



**City of High Springs
Economic
Development Task
Force**

**Final Report and
Recommendations
October 23, 2008**

Participants include:

The Economic Development Task Force:

- Larry Travis – Chair, Mayor of the City of High Springs
- Heather Clarich – Vice Chair, High Springs Chamber of Commerce / Banker
- Tony Boothby – High Springs Main Street / Realtor
- Gene Levine – High Springs Plan Board / Consultant
- Lucie Regensdorf – High Springs Code Enforcement Board / Business Owner
- Ronald Wilson – High Springs Public Safety Committee
- Sue Weller – High Springs Tree Board
- Gary Bennett – Business Owner/ Manager
- Dennis Lee – Land owner / Developer
- George Wang – Realtor/ Economic Development Rep./ Attorney
- Bobby Summers – Alternate/ Citizen / Realtor
- Reginald Barker – Alternate/ Open

City Staff:

- James Drumm - City Manager
- Christian Popoli - City planner
- Kevin Verro- Management Analysts
- Jenny Parham – Deputy City Clerk
- Sandy Richmond – Executive Sectary, City Clerks Office

Presenters

- Ann Collette of The Gainesville Chamber Of Commerce
- Rick Drummond, Assistant County Manager
- Jane Moraski, of The North Central Florida Regional Planning Council
- Mary Helen Blakesly, Governor’s Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development
- Christen Popoli , High Springs City Planner
- Gene Boles, FAICP, Director of the Center for Building Better Communities, University of Florida, High Springs Planning Advisor

Introduction:

The High Springs Economic Development Task Force was established as a Community based advisory group for the purpose of making recommendations to City Commission regarding the economic development needs facing the City of High Springs. The Task Force was given two objectives:

1. Investigate viable short and long term economic development needs.
2. Investigate potential business recruitment plans.

This report details the findings of our investigation and outlines our recommended actions and strategies to develop and improve the business community of High Springs.

Background

The City Commission recognized a need for an economic strategy in order to recruit new business, as well as maintain and expand existing business to ensure the future economic vitality of the City.

In March of 2008, the High Springs City Commission established the Economic Development Task Force. This twelve member Task Force was recruited from within the community in order to solicit the knowledge, skills and expertise in business affairs that exists in and around High Springs. The Task Force was commissioned to address High Springs' economic situation by investigating viable short and long term economic development needs, and potential business recruitment plans. The task force is to then report its findings and make recommendations regarding economic development strategy for consideration by the City Commission no later than October 30, 2008. Unless reauthorized by the City Commission the Economic Development Task Force is to dissolve on November 4, 2008.

Membership

This blue ribbon Task Force provided broad representation of the business community in and around the City of High Springs.

The twelve voting members of the task force are:

1. Larry Travis – Chair, Mayor of the City of High Springs
2. Heather Clarich – Vice Chair, High Springs Chamber of Commerce / Banker
3. Tony Boothby – High Springs Main Street / Realtor
4. Gene Levine – High Springs Plan Board / Consultant
5. Lucie Regensdorf – High Springs Code Enforcement Board / Business Owner
6. Ronald Wilson – High Springs Public Safety Committee
7. Sue Weller – High Springs Tree Board
8. Gary Bennett – Business Owner/ Manager
9. Dennis Lee – Land Owner / Developer
10. George Wang – Realtor/ Economic Development Rep./ Attorney
11. Bobby Summers – Alternate/ Citizen / Realtor
12. Reginald Barker – Alternate/ Open

Ex-officio members of the task force include:

1. James Drumm - City Manager
2. Christian Popoli - City planner
3. Kevin Verro- Management Analysts

The agendas and minutes of the task force were recorded by:

1. Jenny Parham – Deputy City Clerk
2. Sandy Richmond – Executive Secretary, City Manager’s Office

Mission Statement

To provide recommendations to City Commission that the Economic Development Task Force believes will help to grow and enhance sustainable business, both in the short and long term, while being sensitive to the issues of local culture, community character and residents quality of life.

Discussion

The Economic Development Task Force held fifteen (15) meetings between March and October of 2008 to develop this report and make these recommendations. Throughout the process, the Task Force has been guided by the purpose of assisting the City Commission in the development of an Economic Development Strategy.

The current economic well being of High Springs is driven by its existing business and industry. Research indicates that as many as seventy percent of new jobs in communities, like ours, are the result of local business expansion. In order to develop a more sustainable community, both in terms of economic and social viability, the City of High Springs must also encourage and solicit new businesses.

The City should identify the needs of existing and new businesses to assist with expansion and site locations and regulatory and permitting issues, and minimizing obstacles to growth and expansion. The strategic plan for economic development in High Springs must be a private and public partnership to guide and stimulate economic growth in our City. The focus of our plan must be to maintain and support sound economic growth for our City’s needs and opportunities.

During the first series of meetings, the Task Force developed their vision Statement and defined economic development, as follows:

Vision Statement

High Springs is an expanding community looking for partners who will offer opportunities throughout all major sectors of employment. High Springs values its roots and is planning for and embracing the future. High Springs will adopt a philosophy allowing for sustainable development that enhances economic opportunity and community well-being while protecting and restoring the natural environment, where appropriate. High Springs will encourage well-planned growth without sacrificing High Springs’ natural beauty and rural home town character. High Springs will offer attractive opportunities to interested businesses taking advantage of our key location, rail access, local ecological assets and beautiful surroundings. High Springs will protect our existing economic base and encourage future industrial and commercial growth. Gateways to downtown will reflect the community’s distinct character. Newly developing areas will offer appropriate sustainable opportunities to enhance the quality

of life of our citizens by providing improved access to employment opportunities, services, and goods though encouraged commercial, office, and light industrial development. High Springs will capitalize on its short distance from a vibrant interstate transportation web and its utility infrastructure. High Springs will foster and promote ecological tourism that takes advantage of its proximity to the Santa Fe, Suwannee, and Ichetucknee Rivers and associated springs, and capitalize on heritage tourist opportunities. High Springs will encourage re-investment in its natural and cultural resources.

Definition of Economic Development

Economic development is the attraction, creation, retention and improvement of the local business environment including:

- Encouragement of existing business to remain and expand.
- Establishment of new business, industry, and residential development

The Economic Development Task Force recommends the followings goals and objectives.

Goal #1 – *Project a welcoming image with open lines of communication to all those interested in doing business in High Springs.*

Objectives:

- Create or enhance a branded image for the community.
- Create an Economic development webpage, with appropriate links, and place it on the City's website.
- Create a one stop center for interested parties to acquire critical information to expand start, develop, or operate a business in High Springs.
- Foster an atmosphere of partnership between City government, local businesses, and community organizations
- Inform new and existing business/ industry regarding resources, programs, and opportunities.

Goal #2 – *Expedite Development approval Process.*

Objectives:

- Encourage and assist land owners to plan for future business development; including but not limited to utility, storm water, and traffic issues.
- The City should plan, develop, expand and better utilize our existing utilities systems
- Promote and assist urban reserve landowners to voluntarily annex
- Encourage site planning for tracts of land greater than 10 acres within city limits.
- Assist landowners to seek opportunities to capitalize on grants and programs, such as; Community Development Block Grants, Progress Energy or other financial assistance programs.

- Expedite the time frame from initial interest to operational site with the goal not to exceed nine months
- Establish municipal incentives for any qualified existing or relocating business or industry. Some examples may include but are not limited to:
 - Tax abatement for a limited number of years.
 - "Fast track" zoning.
 - Cooperation between City and developer on infrastructure improvements and extensions (i.e. water, sewer, roads).
 - Impact fee waivers, rebates, or reductions

Goal #3 – Develop an Economic Plan that attracts new businesses, encourages growth and development of the city, and enhances economic prosperity, diversity, and opportunity.

Objectives:

- Develop a strategic marketing plan with a long-term vision to create a marketable position for the City of High Springs.
- Create a flexible development plan for the “Gateway” corridors that appropriately utilizes available lands (i.e. restaurants, shopping centers, residential real-estate, office parks, etc).
- Encourage economic diversity to prepare for swings in economic conditions.
- Assemble regional economic development allies to establish protocol for new and existing business.
- Create cooperative marketing efforts with adjoining communities.
- Review and remove regulatory barriers to business.
 - i.e. restrictions on the sale of alcoholic beverages.
 - i.e. restrictions on large retail centers
- Encourage ancillary industries (book stores, clothing stores, restaurants, Small business) to capture “imported as well as local money”
- Open or partner to create a “Business Incubator.”
- Pursue the establishment of Enterprise Zones and Economic Development Districts.

Goal # 4- Actively promote High Springs to attract, retain and expand business opportunities.

Objectives:

- Catalogue and maintain the current inventory of available buildings, parcels, and large tracts of land.
- Advertise in applicable media and government entities:
 - Current property inventory (as previously stated)
 - Access to:

- ◆ Rail
- ◆ Interstate highway
- ◆ State highway
- Proximity to
 - ◆ The City of Gainesville and surrounding communities.
 - ◆ Gainesville Regional Airport
 - ◆ The University of Florida.
- North Central Florida location with the ability to reach any City and Sea Port between Atlanta, Miami, Pensacola and Jacksonville within a five (5) hour drive.
- Develop and capitalize on High Springs' heritage and its abundant natural resources.
 - Partner with Main Street Program, Chamber of Commerce, Alachua County Tourism Development, and other organizations to create attractions and activities in High Springs.
 - ◆ Festivals such as: Pioneer days, Fall Festival.
 - ◆ River and Spring based activities such as: Cave Diving, Snorkeling, canoeing and kayaking, tubing, boating, Fishing etc.
 - ◆ Merchant and retail center based events such as: Fantastic Fridays, Farmers Market.
 - ◆ Specialty events such as: annual Rotary Classic Car show, Parades, public concerts, etc.

Recommended actions

The Economic Development Task Force recommends that City Commission adopt the report and implement the task force recommendations.