Caswell County

Economic Development Action Plan

Creative Economic Development Consulting

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **2**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN **3**

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS **8**

APPENDICES

- **APPENDIX A: SWOT ANALYSIS** **9**
- **APPENDIX B: CASWELL COUNTY PARTNERS** **14**
- **APPENDIX C: ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA** **15**
- **APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS** **25**

STUDY SPONSOR & CONSULTANT **322**

Executive Summary

Caswell County is working hard to reinvigorate its economy. Citizens and leaders alike want more local jobs that pay a better-than-average wage. Those new jobs will lead to an increased tax base, which in turn will support improved government services, economic diversification to help weather recessions, and reduced out-commuting, improving the quality of life. The goal of better paying jobs also addresses the persistent low income levels in the county and encourages higher skill levels in the workforce. To develop this Action Plan for Economic Development, Caswell County engaged citizens in surveys, community leaders in a focus group, and the Economic Development Advisory Committee for input. The goals recommended in this action plan are priorities identified by the citizens and leaders of the county. We encourage a full read of this report and the supporting research to fully understand the rationale of the action plan.

Economic Development Goals and Strategies Summary

Goal: Increase Marketing and Communications to Leverage Existing Resources and Raise Awareness of Caswell County as a Location for Business, Tourists, and New Residents

- *Strategy: Create and maintain an economic development website separate from the county government website.*
- *Strategy: Bring together partner agencies for collaboration and communication.*
- *Strategy: Use social media and e-communications to raise awareness of Caswell County.*
- *Strategy: Create and maintain a common calendar of events.*

Goal: Increase Support to Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses

- *Strategy: Entrepreneurship training*
- *Strategy: Explore a mixed-use incubator facility.*
- *Strategy: Explore an ag-related enterprise center.*

Goal: Recruit More People to Caswell County

- *Strategy: Create a database of people with a personal connection to Caswell County for a recruitment campaign.*
- *Strategy: Create an endowment at PCC that will provide free community college tuition to high school graduates.*
- *Strategy: Get creative with housing development.*

Goal: Engage and Coordinate Connectivity

- *Strategy: Identify best practices in serving rural areas and funding telecommunications networks.*
- *Strategy: Quantify the gaps and telecommunications needs.*

Economic Development Action Plan

The overall goal of Caswell County Economic Development is to create more local jobs that pay a better-than-average wage. Along with more jobs will come an increased tax base, economic diversification, and reduced out-commuting. Working on these goals will also address low-income levels and the limited, small local market for goods and services. It will also indirectly encourage higher education and skill levels in order to secure new jobs.

Caswell County's greatest opportunities for local job creation will come from existing business growth, small business expansion, new business start-ups, and business recruitment. Approximately 65%-75% of new investment and job creation come from existing businesses. Small business and sole proprietors make up 88% of employment in the county. Outside businesses that will find Caswell County's assets attractive will most likely be small companies who want to be near the Triad or Triangle and can take advantage of natural resources.

Caswell County's economic development program needs a multi-faceted approach. However, with resources so very limited, it is important to focus on a few goals. The goals recommended in this action plan are priorities identified in two meetings of Caswell County leadership. The first was comprised of members of the County Commission and Economic Development Advisory Board. The second was a group of business, nonprofit, and community leaders. Together they brought focus to the economic development program.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- **Increase Marketing and Communications to Leverage Existing Resources and Raise Awareness of Caswell County as a Location for Business, Tourists, and New Residents**
- **Increase Support to Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses**
- **Recruit More People to Caswell County**
- **Encourage and Coordinate Connectivity**

Goal: Increase Marketing and Communications to Leverage Existing Resources and Raise Awareness of Caswell County as a Location for Business, Tourists, and New Residents

Strategy 1: Create and maintain an economic development website separate from the county government website.

Action Steps:

- Start with a basic page that includes information for businesses, people, and resources. Our favorite example is http://petalumastar.com/.
- Connect the site to social media platforms.
- Over time, the site could be expanded to include GIS information on sites and buildings, extensive economic data, videos, and contact forms.

Strategy 2: Bring together partner agencies for collaboration and communication.

Action Steps:

- Create the Caswell County Resource Network. The purpose is to share information to spark collaboration, share resources, and identify leverage points.
- Invite key strategic partners to join.
- Meet monthly a few times to kick-start, then quarterly. Try a "Lunch-N-Learn" format.
- The number one way citizens reported getting information on current issues is word of mouth. Use the Resource Network to spread information.

Strategy 3: Use social media and e-communications to raise awareness of Caswell County.

Action Steps:

- Create a master communications database using members of the Caswell County Resource Network. Send a weekly email of "What's Up in Caswell County This Week."
- Use a program like Hoot Suite to schedule posts, and post on several platforms at one time.
- Regularly post events and positive stories on the Caswell County Facebook Page.
- Create a LinkedIn group for Caswell County businesses.
- Use Twitter for pertinent updates and news.
- Write a guest column on economic development. Caswell County citizens still get information on current issues from the local newspaper.

Strategy 4: Create and maintain a common calendar of events.

Action Steps:

- The common calendar could be housed on the economic development website listed below, a partner agency website, or a standalone site. Check out https://www.whatsupinelkinnc.com/.
- Set up the calendar to provide administrative rights to several organizations so the burden of keeping the calendar up to date does not fall to the economic development office.

Goal: Increase Support to Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses

Strategy: Entrepreneurship training.

Action Steps:

- Employ Economic Gardening strategies to counsel entrepreneurs on the potential in hospitality, precision machining, brewery/distillery, and ag-related businesses. The retail leakage information can assist in defining market potential. This is a higher form of business counseling, almost mentoring. It could be supported with a mentor network like SCORE.
- Explore Floyd, VA's C4 entrepreneurship training program as a model. Also, explore Roanoke, VA's GrowthWheel model, which is something similar to Alamance Community College's CEO (Clapp Entrepreneurial Opportunity) Initiative. The Certified Entrepreneurial Community® Program is another way to build the community ecosystem.
- Offer training on how to expand your business into the region and through e-commerce. The Caswell County market is so small that most companies will not be able to survive solely on the local market. Most will need to expand sales into the region and/or online.

Strategy: Explore a mixed-use incubator facility.

Action Steps:

- Identify best practice incubator and co-work facilities. Examples: Danville, VA, Abbeville, SC, and Graham, NC. Explore their funding sources, operational models, and target company profile.
- Identify potential building space and complete a feasibility study that includes renovation costs, potential grant sources, operational costs, and potential revenue.
- It is likely an incubator in Caswell County will be a mix of uses such as business space, small offices/co-work, and flex space. Cast a wide net when conducting research.
- If this incubator or the ag-center mentioned below is pursued, we recommend establishing in a nonprofit to limit liability and provide flexible in development and operations.

Strategy: Explore an ag-related enterprise center.

Action Steps:

- Use the ag center explored on the Maine trip as a model.
- The center could bring together Agriculture Extension, arena, food processing, meeting facilities, and other ag-related businesses.
- Pull together stakeholders to conduct a needs assessment.
- Find funding for a feasibility study.

Goal: Recruit More People to Caswell County

Strategy 1: Create a database (and social connections) of people with a personal connection to Caswell County for a targeted recruitment campaign.

Action Steps:

- Connect with high school reunion committees and church membership rosters.
- Promote new company locations and expansions, events, positive news stories, and community investments.
- Encourage companies to list job opportunities with this network.

Strategy 2: Create an endowment at Piedmont Community College that will provide free community college tuition to high school graduates as a way to encourage more people to reside in Caswell County.

Action Steps:

- Research the program in Alleghany County, NC, associated with Wilkes Community College.
- Through Piedmont Community College, identify the cost to endow scholarships for approximately 40% of graduating seniors.
- Fundraising could be done through an existing nonprofit with a mission for education. Abbeville County, SC is raising funds for a similar program through the Freshwater Coast Foundation.

Strategy 3: Get creative with housing development.

Action Steps:

- With the county planning department, quantify vacant and substandard housing to understand the scope of the issue.
- Actively demolish sub-standard housing. Some counties and municipalities have demolition program that could be modeled.
- Identify developers who have created housing in similar rural communities and actively recruit.
- Investigate a partnership with Piedmont Community College to develop multi-family housing on/near campus.

Goal: Engage and Coordinate Connectivity

Strategy 1: Identify best practices in serving rural area and funding telecommunications networks.

Action Steps:

- Reach out to partners to identify best practices in North Carolina and other states. Target Danville Regional Foundation, telephone cooperatives, Councils of Government and their counterparts in other states, NC Rural Center, and others, for best practices. Appalachia Regional Commission will also have some good case studies. Amherst County, VA, is working on this same issue and may have some ideas.
- Search for funding opportunities through state and regional grants.

Strategy 2: Quantify the gaps and telecommunications needs.

Action Steps:

- Complete a survey and/or obtain results of other studies of business telecommunications needs.
- Complete a survey of citizen telecommunications needs.
- Confer with telecommunications providers about capacity and distribution expansion plans.

Implementation Steps

Implementation will require both financial and staff resources. Currently, economic development is staffed by two part-time positions, a director and an assistant. We recommend making the current part-time director position full-time, adding a full-time assistant director, and maintaining the part-time assistant position. That boosts economic development from two part-time positions (1 FTE) to two full-time and one part-time (2.5 FTE), an increase of 1.5 positions total. The work to implement this action plan, along with the existing program of work, warrants at least 2.5 total positions. If the current incubator project is successful, the assistant director could oversee that project.

In addition to staff, financial resources are needed. The current budget is $85,000 including staff salaries, benefits, and operations. Of the $85,000, $29,000 is for operations such as office supplies, fees, subscriptions, travel, etc. There is a limited amount that actually is assigned to programming. We recommend a total budget of $240,000. This could be phased with staffing ramped up over two years.

Budget Item	Budget – Year 1	Budget – Year 2
Salaries	$96,000 (1.5 staff)	$156,000 (2.5 staff)
Operations	$30,000 (small increase due to increased activity)	$34,000 (additional increase due to added staff)
Programming	$50,000 (website, resource network, marketing, incubator feasibility, etc.)	$50,000 (website maintenance, resource network, marketing, ag center study, surveys, etc.)
Total	**$176,000**	**$240,000**

In addition to financial resources and staff, leadership is critical. The current Economic Development Advisory Board should be revamped. We recommend adding private sector members to make an equal number of public and private sector representatives. The private sector could be selected from investors in a nonprofit economic development corporation. Many economic development organizations in North Carolina operate as a public-private nonprofit corporation, or have a ally nonprofit organizatoin. See Surry, Davie, and Wilkes Counties as examples.

APPENDIX A: SWOT ANALYSIS

The action planning process in Caswell County started with gathering information to develop an asset map. Input came from surveys, economic research, and two meetings of elected, business, and community leaders. Sound economic development strategies are asset-based. The action plan goals are built upon this foundation. The traditional SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) Analysis format was used to present the asset map.

SWOT Analysis Summary

Strengths

- Piedmont Community College
- Entrepreneurial people
- Agriculture
- Proximity to metro areas
- Business-friendly government
- Natural resources

Weaknesses

- Lack of resources
- Small population, market size
- Transportation access
- Lack of communication
- Low educational attainment, low incomes

Opportunities

- Small business and entrepreneur development
- High speed internet
- Agri-business, agri-tourism
- Amenity development
- Housing development

Threats

- Aging population
- Declining population
- Economic stagnation
- High percent of government employment
- Opioid problem, crime

Strengths

Local small businesses, retailers	Parks and Recreation	Land	Federal/State funding, and taxes
Prisons - good place to work	Health care	Agriculture	Concerned citizenry and officials who promote growth when possible, community lunch
Groups that support local business growth such as Busy Bee and the Local Foods Council	Its proximity to developed areas of NC while still retaining it's historic and natural beauty and charm	Quality of life, pristine rural county, churches	Water resources
County government, lack of politics, permitting process	Highways 86, 150, 158	Community's creative approach to entrepreneurship	Industrial Park and Available 40000sf Building
Agriculture, natural resources, and forestry	Piedmont Community College, K-12 education	Environmental resources: Dan River, lakes, forests, game lands, clean water	Creative, entrepreneurial people

Weaknesses

Transportation	Limited jobs available	Lack of unity, communication	Leadership	Hotel, lodging
Trash in the county, lack of pride	Poverty; number of low income families	Lack of infrastructure: water, sewer, roads, natural gas, industrial park	Lack of community support	Downtown
Resources	Funding and financial incentives for business growth as well as infrastructure	Low population	Work force, skilled workforce	Financial help and training for developing small businesses
The lack of access to amenities that businesses need	Aging population, young people who want to stay in Caswell	Living wages	Schools	Educational level of residents
Internet and communications. High speed Internet (DSL, Fiber) is not available in most areas	Organized effort to attract prospects	Lack of a major highway	Housing options	High-level cultural amentities

Opportunities

- Transportation, including public transportation, rails to trails
- Proximity to Danville, Greensboro, Chapel Hill, RTP
- Affordable housing with jobs outside the county
- Land
- Teens, youth sports
- Agriculture
- Recruiting businesses, freelance economy
- Incentives to those that would have their farms open for tours, Bed and Breakfasts, etc.
- Expand businesses and development
- Increase income
- Revitalize downtown
- Agritourism, higher value ag products, hemp
- Grow small businesses
- E-businesses
- The arts (civic center is a great resource)
- Vocational training
- Industrial park
- Recreation, history, and tourism
- Planning, master plan, parks and rec plan
- Highway 86
- Entrepreneurship
- High speed internet, e-commerce
- PCC training
- Having a ED Commission and ED director
- Anything tied to the county's asset of land (agriculture, natural resources, and forestry)
- Citizen buy-in for change

Threats

- Aging population
- Youth not completing school and no desire to work
- Tradition
- Lack of new businesses
- Lack of public transportation
- Opioid problem, crime, low incomes
- Lack of jobs and low pay
- Adverse to change
- Work force skills, low educational attainment
- Stagnation
- Resistance from other businesses
- Lack of progressive leadership
- Lack of incentives from the local government
- Growing dependency on government assistance programs
- Ability to recruit new business
- Finances, state funding
- Lack of broadband internet
- Major cities nearby
- Lack of infrastructure
- Fear of change
- Outsourcing to other counties
- Environmental degradation
- Selling family-farms
- Lack of ordinances, zoning, minimum housing standards

Appendix B: Caswell County Partners

Caswell County is small and has limited resources. It will have to partner with other agencies and organizations to achieve economic development goals. During the planning process, we identified the following partner organizations; there are likely many more. The key is to identify strong partners that can bring a variety of resources to the table.

- Caswell County Local Foods Council, Farmers Market
- Partnership for Children
- 4H
- NCSU Extension Service
- USDA
- Churches
- Schools
- Gunn Library
- Parks and Recreation
- Fire Departments
- Health Care: Dept. Social Services, Caswell Medical Ctr., Health Dept., Hospice, The Health Collaborative
- Piedmont Community College
- Senior Center
- Royal Textiles
- Caswell Pines
- Caswell Creators Network
- Caswell Funds
- Caswell Horticulture Club
- EPIC
- Parrish
- Ruritans
- Prison
- Governmental organizations
- Meals on Wheels
- Boy Scouts
- Caswell County Partnership for Children
- Chamber of Commerce
- Piedmont Progressive Farmers Group
- Danville Regional Foundation
- Caswell County Farm Bureau
- Person and Rockingham Counties
- Piedmont Electric Coop and Duke Energy
- Caswell County Historical Association
- VFW
- Sherriff and police departments
- Goodwill
- State Employees Credit Union, Carolina Farm Credit
- Dillard Education Economic Development Services
- Cattlemen's Association
- Telamon Head Start
- Council for the AAG
- Piedmont Elect Foundation

A footnote on partners: Resources are so limited and the number of leaders few that Caswell County should consider merging similar nonprofits for efficiency. Board members and staff can be shared and fundraising maximized.

Appendix C: Economic and Demographic Data

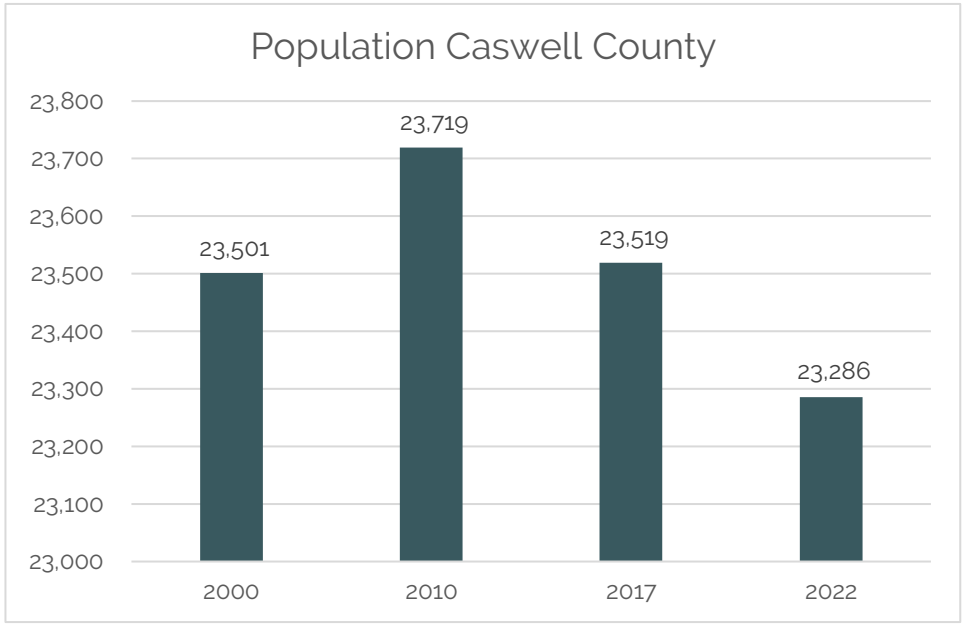
Highlights:

- Projected declining population and slower population growth than the region and state – companies want to see a growing market and growing labor pool.
- Per capita and median household income lower than region and state – shows limited local market opportunities
- Older and aging population – Millennials make up the largest segment of the workforce, and Caswell County is not doing a good job at attracting them
- Low educational attainment – companies want to see a pipeline of skilled workers
- The unemployment rate is low but higher than region and state – currently below full employment; thus, employers having a difficult time finding employees
- Slow growing labor force
- The majority are employed in government, health care, social assistance, and retail trade – manufacturing has a higher multiplier effect
- 88% are employed in businesses with <10 employees
- 17% are self-employed
- Over 80% of workforce out-commutes – economic, quality of life, and transportation concern
- Retail leakage is found in every industry sector

Projected declining population

88% employed in business with < 10 employees

Unemployment rate is Low



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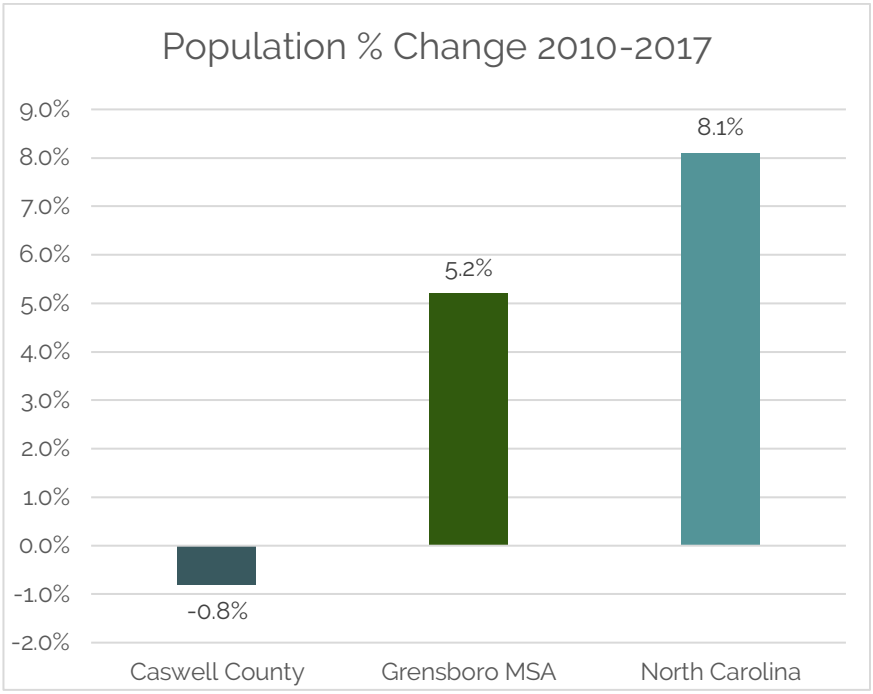

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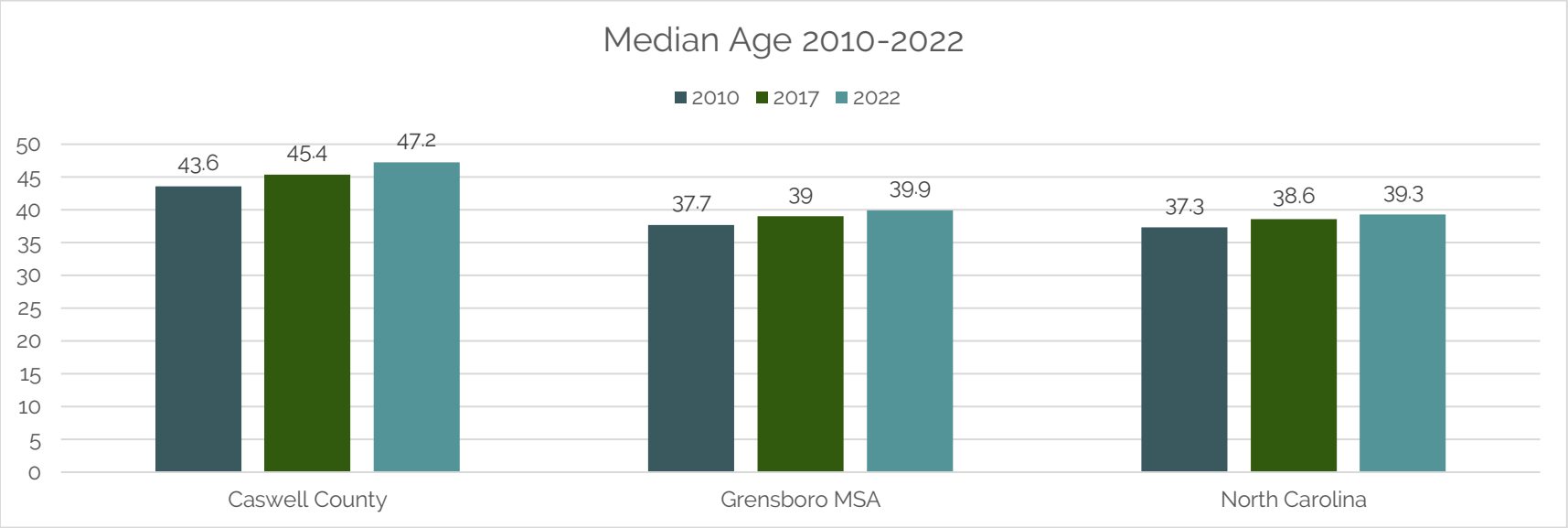
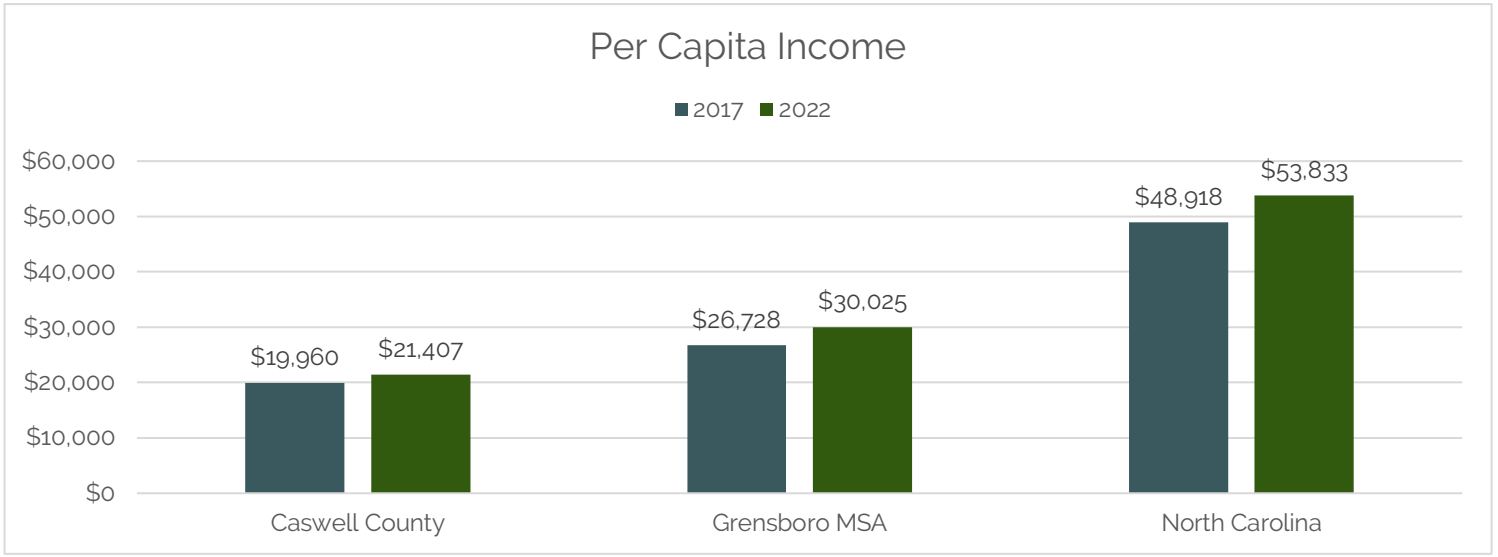

Median Age 2010-2022
2010
2017
2022
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
43.6
45.4
47.2
37.7
39
39.9
37.3
38.6
39.3
Caswell County
Grensboro MSA
North Carolina

Source: ESRI



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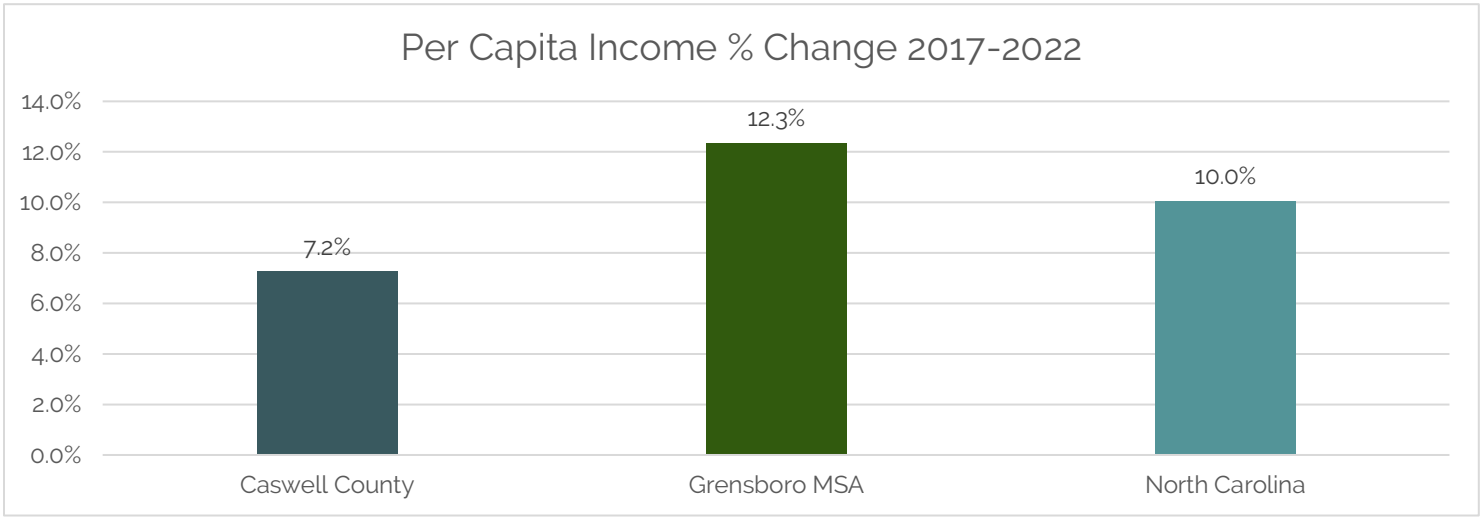

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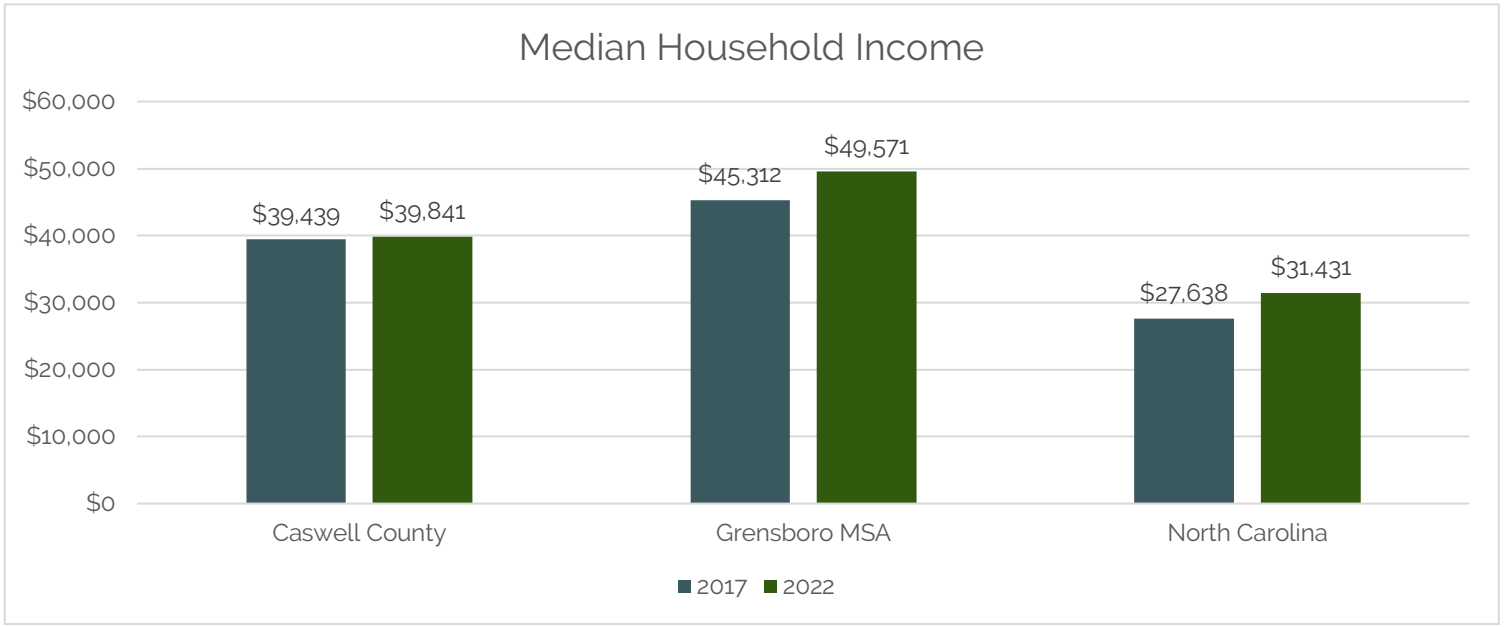

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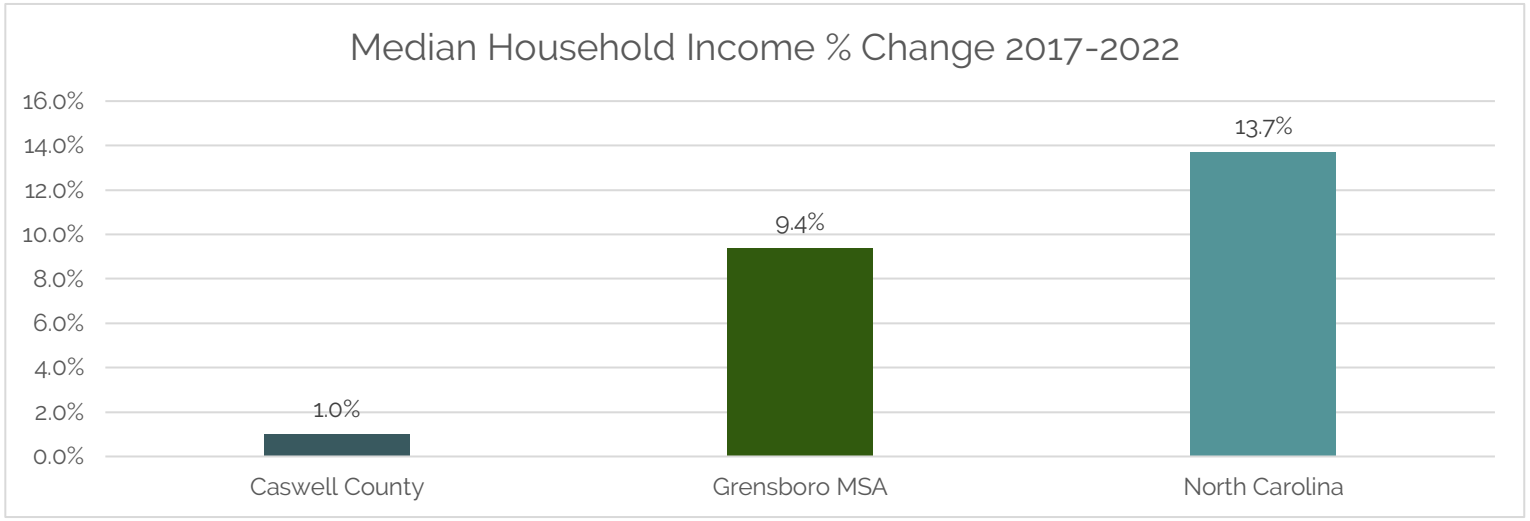

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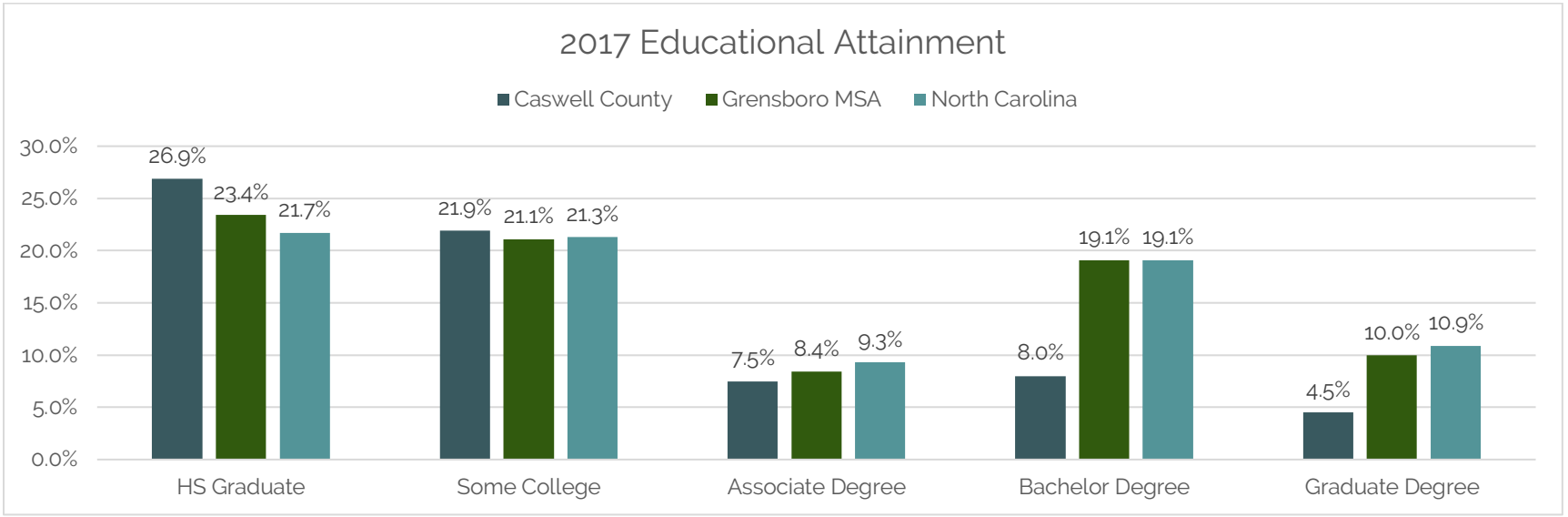
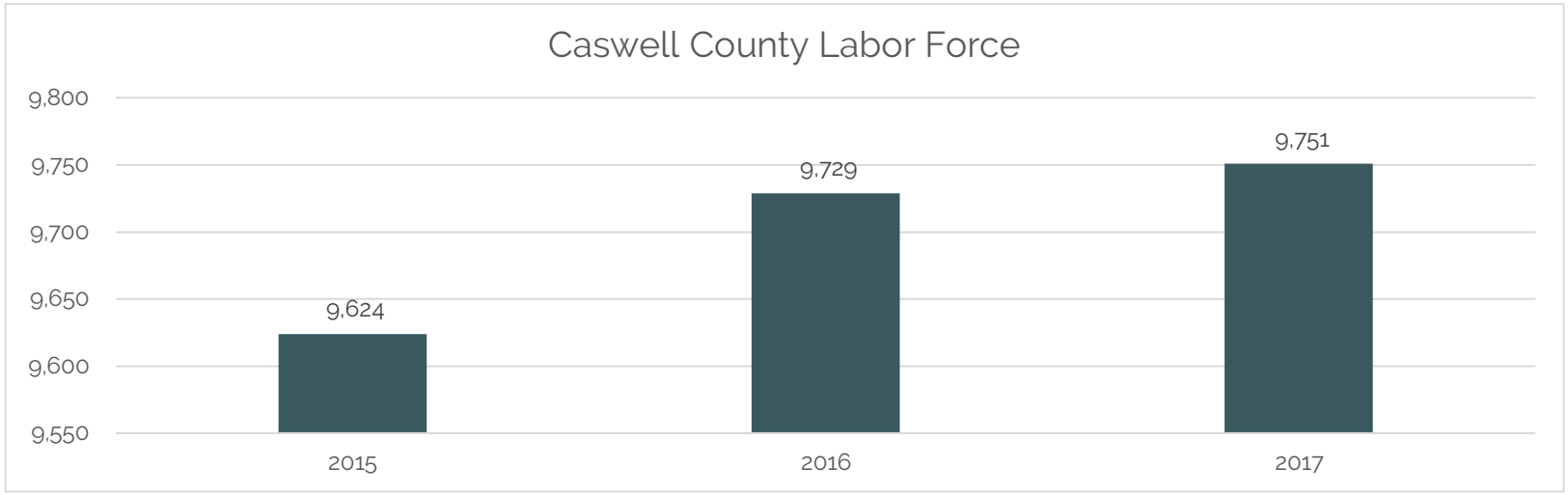
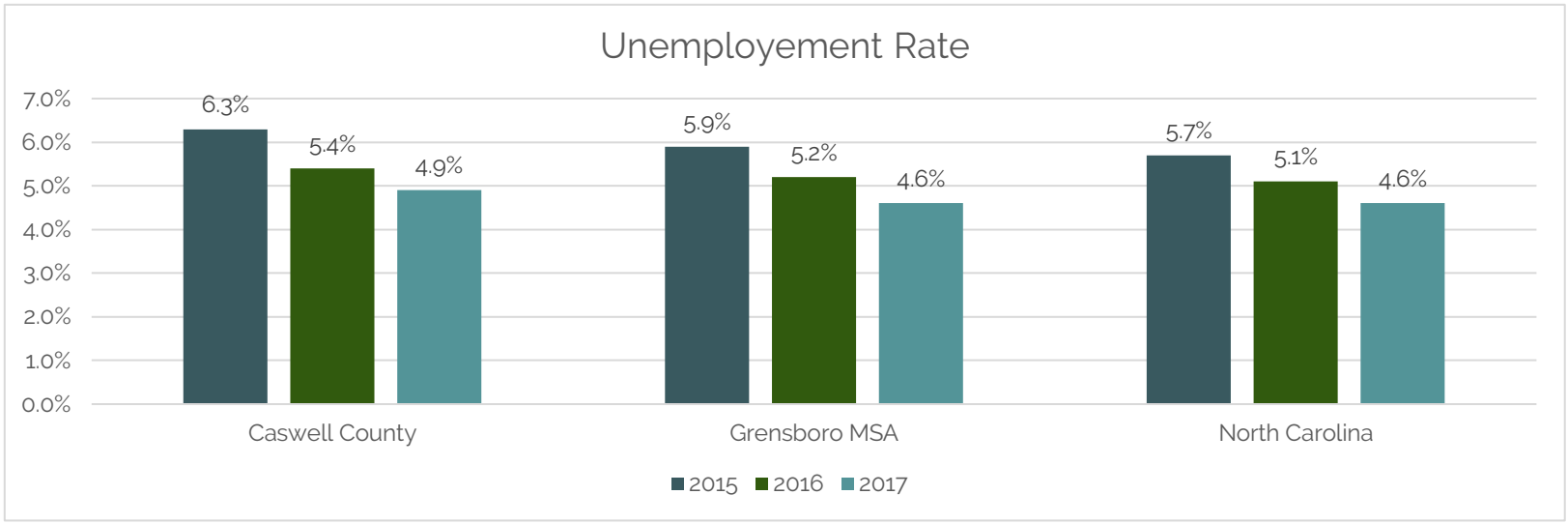

2017 Educational Attainment
Caswell County
Grensboro MSA
North Carolina
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
26.9%
23.4%
21.7%
21.9%
21.1%
21.3%
7.5%
8.4%
9.3%
8.0%
19.1%
19.1%
4.5%
10.0%
10.9%
HS Graduate
Some College
Associate Degree
Bachelor Degree
Graduate Degree

Source: ESRI



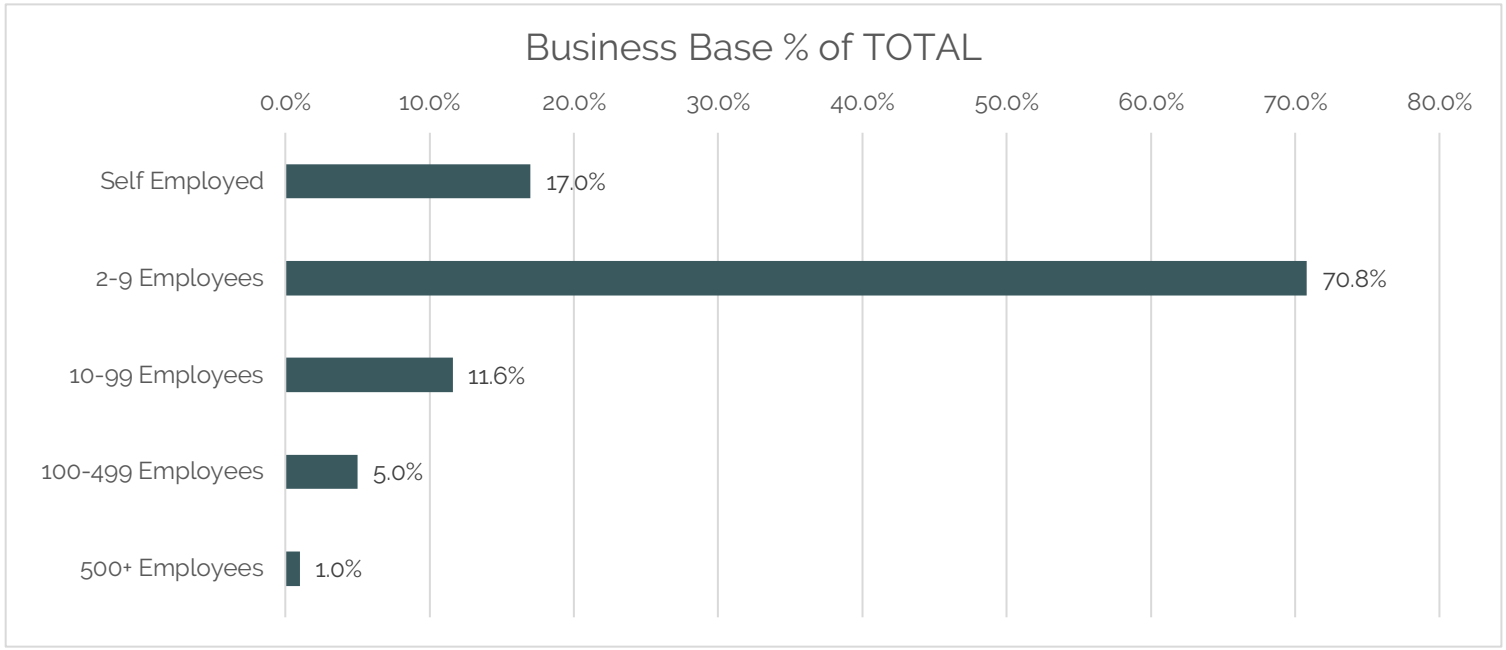
Source: NC LEAD



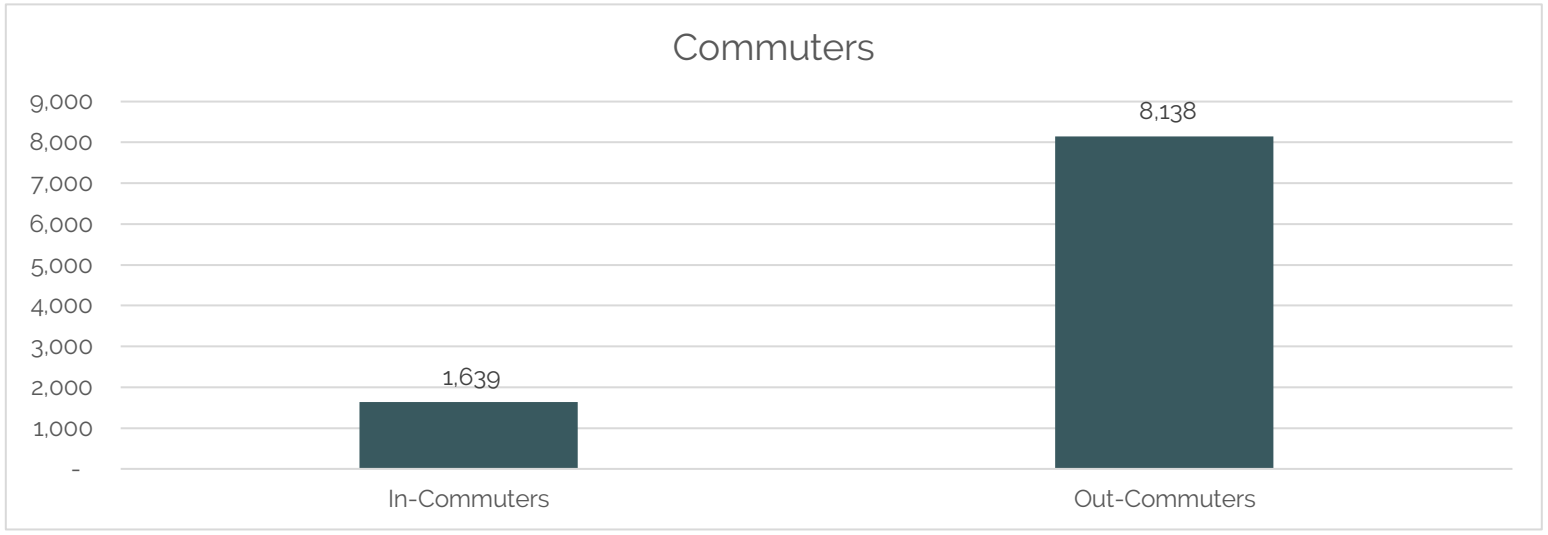
Source: NC LEAD

Employment By Industry				
Industry	Establishments	Employment	% of Employment	Avg. Weekly Wage
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	13	97	4.08%	$667.56
Construction	25	201	8.45%	$704.34
Manufacturing	13	213	8.95%	$957.75
Wholesale Trade	5	34	1.43%	$444.11
Retail Trade	43	302	12.69%	$366.63
Transportation and Warehousing	17	63	2.65%	$804.75
Finance and Insurance	8	52	2.18%	$791.27
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	19	51	2.14%	$698.36
Administrative and Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	17	113	4.75%	$559.72
Health Care and Social Assistance	32	339	14.24%	$596.28
Accommodation and Food Services	13	146	6.13%	$198.06
Other Services (except Public Administration)	34	83	3.49%	$337.24
Public Administration	10	686	28.82%	$679.14
Total		2,380		

Source: NC LEAD



Source: YourEconomy.Org



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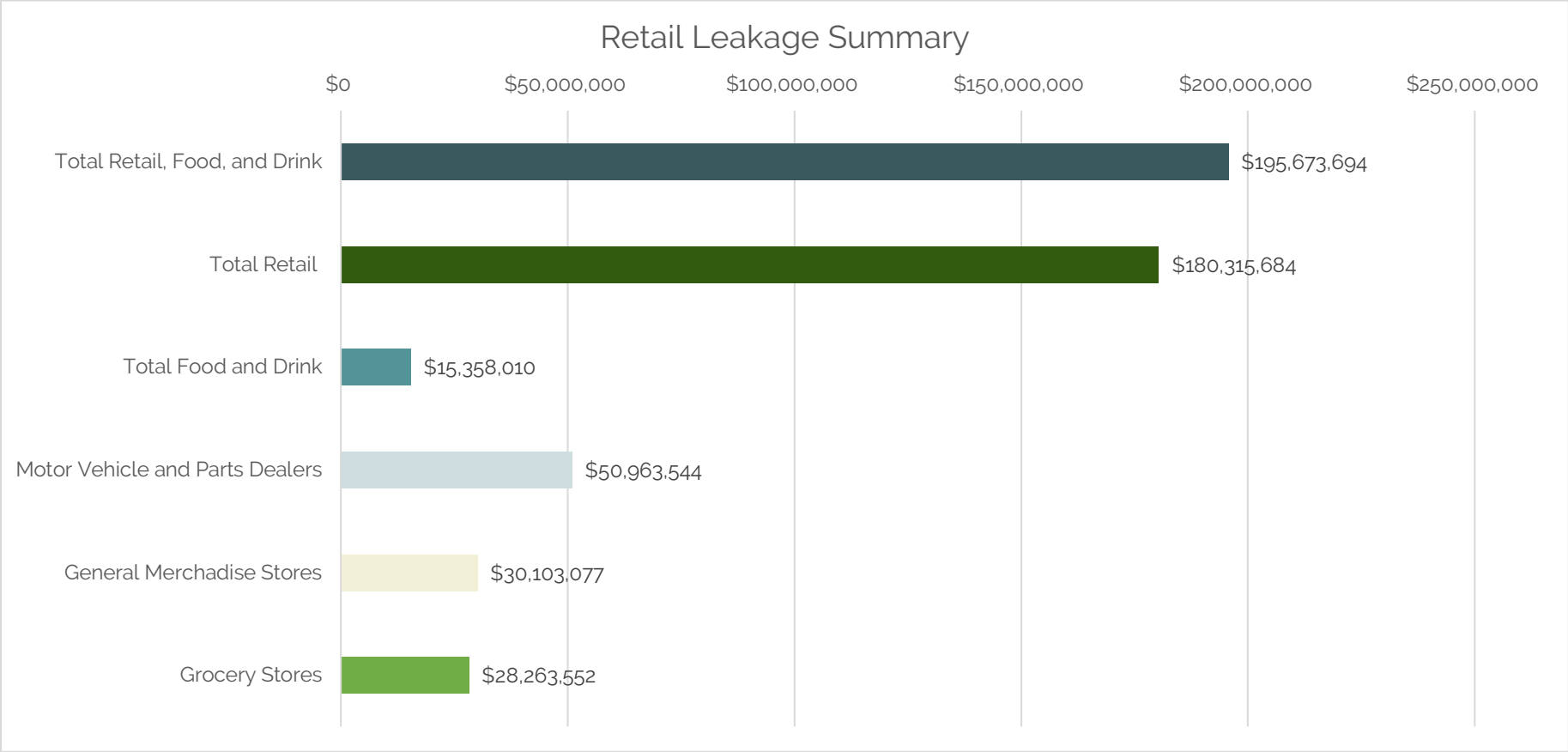

Retail Leakage Summary
$0
$50,000,000
$100,000,000
$150,000,000
$200,000,000
$250,000,000
Total Retail, Food, and Drink
$195,673,694
Total Retail
$180,315,684
Total Food and Drink
$15,358,010
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers
$50,963,544
General Merchadise Stores
$30,103,077
Grocery Stores
$28,263,552

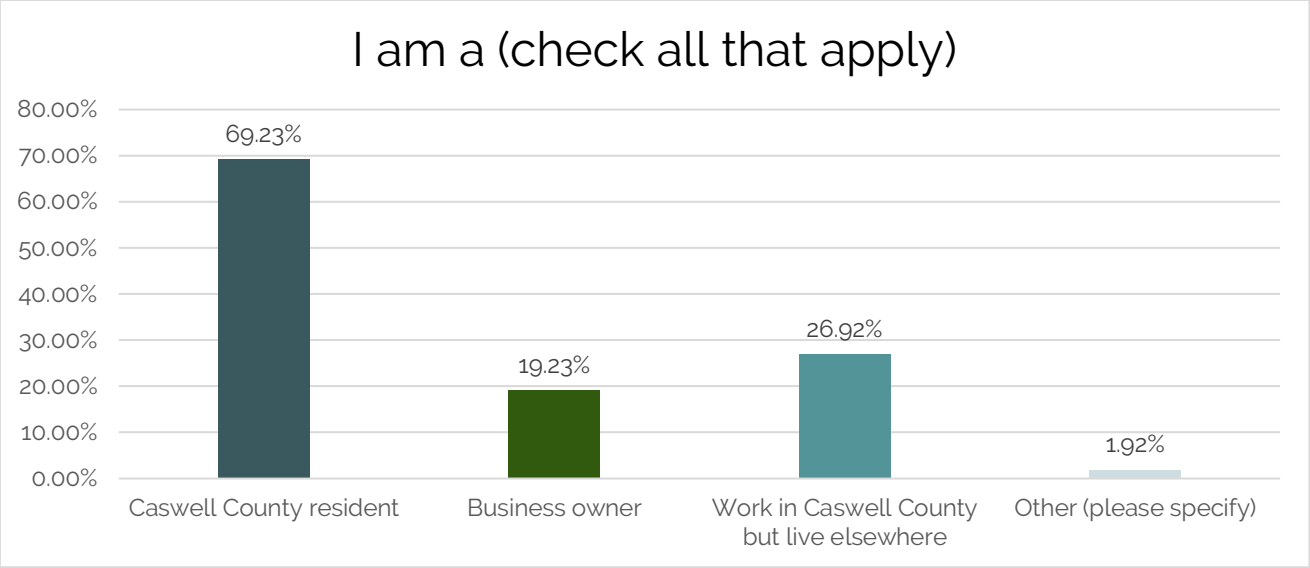
Source: ESRI

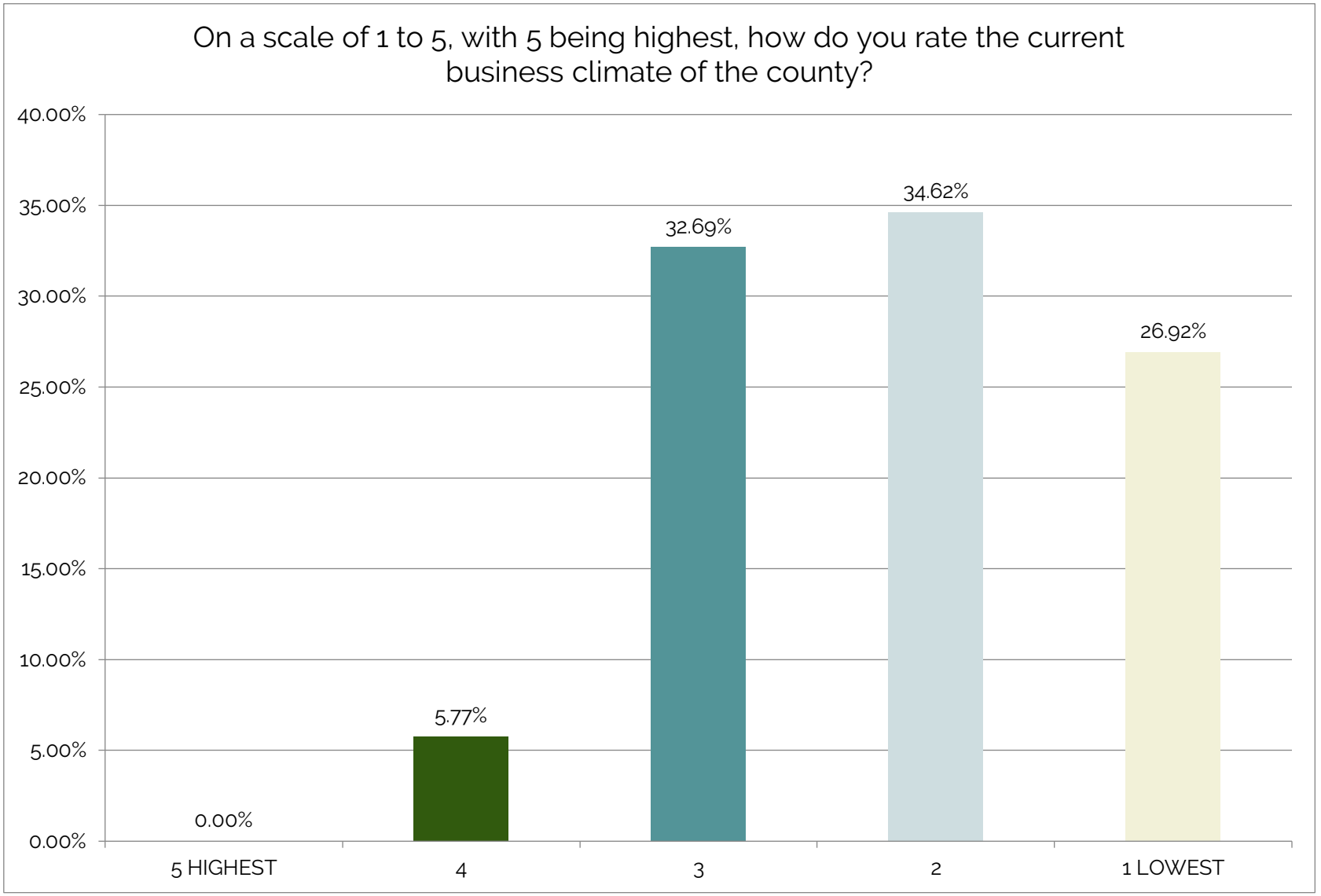
Appendix D: Community Survey Results

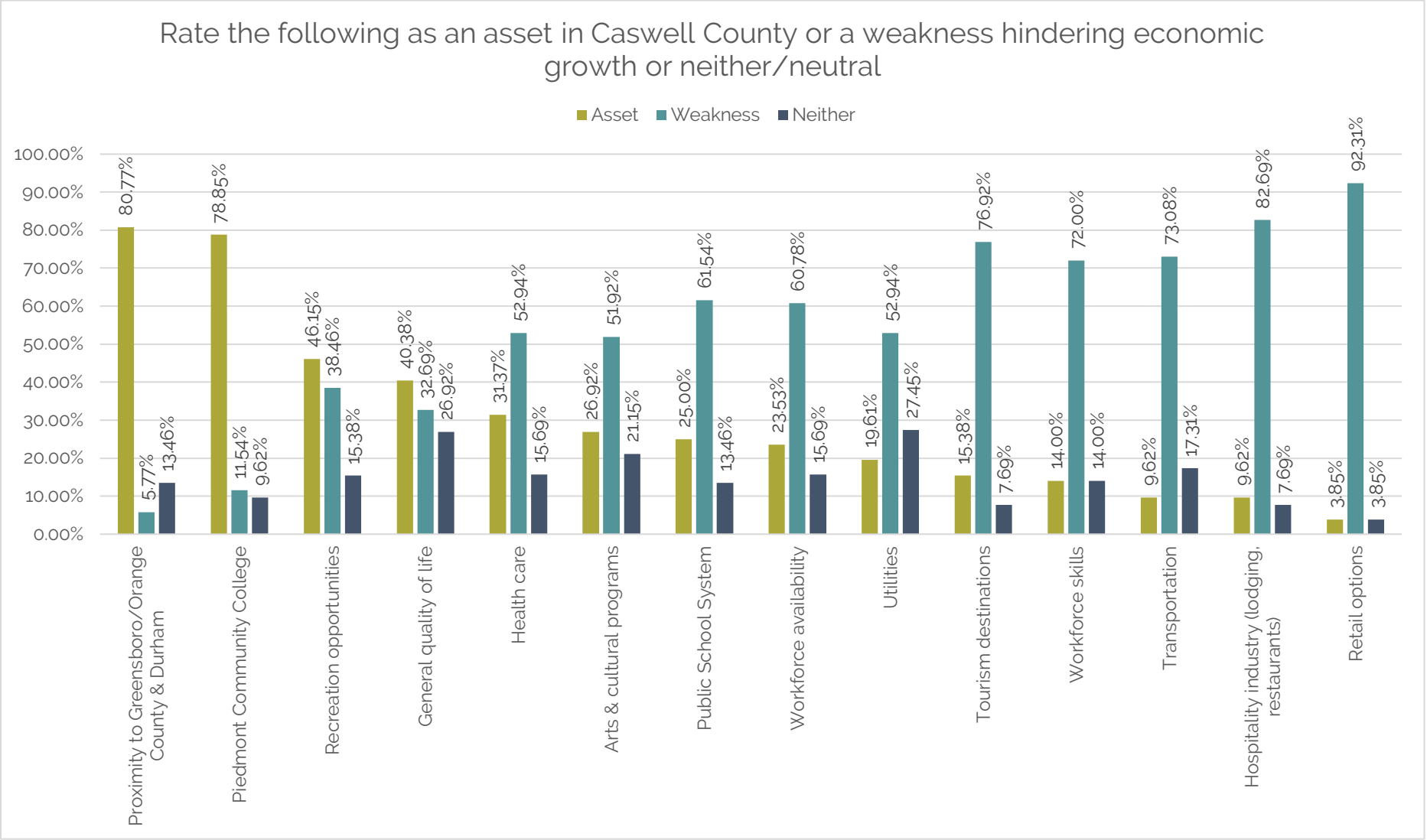
There were 52 responses to this online survey, 66 responses to an earlier economic development survey, and fifteen individual interviews conducted. The majority of respondents are Caswell County residents.

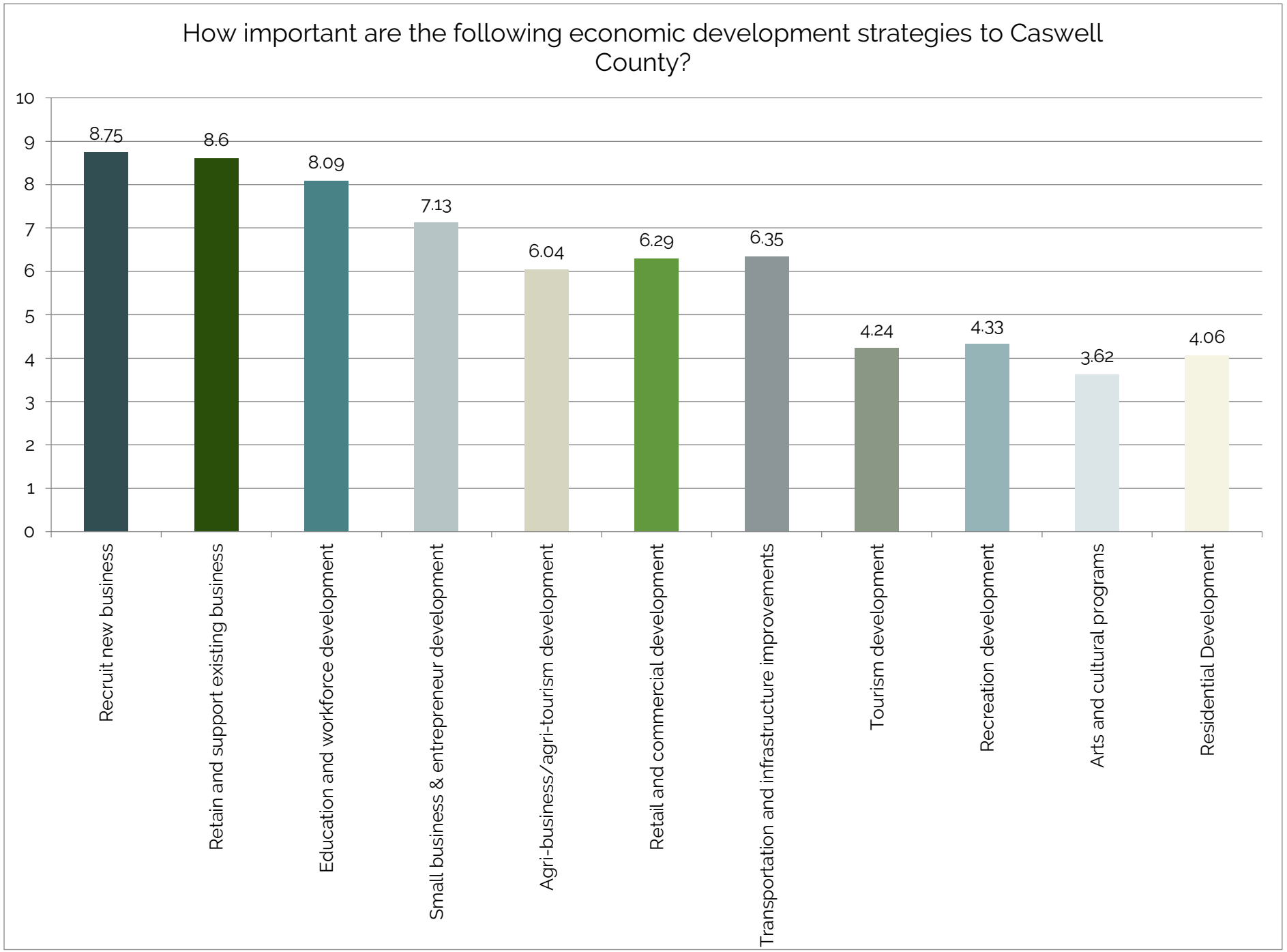
Highlights:

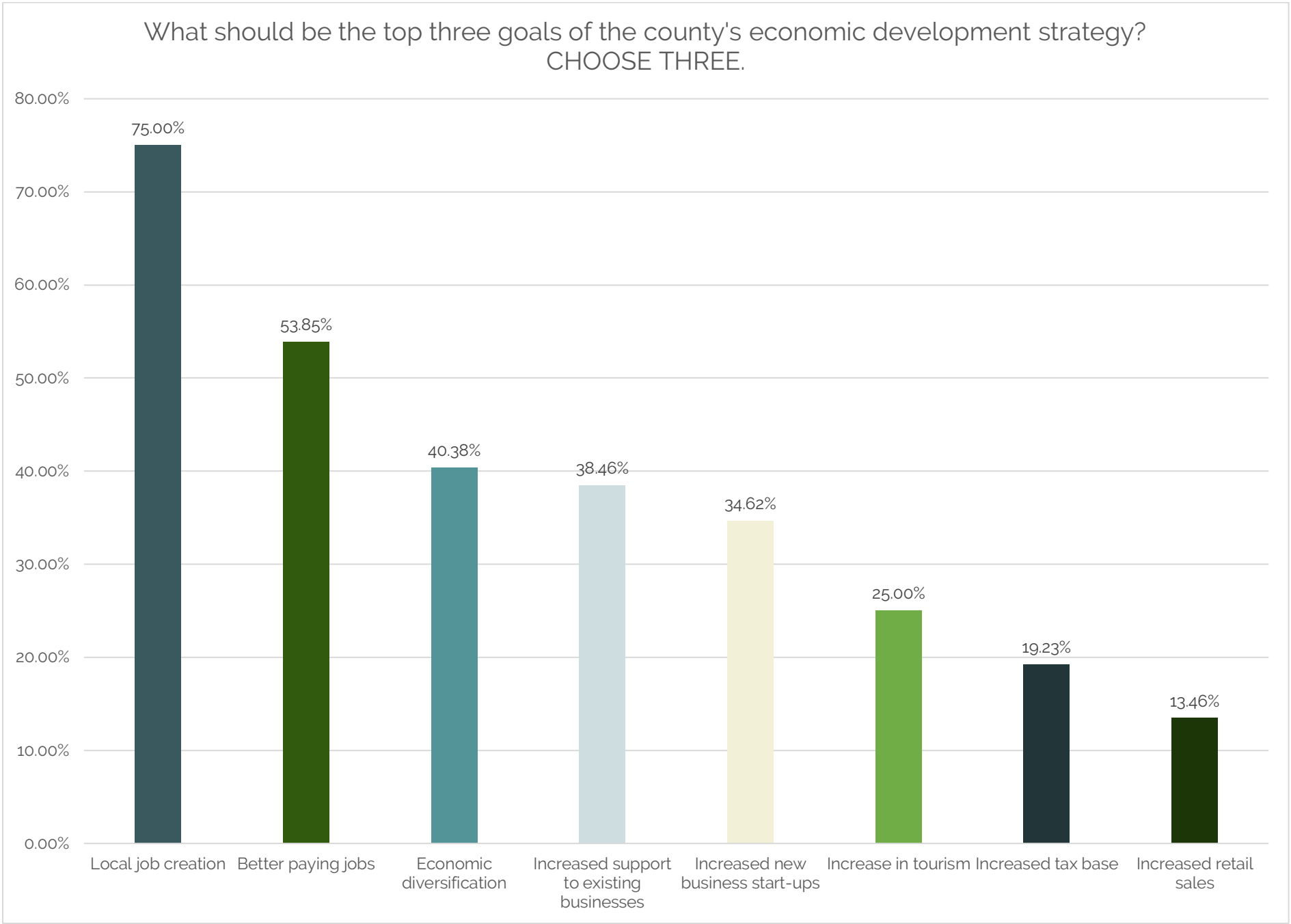
- Low business climate ranking
- Cite proximity to Greensboro/Orange County & Durham as top asset, Piedmont Community College is second
- List retail options and hospitality industry as greatest weaknesses
- Citizens want more local, better-paying jobs.
- Citizens want the county to invest in business recruitment, infrastructure, agri-business, and downtown development.

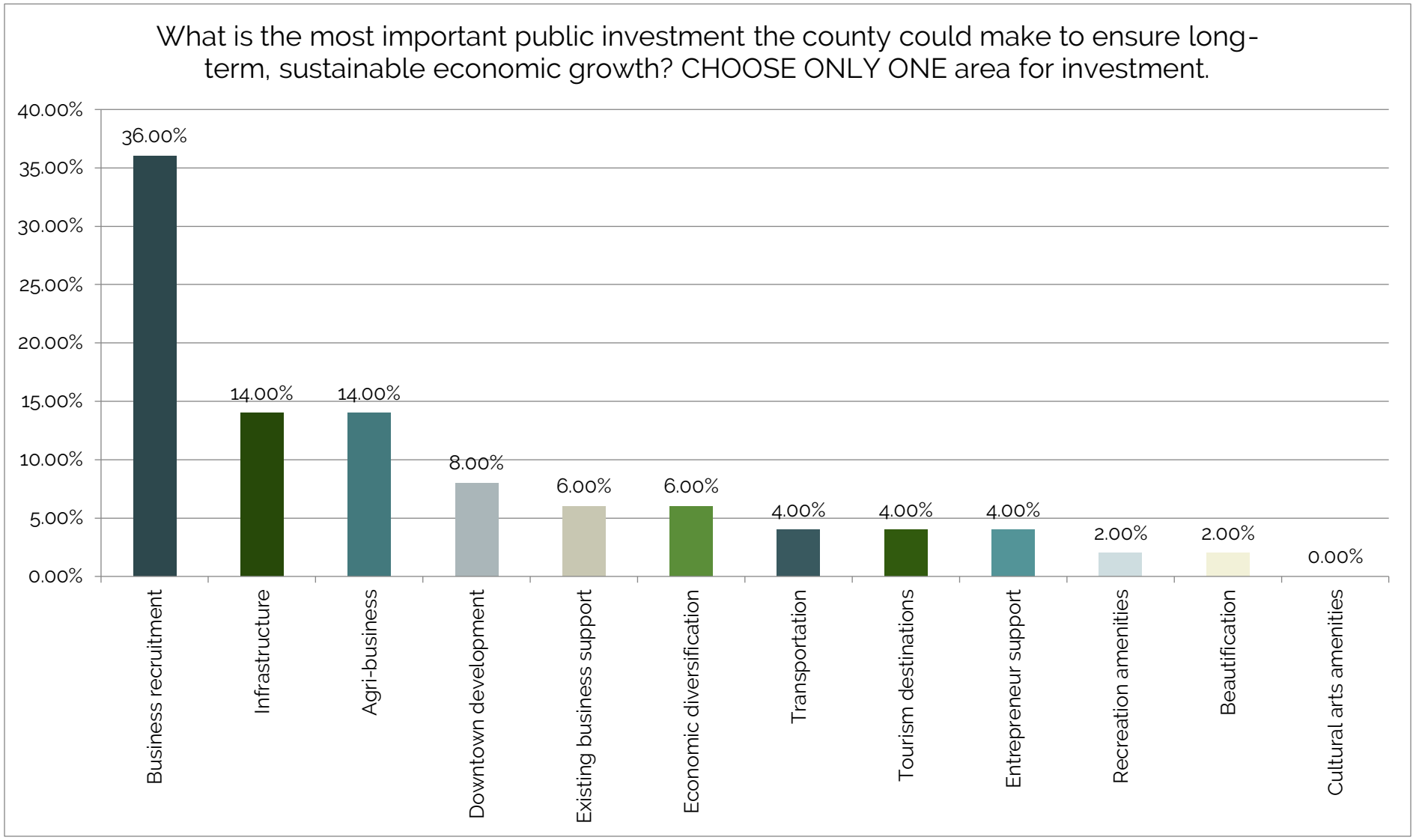



On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, how do you rate the current business climate of the county?
40.00%
35.00%
30.00%
25.00%
20.00%
15.00%
10.00%
5.00%
0.00%
0.00%
5.77%
32.69%
34.62%
26.92%
5 HIGHEST
4
3
2
1 LOWEST


Rate the following as an asset in Caswell County or a weakness hindering economic growth or neither/neutral
Asset
Weakness
Neither
100.00%
90.00%
80.00%
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
80.77%
5.77%
13.46%
78.85%
11.54%
9.62%
46.15%
38.46%
15.38%
40.38%
32.69%
26.92%
31.37%
52.94%
15.69%
26.92%
51.92%
21.15%
25.00%
61.54%
13.46%
23.53%
60.78%
15.69%
19.61%
52.94%
27.45%
15.38%
76.92%
7.69%
14.00%
72.00%
14.00%
9.62%
73.08%
17.31%
9.62%
82.69%
7.69%
3.85%
92.31%
3.85%
Proximity to Greensboro/Orange County & Durham
Piedmont Community College
Recreation opportunities
General quality of life
Health care
Arts & cultural programs
Public School System
Workforce availability
Utilities
Tourism destinations
Workforce skills
Transportation
Hospitality industry (lodging, restaurants)
Retail options


How important are the following economic development strategies to Caswell County?
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
8.75
8.6
8.09
7.13
6.04
6.29
6.35
4.24
4.33
3.62
4.06
Recruit new business
Retain and support existing business
Education and workforce development
Small business & entrepreneur development
Agri-business/agri-tourism development
Retail and commercial development
Transportation and infrastructure improvements
Tourism development
Recreation development
Arts and cultural programs
Residential Development


What should be the top three goals of the county's economic development strategy? CHOOSE THREE.
80.00%
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
75.00%
53.85%
40.38%
38.46%
34.62%
25.00%
19.23%
13.46%
Local job creation
Better paying jobs
Economic diversification
Increased support to existing businesses
Increased new business start-ups
Increase in tourism
Increased tax base
Increased retail sales


What is the most important public investment the county could make to ensure long-term, sustainable economic growth? CHOOSE ONLY ONE area for investment.
40.00%
35.00%
30.00%
25.00%
20.00%
15.00%
10.00%
5.00%
0.00%
36.00%
14.00%
14.00%
8.00%
6.00%
6.00%
4.00%
4.00%
4.00%
2.00%
2.00%
0.00%
Business recruitment
Infrastructure
Agri-business
Downtown development
Existing business support
Economic diversification
Transportation
Tourism destinations
Entrepreneur support
Recreation amenities
Beautification
Cultural arts amenities

The results of the survey will be compiled with all survey results and presented to the EDC and County. Please make any additional comments here.

Responses
I love living in Caswell County but there are issues that need to be addressed. Our public school system is going downhill quickly. Many are homeschooling and some are leaving our county for a better education. Public housing is an issue. The two apartment complexes that do have a waiting list are dangerous. Homes are allowed to have trashed yards that are eye sores to those coming through. Yet the restrictions for mobile homes (first-starter homes) are outrageous therefore young, working and productive potential citizens choose to go into another county. We welcome those coming in on public assistance that are not working but discourage those who are. We need some changes.
Like mentioned above, do not try to make this area into something it was never meant to be. It should remain rural in nature without the pollution, stress, and chaos of cities like Greensboro, Charlotte, Raleigh, etc. Instead SELL what it has to offer, that being an ESCAPE from all the above places. Build up the community and encourage farms, wineries, bed and breakfasts, ranch escapes, etc.
I love my county and its slow pace, but in order to retain our youth for them to work here and live here, there has to be more than just land, tobacco, and cows to support that.
Development of an Agriculture Convention Center
There are many people living in the Triangle area who would love to move further out to areas such as Caswell. Much of the modern workforce needs to be online for this, so having a hub of highspeed internet access is important to attract such business people. Also, Caswell is a great place for recreational farms (farms that have been restored and supplement their income with some type of recreational activities). Supporting businesses such as these could help to preserve our historical farms and bring more tourism into the area.
EXISTING BUSINESS IS THE MOST OVERLOOKED - EXISTING BUSINESS COULD EXPAND AND GROW EXPEDENTIALLY IF GIVEN THE INCENTIVES A NEW BUSINESS IS GIVEN. WHY IS THIS ALWAYS OVERLOOKED. WE ARE MADE TO FEEL UNIMPORTANT TO THE COUNTY.
Until the power struggles are over between the elected officials nothing will improve. Too many people want to be in charge instead of working towards the same goal. Preserving the past and embracing the future is just something written on a sign.
Without investors the county will struggle. Bring in outside help.
We seem to be on the right track to attract growth

Study Sponsor & Consultant

The Caswell County Office of Economic Development is working to spur new business growth help by providing:

- assistance in combining state and local government incentives for new industry,
- assistance to small business to get funds needed for building expansion,
- assistance to new businesses in obtaining state funding for infrastructure to new sites,
- assistance in providing employee screening and pre-employment training for new businesses or expansions.

Creative economic development consulting

www.creativeedc.com

Creative Economic Development Consulting, LLC, provides strategic planning, product development, organizational development, social media, and economic impact analysis services to communities. Creative EDC is an innovative firm that owns three proprietary programs: Certified Entrepreneurial Community®, CreativeSiteAssessment.com, and Certified Industrial Buildings.