units, 2024	5,987
Projected Units in 2029	6,019
Projected % Increase 2024-29	0.53%
% Occupied	87.20%
% Vacant	12.80%
Owner-Occupied	46.50%
Renter-Occupied	40.70%
Affordability Index 2024	101
Median Monthly Contract Rent (2018-2022)	\$607
Median Monthly Gross Rent (2018-2022)	\$827
Median Home Value 2024	\$149,263
Median Age Built (2018-2022)	1973
Stock	
1, Detached	64.70%
1, Attached	0.70%
2-9 Units	19.80%
10-19 Units	4.6%
20+ Units	2.3%
Mobile Home, Boat, RV, etc.	7.80%
Homes for Sale Apr.2025	189
Average Sale Time (days) Apr.2025	56
<i>Sources: ESRI, rockethomes.com</i>	



Source: JobsEQ®

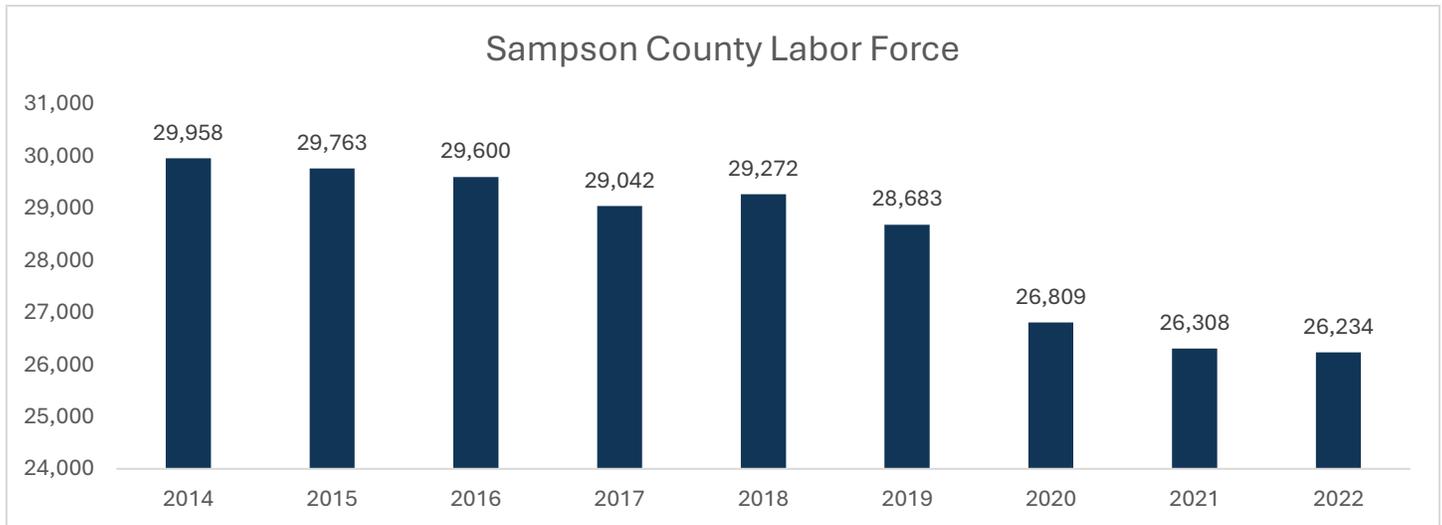
10-Year Trend Median Home Value-Comparable Counties



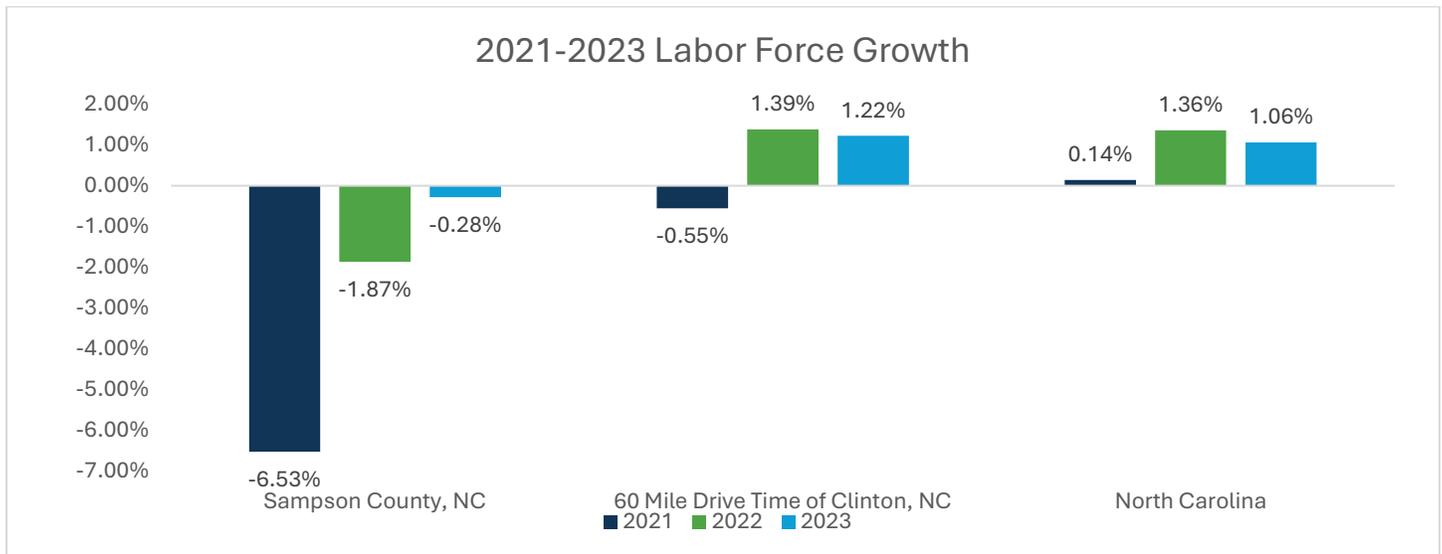
Source: JobsEQ®

Labor Force, Industry Sectors, & Wages

The labor force includes people who are working and actively seeking work. It does not include people who are not participating in the labor force such as retirees. The industry sectors below are the two-digit level industry classifications of the North American Industry Classification System. Wages includes base pay, commissions, bonuses, tips, and some employer contributions to deferred compensation plans.

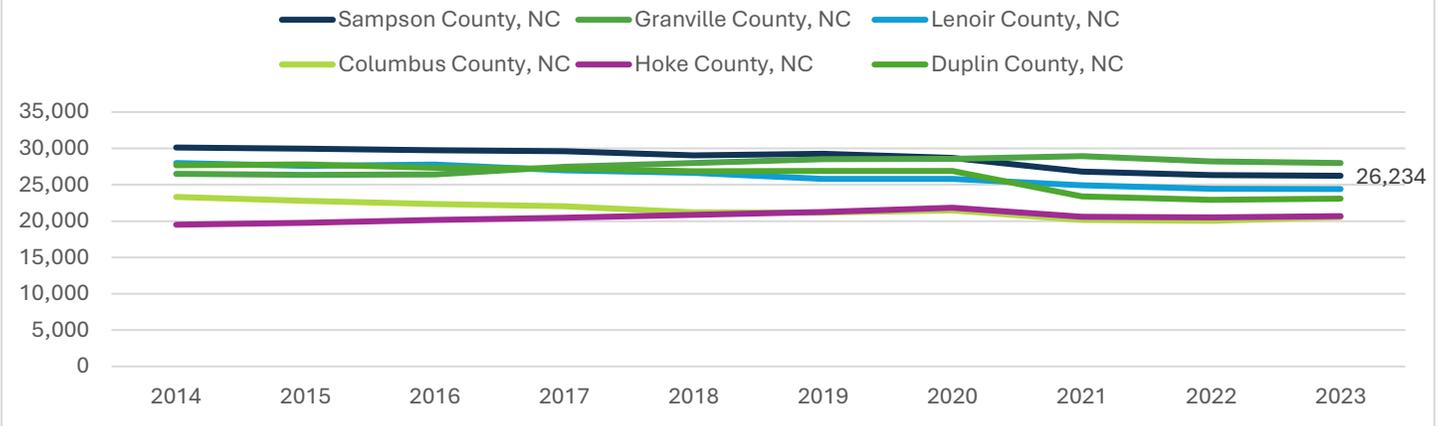


Source: JobsEQ®



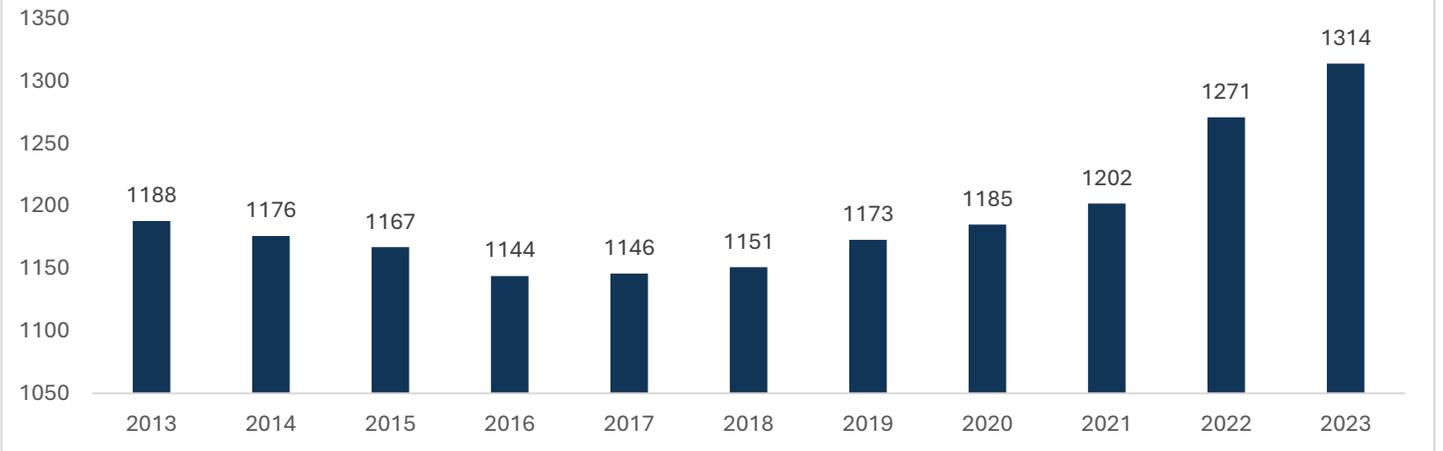
Source: JobsEQ®

10-Year Labor Force Trend-Comparable Communities



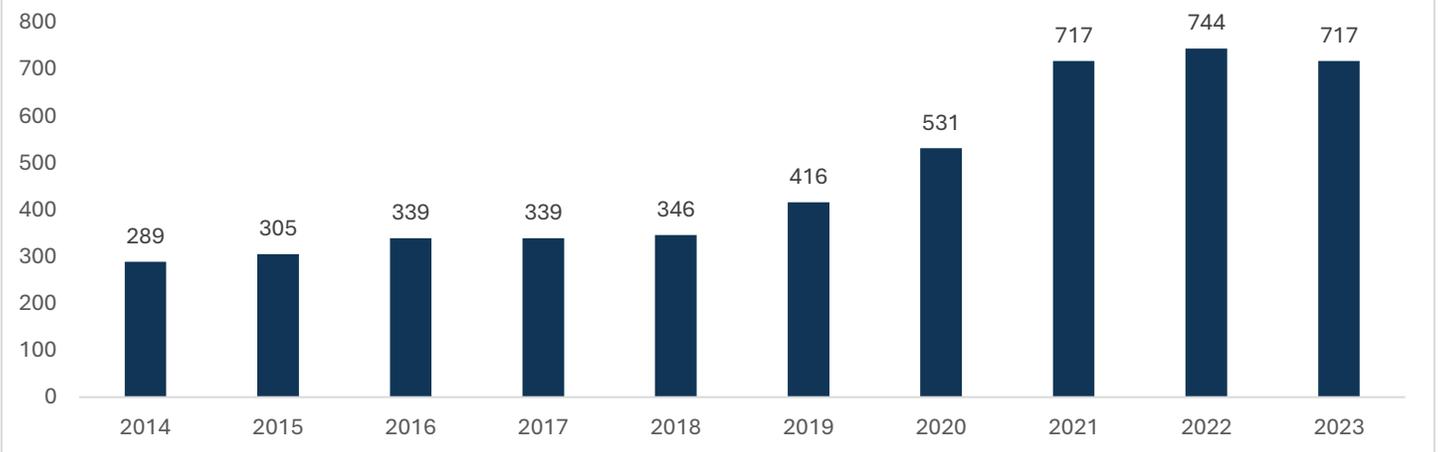
Source: JobsEQ®

Sampson County Number of Business Establishments



Source: Census.gov

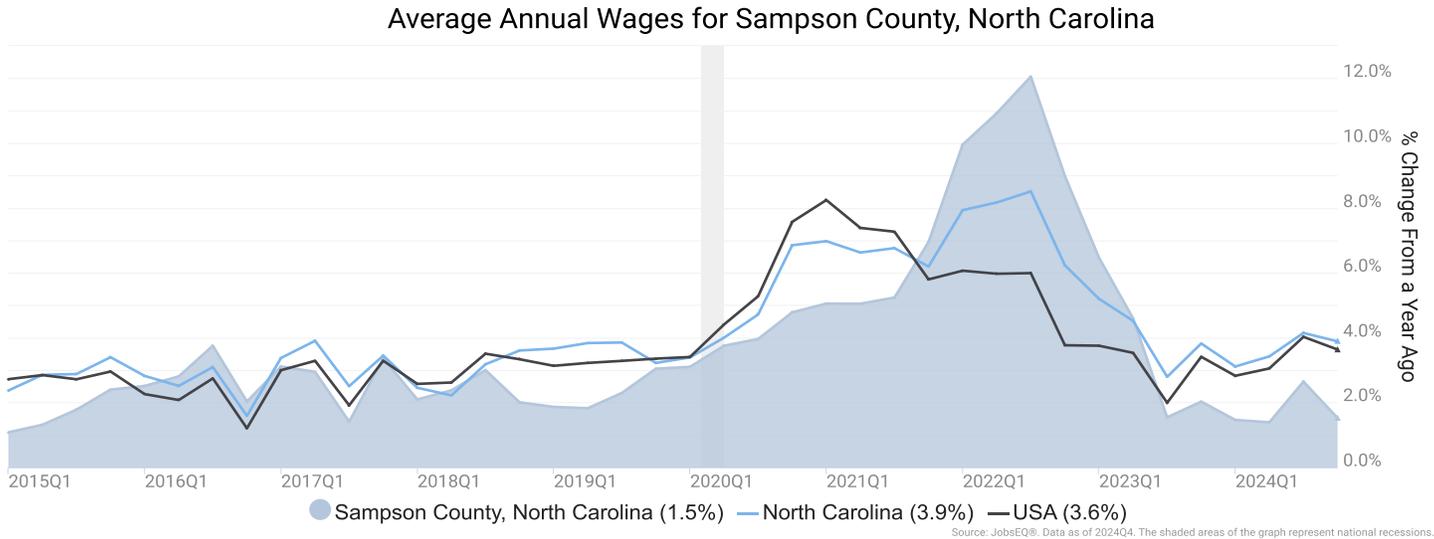
Sampson County New Business Applications



Source: Census.gov



Source: JobsEQ®

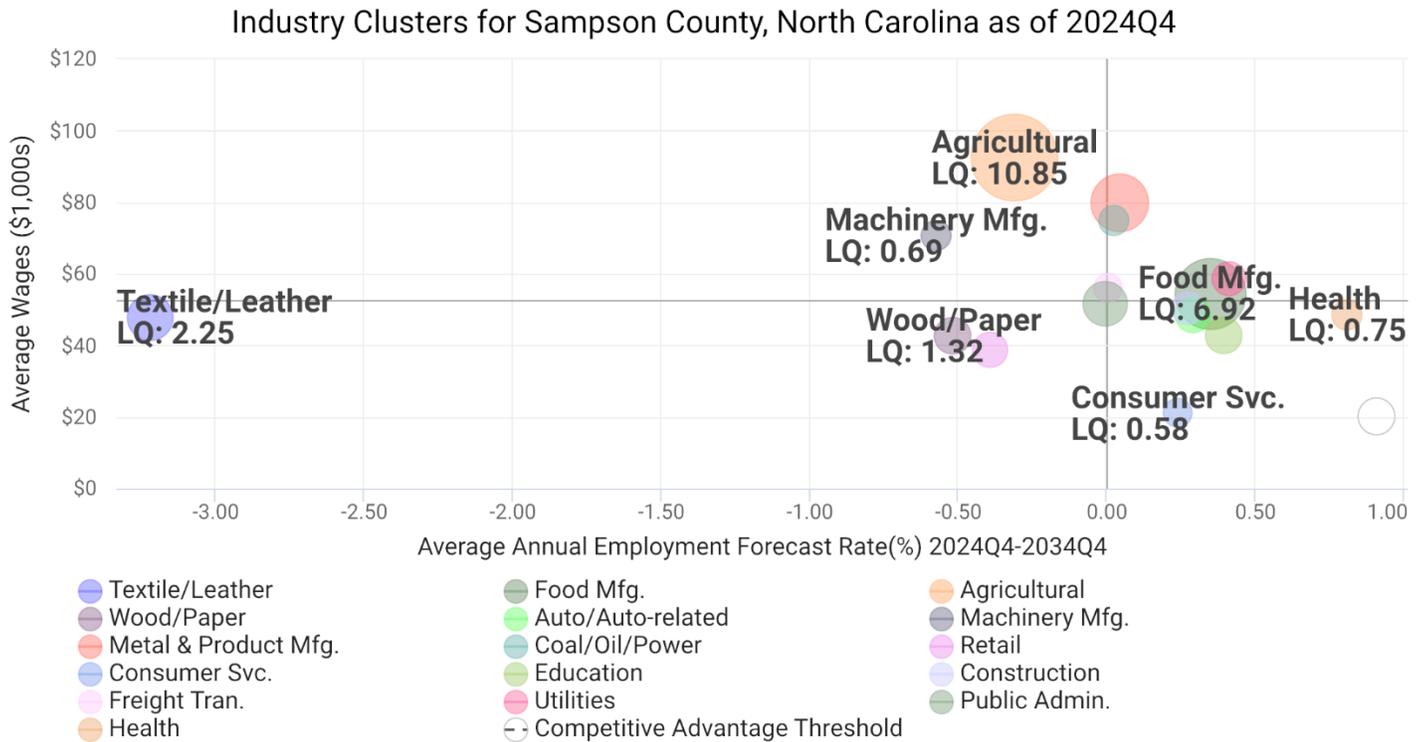


Source: JobsEQ®

Sampson County Employment by Industry 2024 Q4	Empl.	% of total Empl.	Avg Ann Wages	LQ
Manufacturing	2,895	15.09%	\$63,785	1.92
Retail Trade	2,423	12.63%	\$34,580	1.30
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2,333	12.16%	\$93,292	10.10
Health Care and Social Assistance	2,114	11.02%	\$49,763	0.73
Educational Services	1,902	9.91%	\$49,173	1.23
Public Administration	1,302	6.79%	\$51,648	1.44
Accommodation and Food Services	1,285	6.70%	\$18,986	0.77
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1,038	5.41%	\$35,302	0.89
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,022	5.33%	\$29,222	1.25
Construction	1,005	5.24%	\$50,255	0.88
Wholesale Trade	510	2.66%	\$68,171	0.71
Transportation and Warehousing	352	1.83%	\$55,207	0.37
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	342	1.78%	\$60,518	0.25
Finance and Insurance	251	1.31%	\$52,618	0.33
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	118	0.61%	\$20,768	0.29
Information	99	0.52%	\$60,745	0.27
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	99	0.52%	\$39,683	0.29
Management of Companies and Enterprises	49	0.26%	\$121,614	0.16
Utilities	33	0.17%	\$73,757	0.33
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	16	0.08%	\$77,697	0.23
Total - All Industries	19,187		\$52,481	

Source: JobsEQ®

Location quotients represent the concentration of employment in an industry compared to the national average. In Sampson County, Agriculture has a high location quotient (LQ) of 10.85. Industries to the left of the vertical line (“0”) are expected to have job losses (Machinery Manufacturing), while industries to the right of the line are expected to have growing employment (Food Manufacturing). Industries that are above the vertical line (Agriculture) pay above the average county wage. The ideal companies to recruit are in the northeast quadrant – they are expected to grow and pay above average wages.



Source: JobsEQ® Data as of 2024Q4

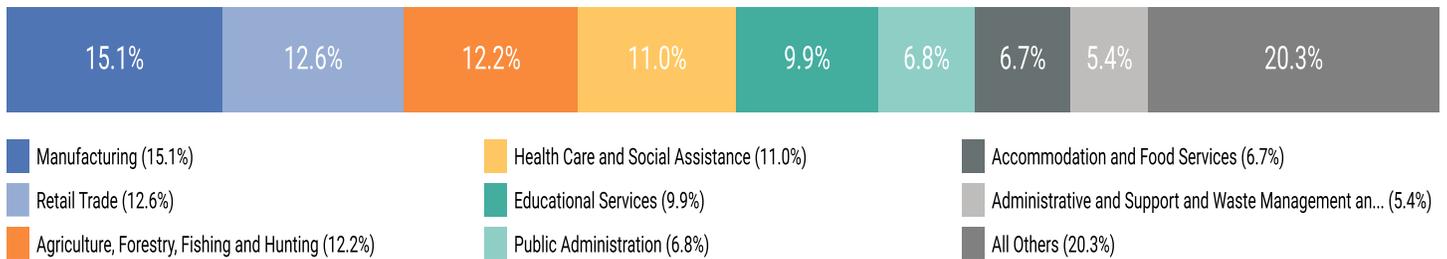
Source: JobsEQ®

Industry Clusters for Sampson County, North Carolina as of 2024 Q4

Industry Group	Average Annual Employment Forecast Rate(%) 2024Q4-2034Q4	Average Wages	LQ	Emp. By Cluster
Agricultural	-0.31	\$92,492	10.85	2,319
Food Mfg.	0.35	\$54,369	6.92	1,598
Metal & Product Mfg.	0.05	\$79,846	4.16	558
Textile/Leather	-3.22	\$47,791	2.25	83
Public Admin.	-0.01	\$51,652	2.19	1,302
Wood/Paper	-0.52	\$42,729	1.32	185
Education	0.40	\$42,810	1.23	2,356
Auto/Auto-related	0.29	\$48,524	1.17	372
Retail	-0.39	\$38,788	1.14	2,933
Utilities	0.41	\$58,675	1.05	94
Construction	0.27	\$50,389	0.93	1,092
Health	0.81	\$48,521	0.75	2,114
Coal/Oil/Power	0.02	\$74,921	0.71	103
Machinery Mfg.	-0.57	\$70,716	0.69	235
Freight Tran.	0.00	\$56,115	0.62	339

Source: JobsEQ®

Total Workers for Sampson County, North Carolina by Industry

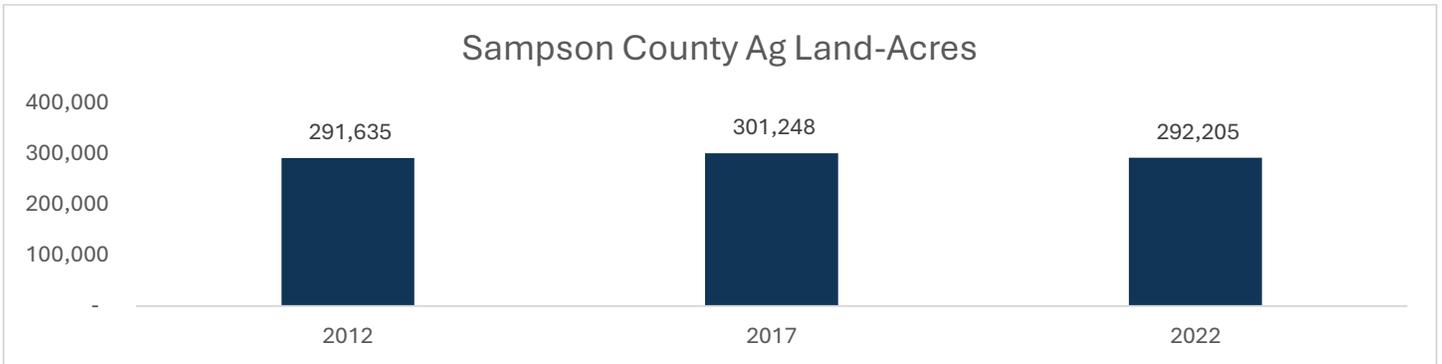


Source: JobsEQ®
 Data as of 2024Q4
 Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

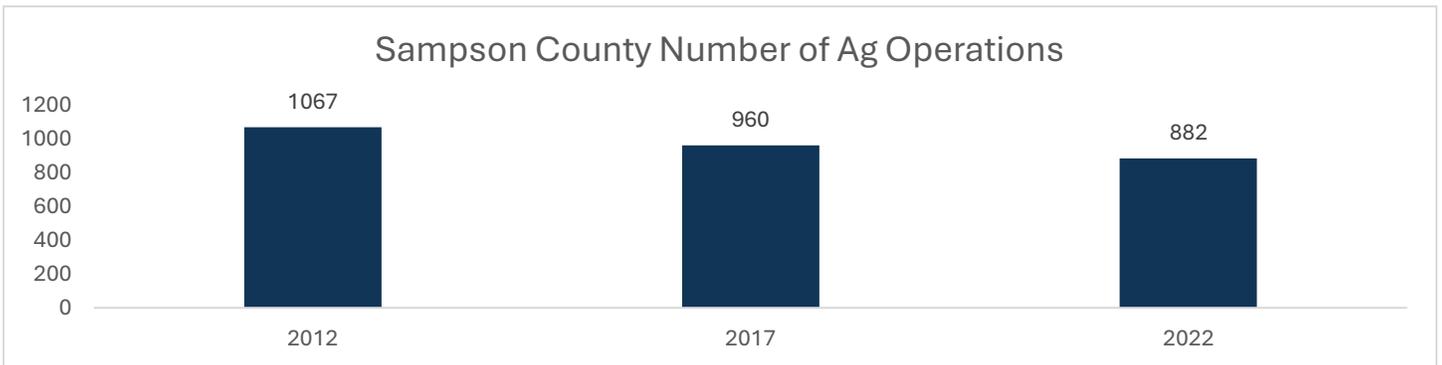
Source: JobsEQ®

Agriculture

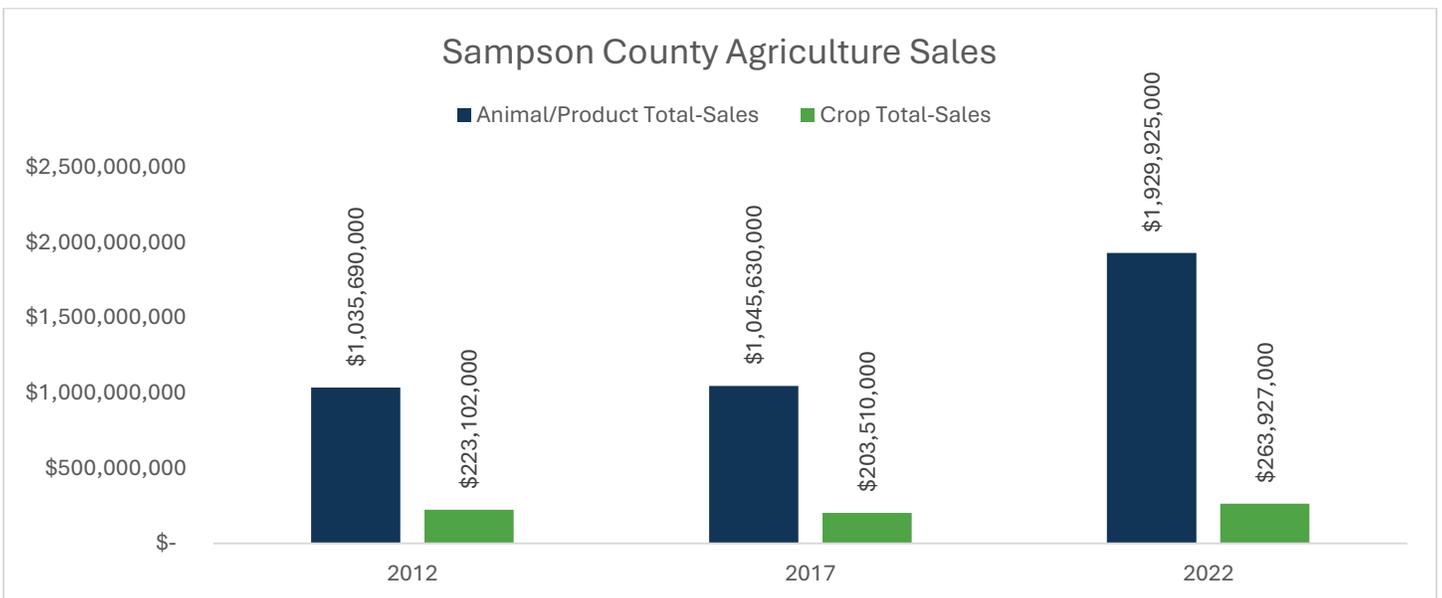
The 2025 dash 2026 county budget message stated that there are 606,611 acres of land in Sampson County and 404,588 acres are listed in Present Use Value. Of the land listed in Present Use Value, 48% is in crop, and 42% in timber, and 10% is commercial, residential and industrial.



Source: USDA

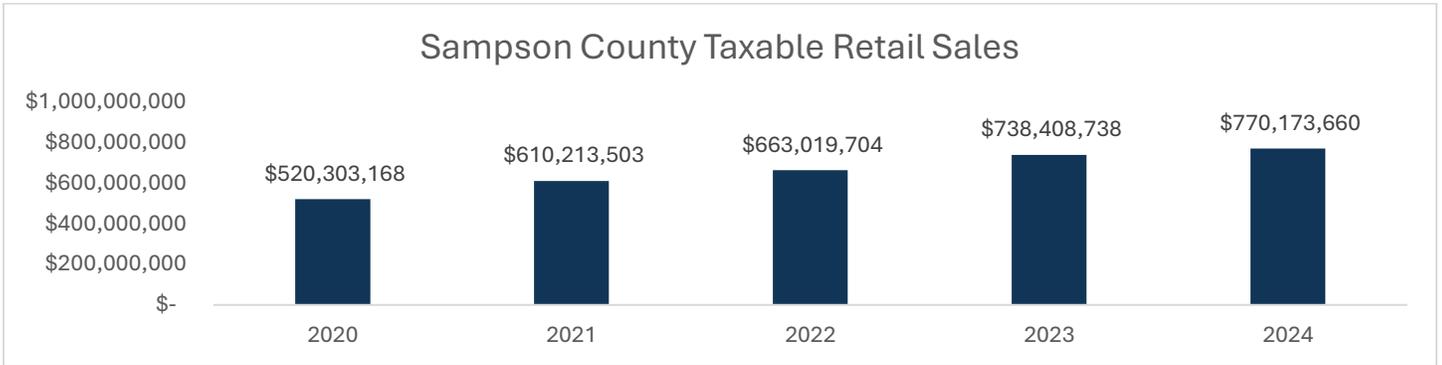


Source: USDA

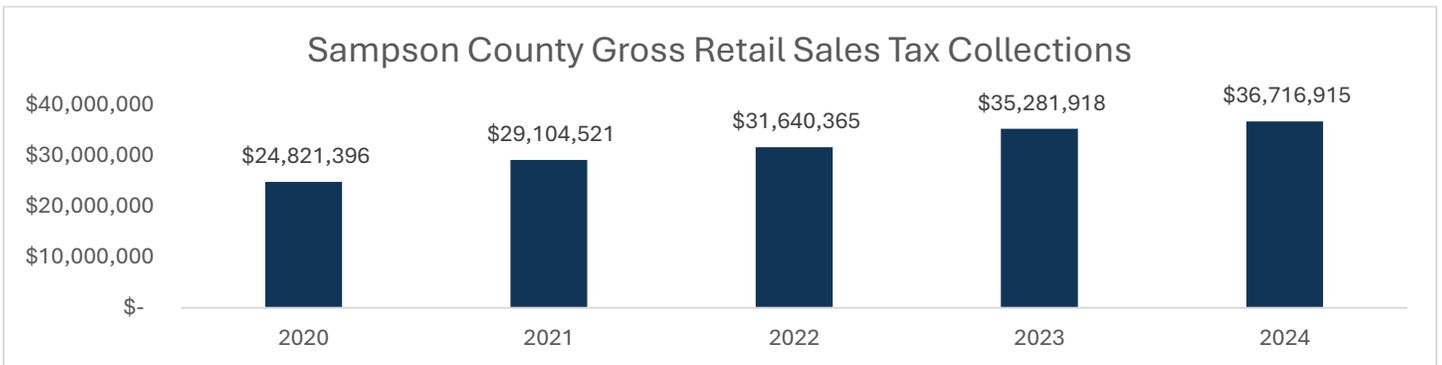


Source: USDA

Retail Sales



Source: DOR NC.gov

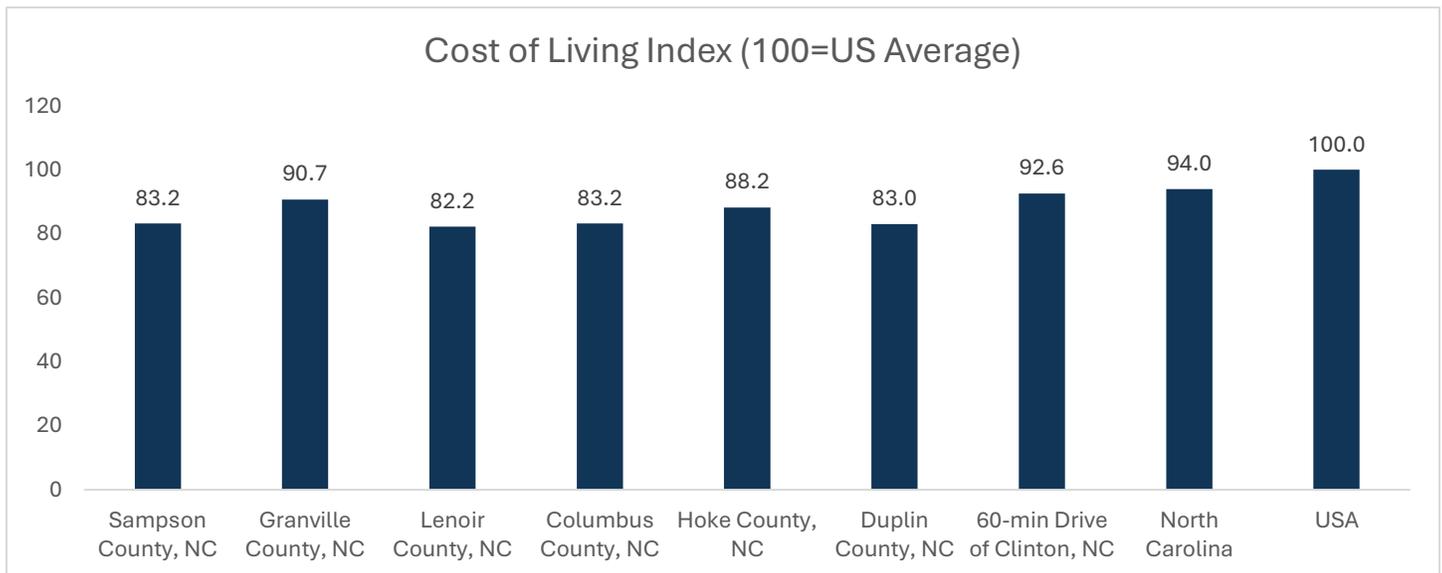


Source: DOR NC.gov

Cost of Living

2024 Cost of Living Information			
	Annual Average Salary	Cost of Living Index (Base U.S.=100)	U.S. Purchasing Power
Sampson County, NC	\$52,481	83.2	\$63,056
Lenoir County, NC	\$49,382	82.2	\$60,061
Duplin County, NC	\$50,847	83.0	\$61,290
Columbus County, NC	\$47,140	83.2	\$56,637
Hoke County, NC	\$44,780	88.2	\$50,771
Granville County, NC	\$57,104	90.7	\$62,939
60-min Drive of Clinton, NC	\$63,207	92.6	\$68,284
North Carolina	\$66,375	94.0	\$70,644
USA	\$73,145	100.0	\$73,145

Source: JobsEQ - Economic Overview



Source: JobsEQ - Economic Overview

Appendix C: Product Assessment

Sampson County has a very limited inventory of sites and buildings to attract new investment. The majority of expanding companies, approximately 80%, want or prefer an existing, modern industrial building. Today the most often requested ceiling height is 32', and the most often requested size is 100,000 SF.

There is only one business park that has all utilities on site, and it is not a North Carolina Certified Site. A certified site is a site that has due diligence, site planning, and development cost estimation complete. There is a recommendation in the strategic plan to complete the remaining due diligence on the business park to enhance its marketability. The Joe Britt Warren Business Park would be more marketable if utilities were extended and due diligence was completed.

There are only two available buildings marketed in the county, and both of them have low ceiling height. In order to attract the nearly 80% of companies that are looking for an existing building, this strategic plan recommends conducting a feasibility study to establish a spec building program.

Site Inventory

Sampson County markets five industrial sites on the state's online database. The sites range from 4.8 acres to 210 acres. Only two of the Properties, the former Tar Heel Motel Site and the Sampson Southeast Business Center, have all utilities on site. The Sampson Southeast Business Center is home to several existing businesses, is accessed off of U.S. 421 and Hwy 701, and has some due diligence completed.

Site	Acres	Utilities
Former Tar Heel Motel Site	4.8 acres	All utilities on site
Peterson Investments, LLC	54 acres	Electric on site
I-40 (Exit 355)	100 acres	Electric and water on site
Sampson Southeast Business Center	120 acres	All utilities on site
Joe Britt Warren Business Park	210 acres	Electric on site

Source: EDPNC

Building Inventory

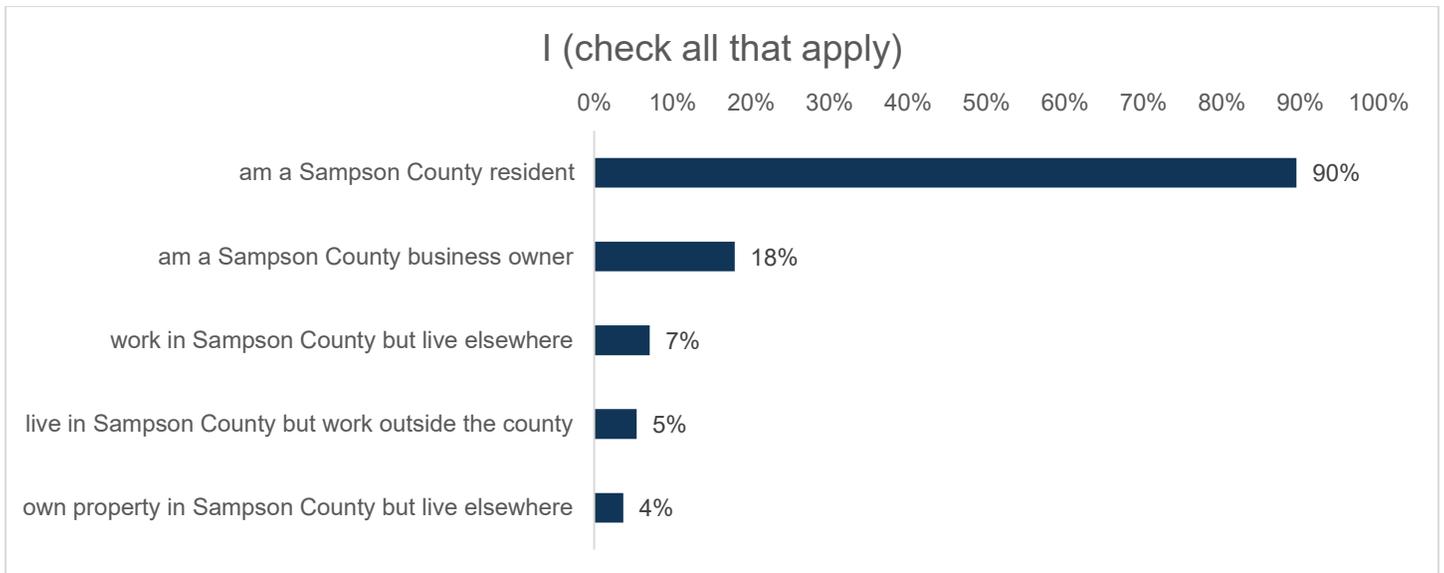
There are only two buildings marketed in Sampson County on EDPNC's website. Both are older metal warehouse buildings with low ceiling height.

Building	Square Feet	Ceiling Height
395 Pugh Road	67,500 SF	20'
321 Goldsboro Street	24,000 SF	16'

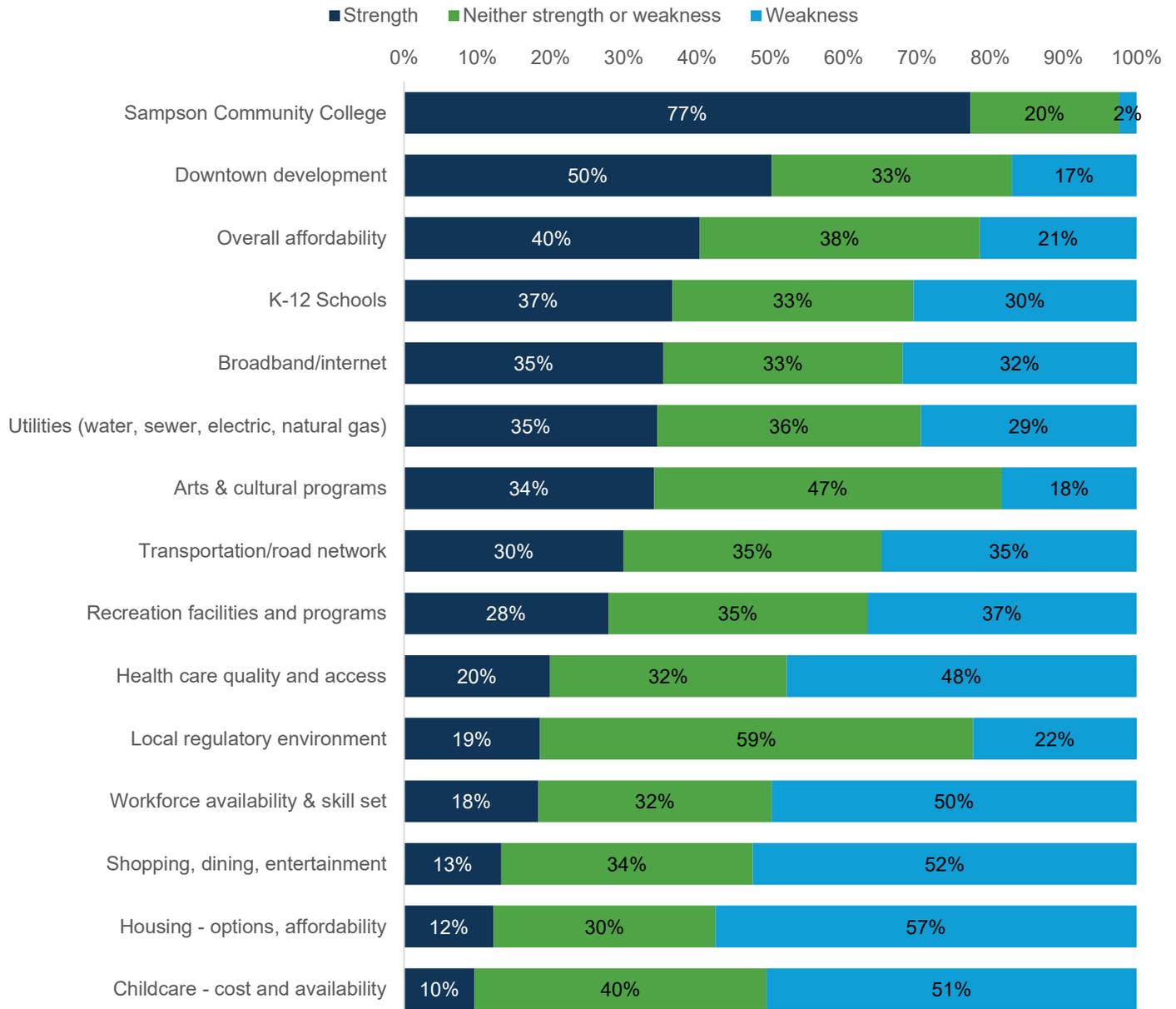
Source: EDPNC

Appendix D: Community Survey

There were 296 responses to the community survey, which was distributed electronically through contact databases and social media. Respondents live, work, or own a business or property in Sampson County.

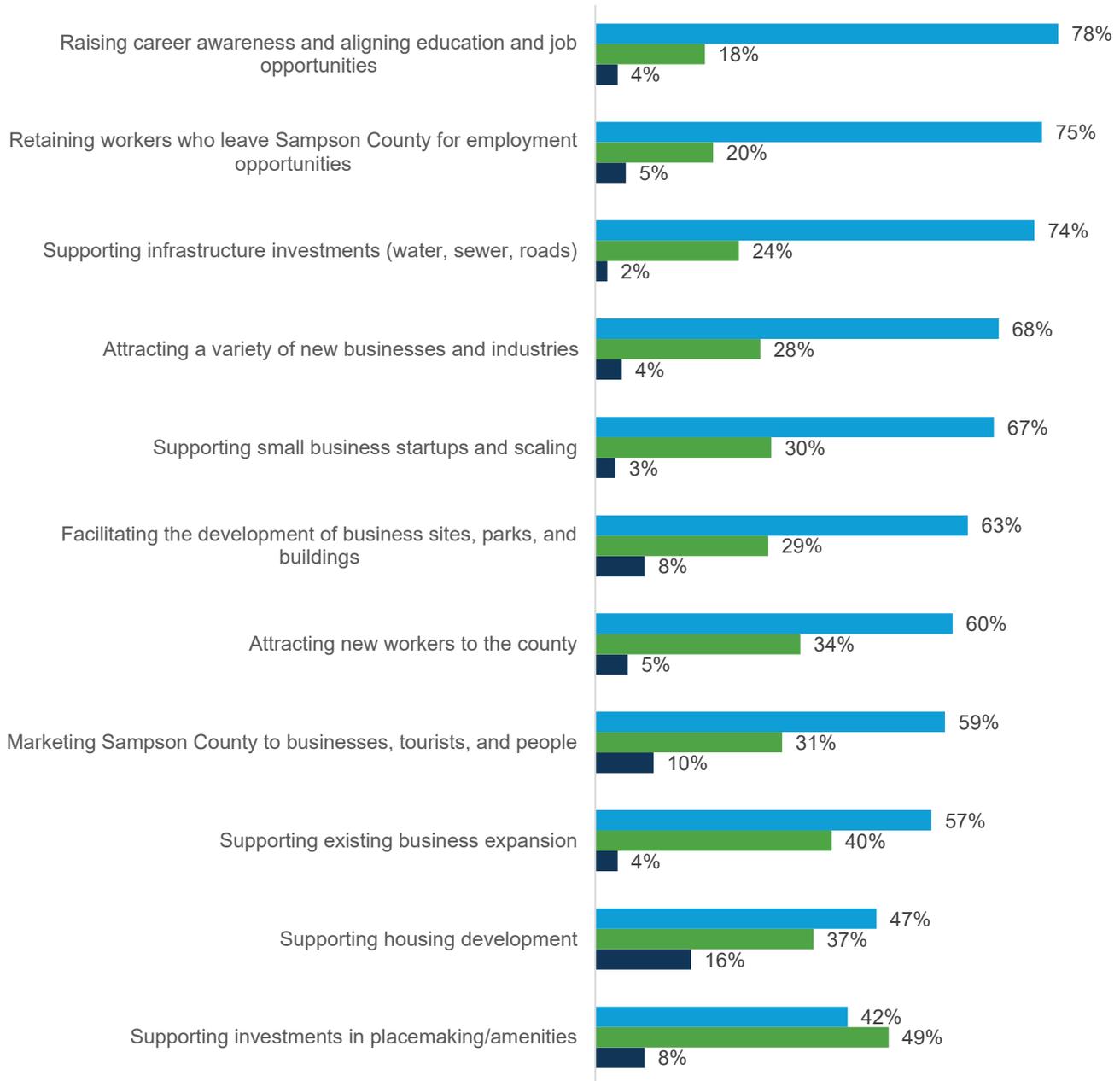


From a business perspective, rate the following as strengths, weaknesses, or neither for Sampson County.

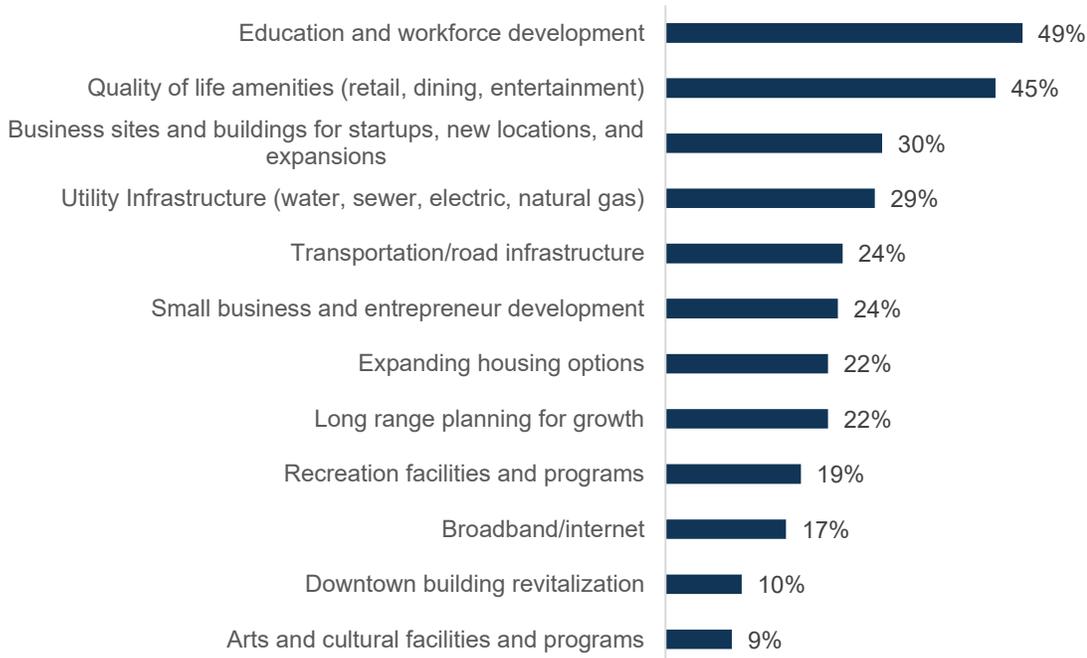


I would like to see Sampson County invest more/less resources in these economic development strategies.

■ More resources ■ About the same ■ Less resources



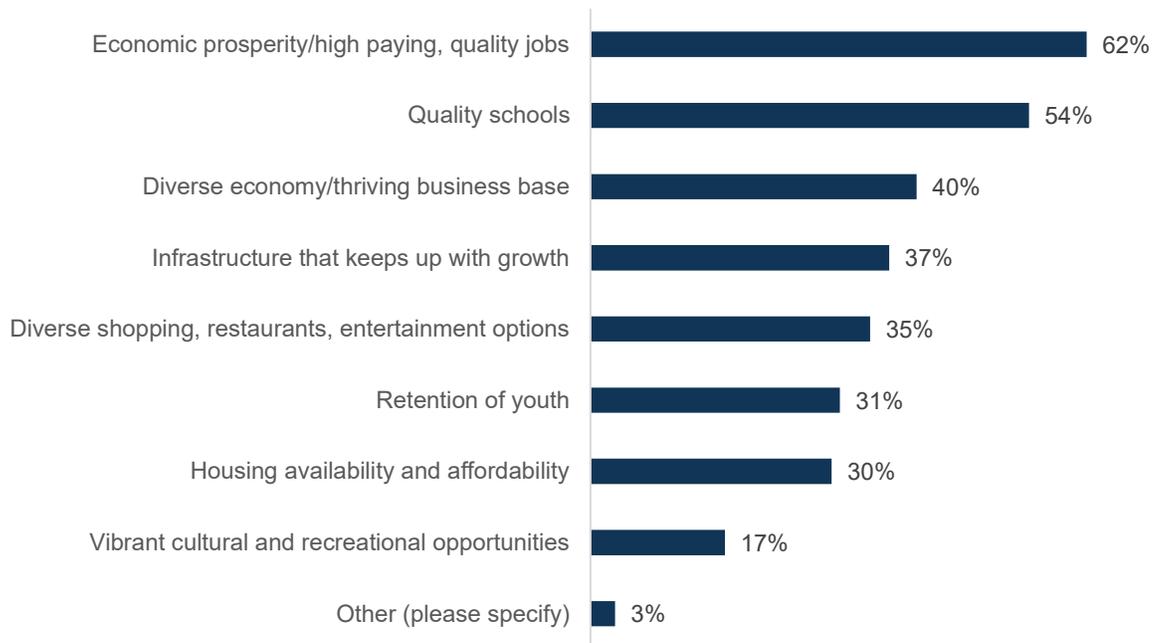
What is the most important investment Sampson County could make to ensure long-term, sustainable economic growth? CHOOSE THREE.



Rank the following economic development strategies with 1 being the highest and 7 being the lowest.

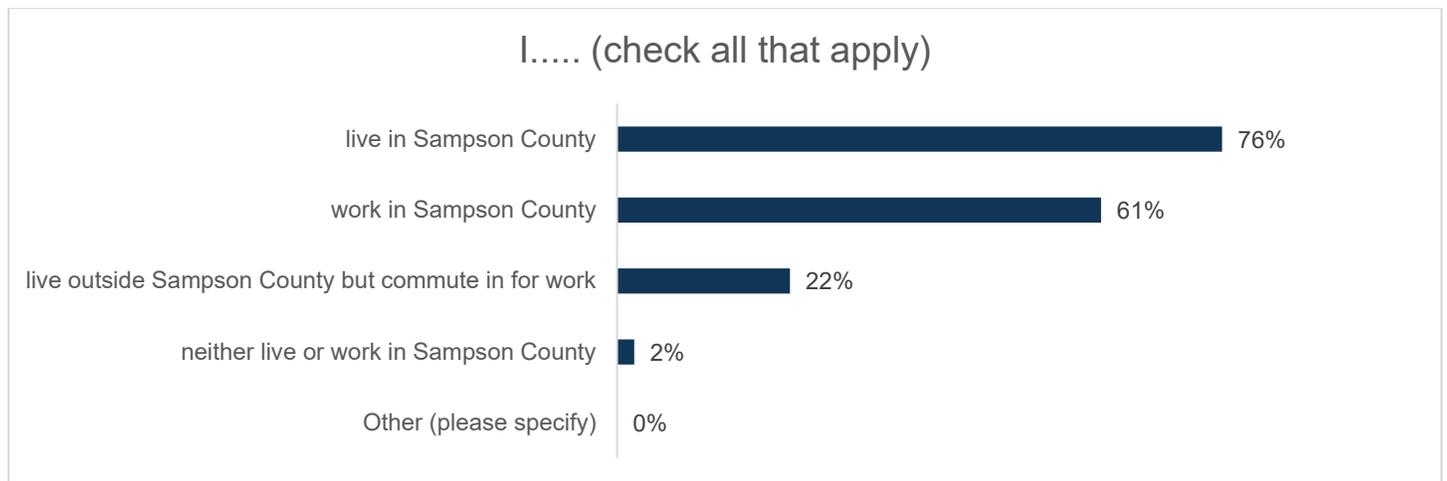
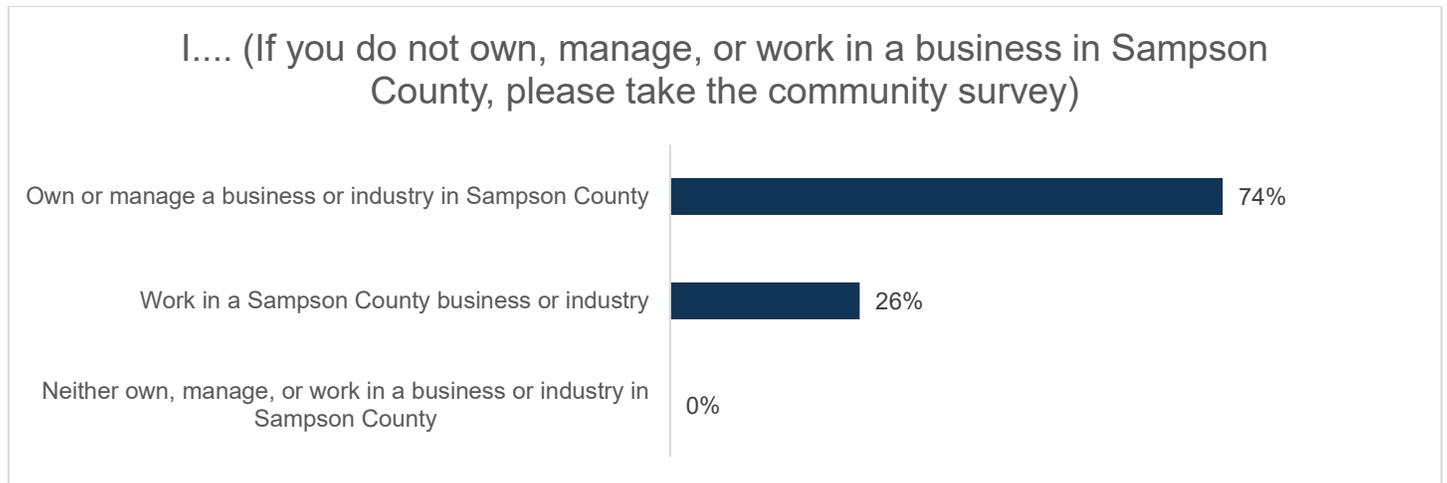


What does success in economic development look like for Sampson County? CHOOSE THREE.

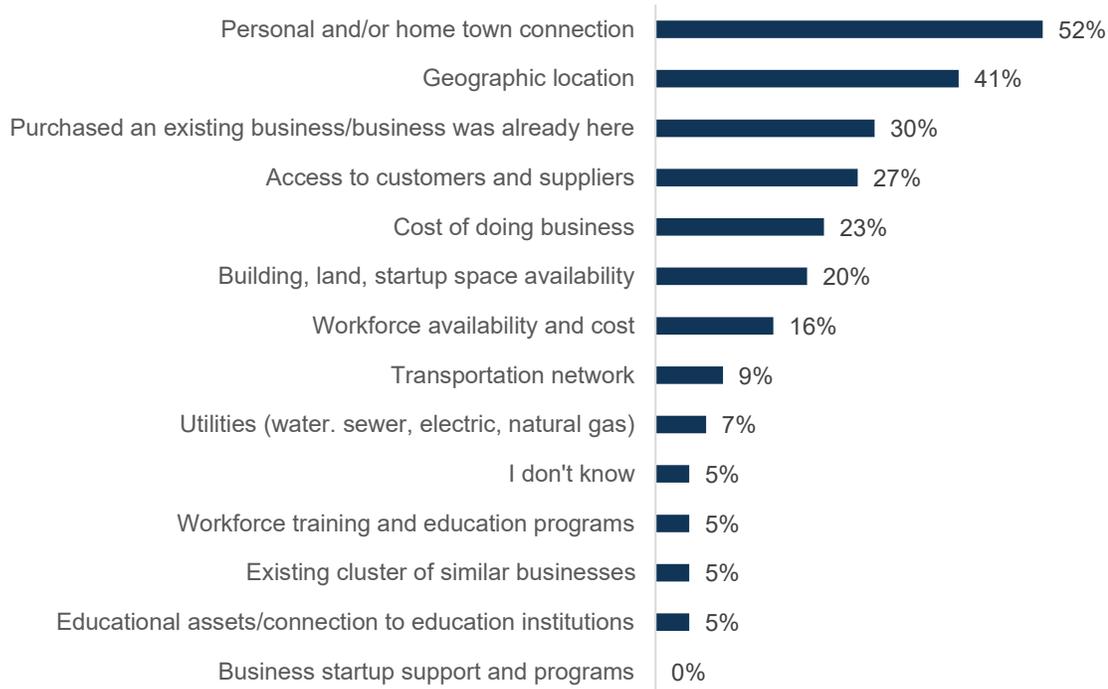


Appendix E: Business Survey

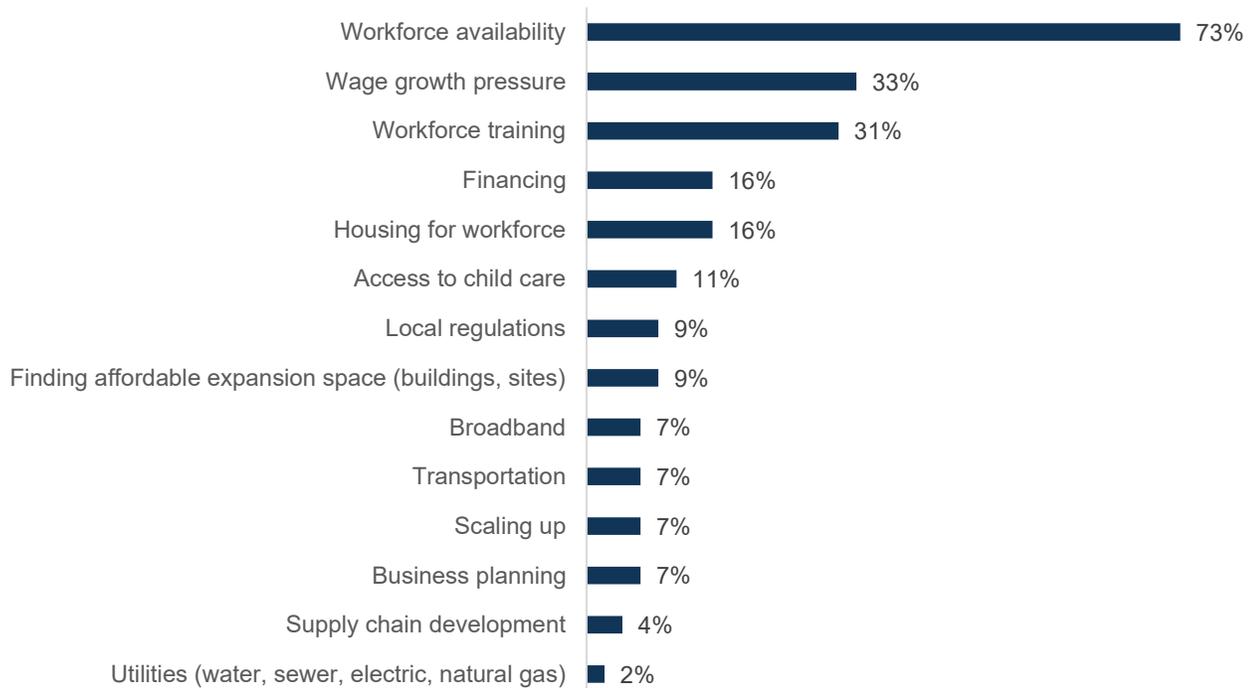
The online business survey was distributed to contact databases of businesses and via social media. There were 47 responses, most are long-time manufacturing businesses.



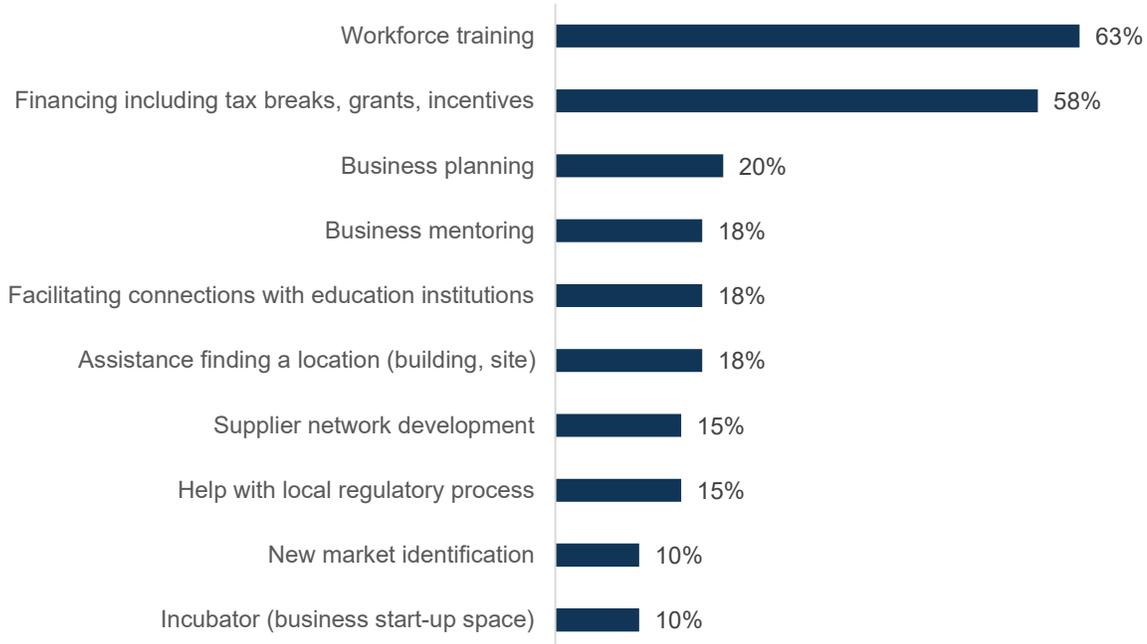
Why did your company locate or start up in Sampson County? Choose all that apply.



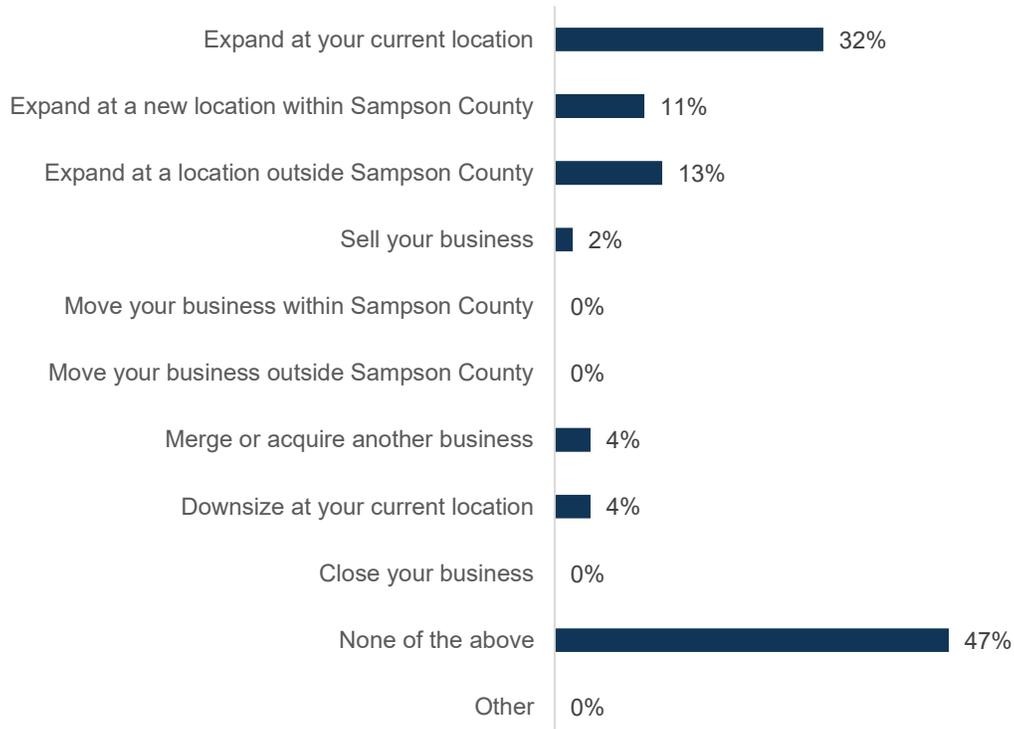
What are your main challenges to sustaining and growing your business/industry? Choose all that apply.



What business assistance would have been helpful when you started your business or that you believe would be helpful to a new business starting in Sampson County today? Choose all that apply.

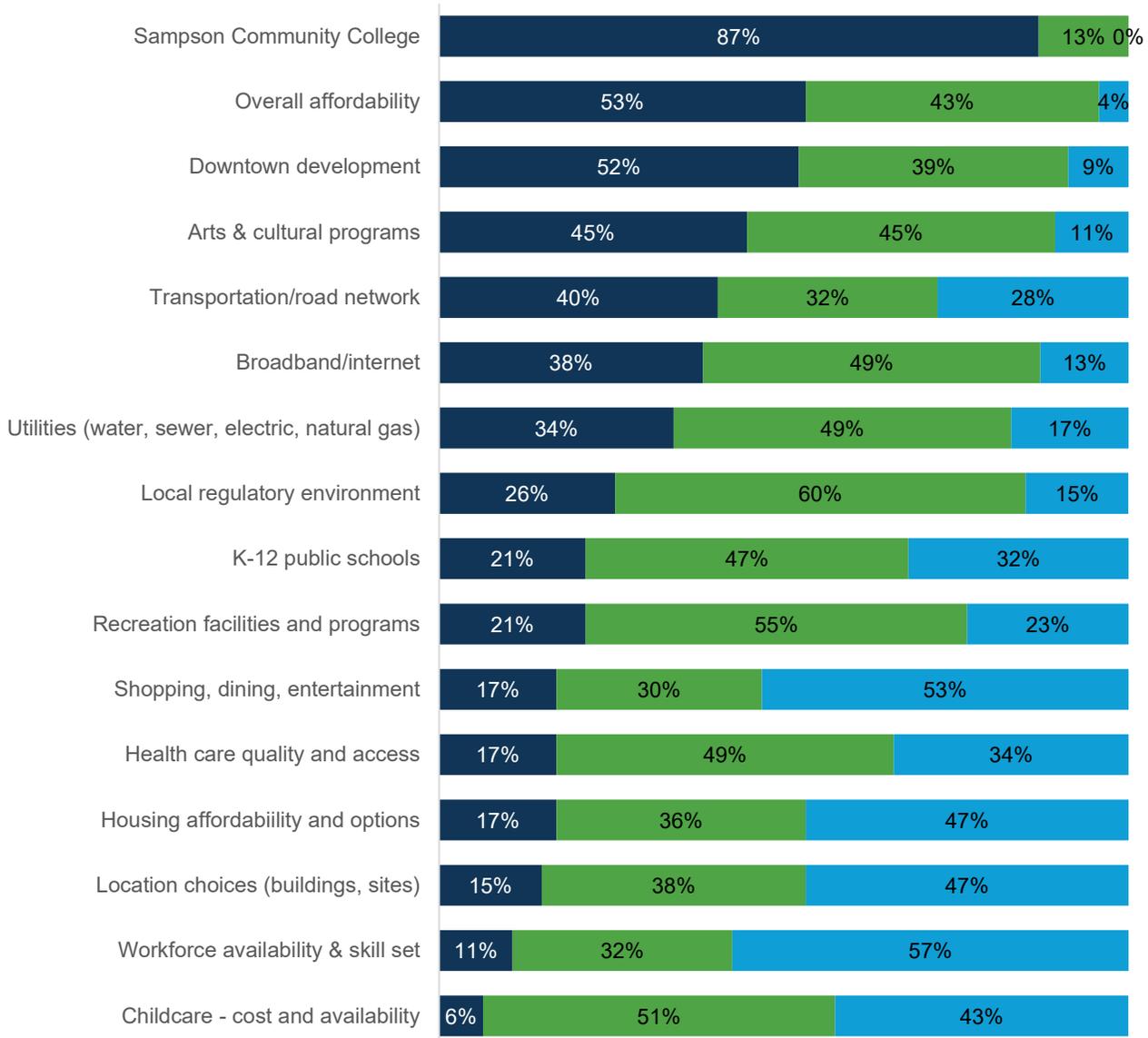


Are you currently planning to... Choose all that apply.



From a business perspective, rate the following as strengths, weaknesses, or neither for Sampson County.

■ Strength ■ Neither strength or weakness ■ Weakness



I would like to see Sampson County invest more/less resources in these economic development strategies.

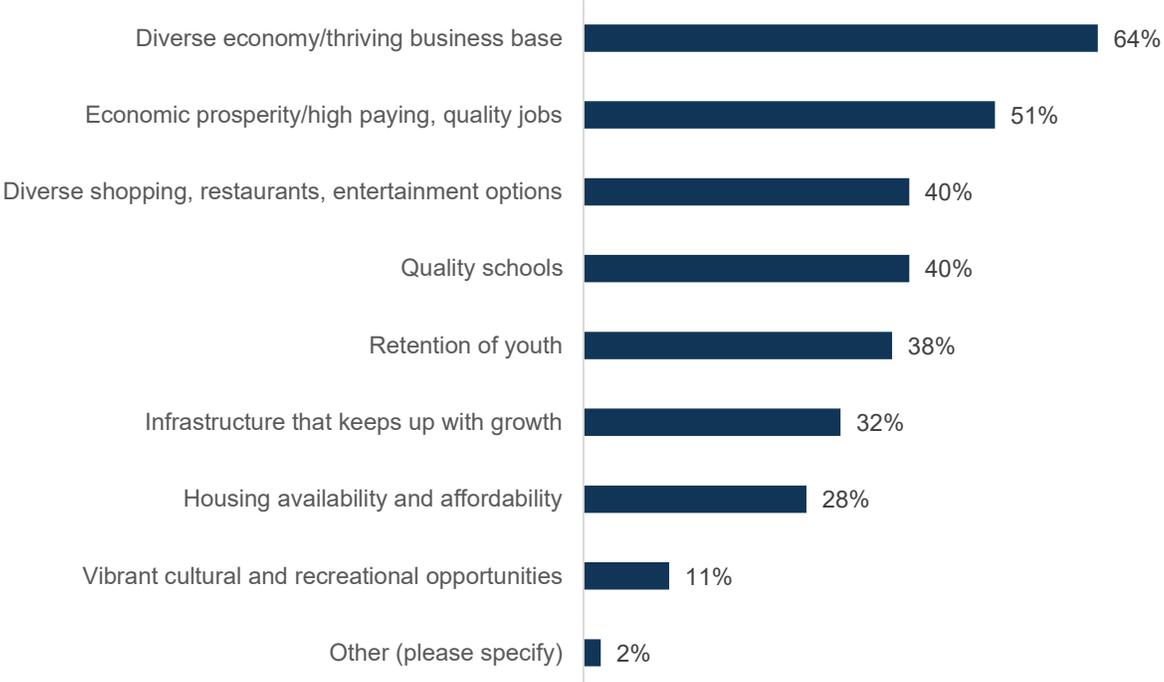
■ More resources ■ About the same ■ Less resources



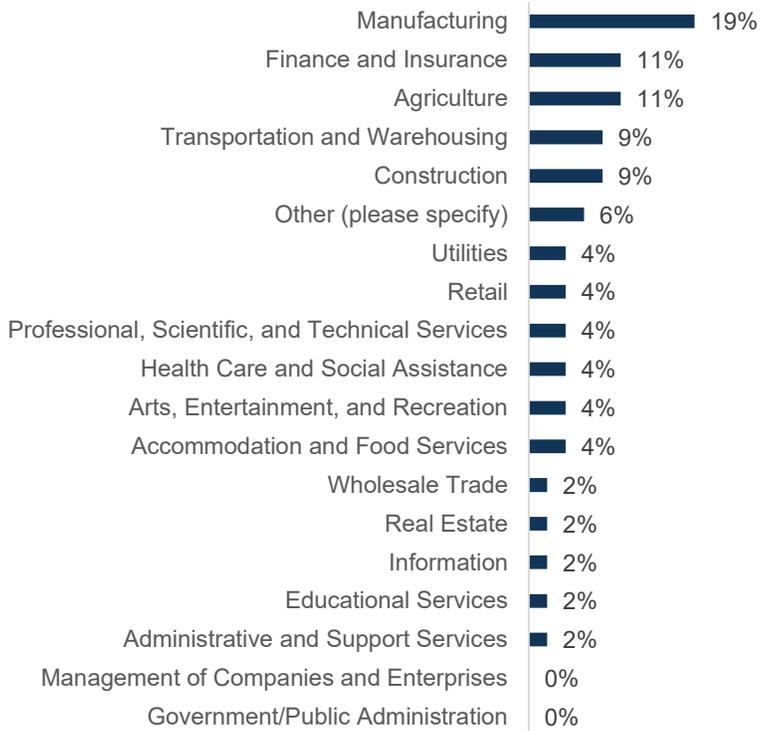
What are the most important investments Sampson County could make to ensure long-term, sustainable economic growth? CHOOSE THREE.



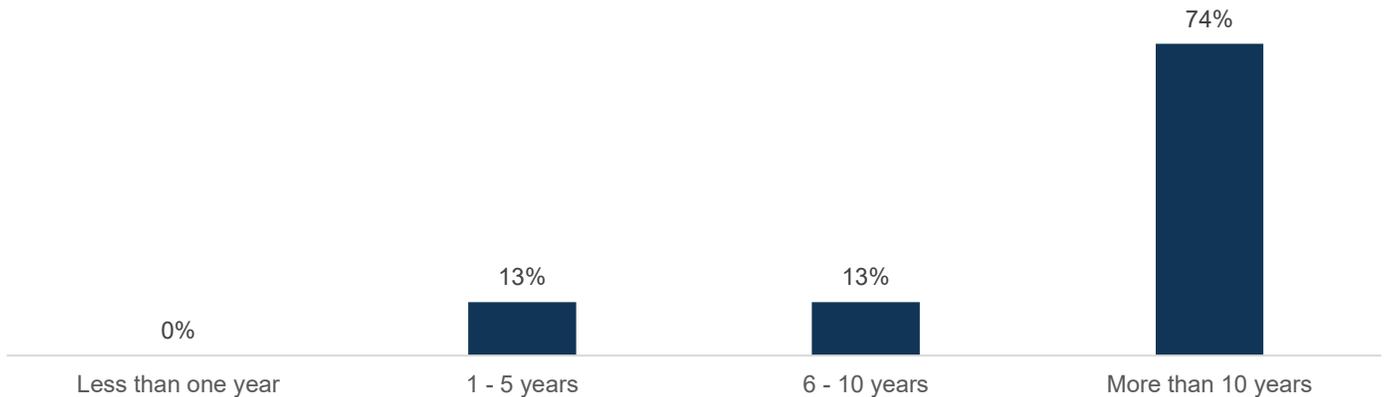
What does success in economic development look like for Sampson County? CHOOSE THREE.



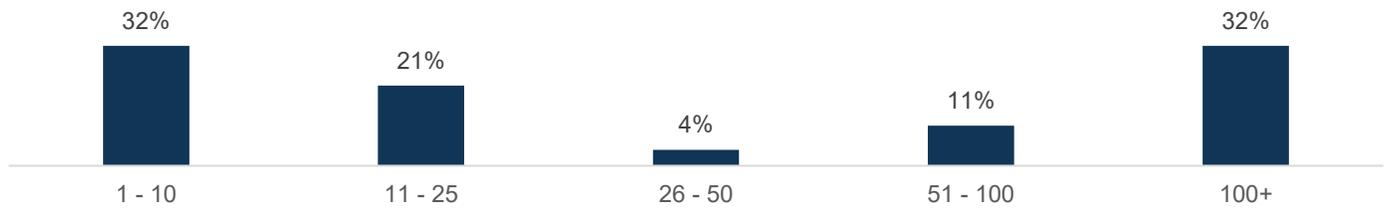
What business sector most closely matches your business?



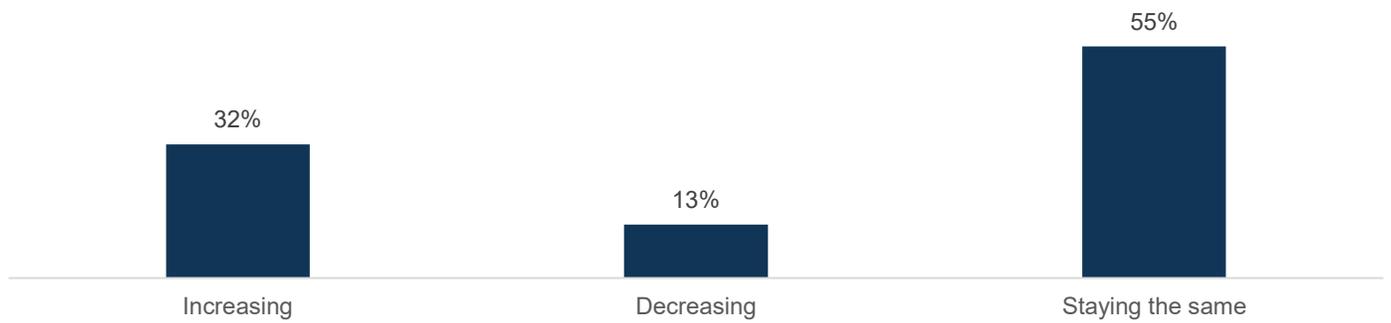
How many years has your business been operating?



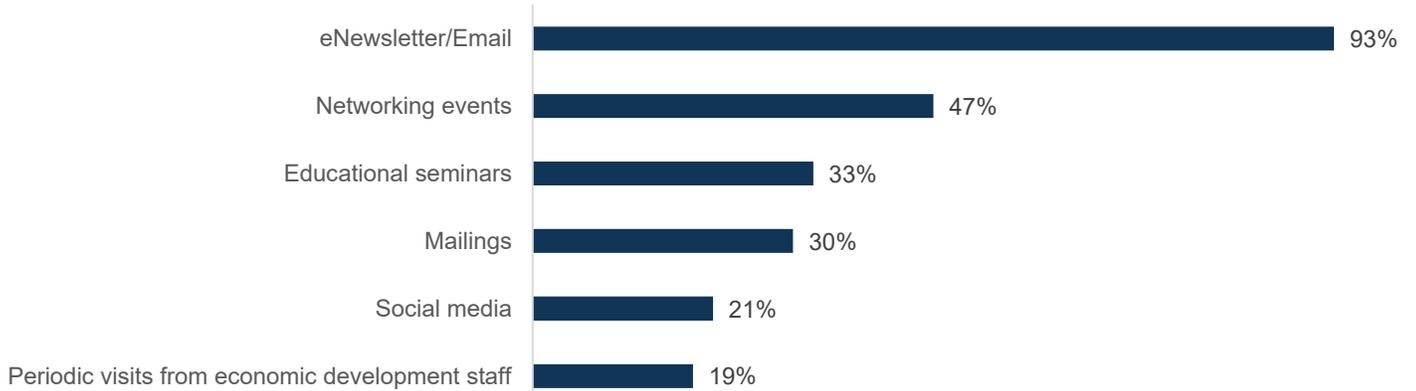
How many employees, full-time equivalents, are employed in your business?



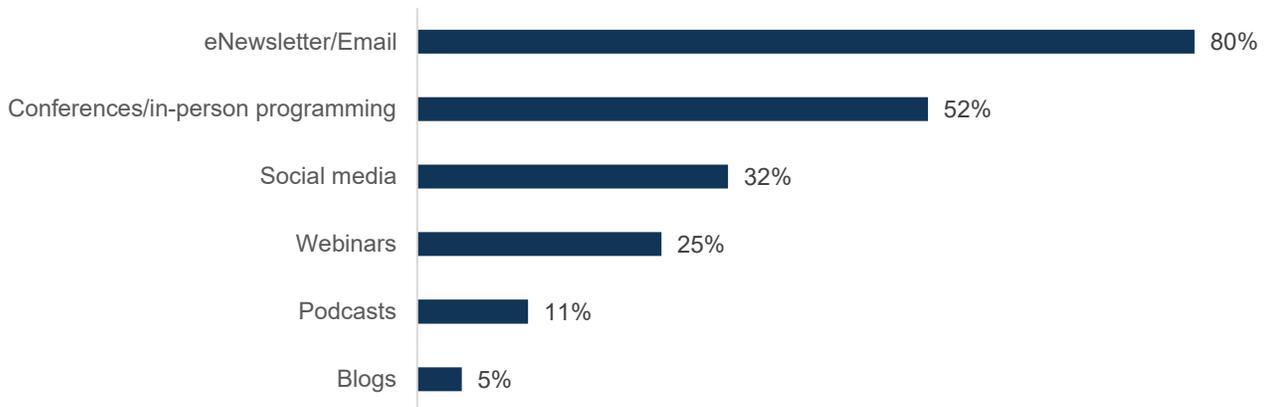
Our number of workers is...



How would you like to be contacted with information from Sampson County Economic Development? Choose all that apply.



What is your preferred method to consume information that can help you grow your business? Choose all that apply.



Steering Committee

The Steering Committee provided input into the SWOT Analysis, vetted strategies, reviewed findings and assessments, and guided the strategic planning process. The team represents a wide range of expertise which was leveraged in the strategic planning process. Special thanks to Ray Jordan whose contributions and insights were invaluable.

- Dr. Linda Brunson, Chair, City of Clinton School Board
- Catherine Ezzell-Joyner, Ezzell Trucking, Inc.
- Gary Herring, Mary Mack's, Inc.
- Allen McLamb, Chair, Sampson County Board of Commissioners
- Bill Scott, Butler & Faircloth Realtors
- Chuck Spell, Hog Slat, Inc., Chair SECD Advisory Board and Clinton 100 Committee
- Dr. William J. Starling, President, Sampson Community College
- Dickie Walters, Council Member, Town of Salemburg & Star Communications
- Craig Warren, Mayor, Town of Newton Grove
- Jeffrey Hudson, Interim County Manager, County of Sampson
- Ray Jordan, Director, Sampson County Economic Development
- Jean Ko, PIO, County of Sampson

Study Sponsor and Consultant



SAMPSON COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

[Sampson County Economic Development](#) leverages the region's strengths in agriculture, advanced manufacturing, and logistics. With a strategic location near I-40 and within a 60-minute drive of major metropolitan areas, Sampson County offers businesses access to robust infrastructure, a skilled labor force, and affordable operating costs. Economic development efforts also emphasize workforce readiness, site development, and maintaining a business-friendly climate that supports both new investment and the expansion of existing companies.



[Creative EDC](#) provides strategic planning, product development, organizational development, and economic impact analysis services to communities.