

HABERSHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUBJECT: Development of Economic Development Strategy by Carl Vinson Institute of Government

DATE: June 17, 2021

BUDGET INFORMATION: \$5,879.33

(X) RECOMMENDATION
() POLICY DISCUSSION
() STATUS REPORT
() OTHER

COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED ON: June 21, 2021

PURPOSE: Partnership Habersham has received a proposal from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to develop an economic development strategy for the future growth of Habersham County. When partnered with our Comprehensive Plan, this can act as a guidance document for future decisions. Partnership Habersham is requesting funding of \$5,879.33 from the Board of Commissioners for development of the strategy. If approved, the County, Development Authority, and the Partnership will each pay a third.

BACKGROUND / HISTORY:

1. The total cost of the Carl Vinson Institute's strategy development is \$24,838.
 2. It is proposed to use an existing \$7,200 credit left over from Habersham County's partnership with Carl Vinson's Archway Partnership. The remaining \$17,638 is proposed to be split evenly between the County, Development Authority and the Partnership.
 3. Habersham County seems to be on the cusp of unprecedented growth along the Highway 365 corridor on the southern end of the county. The strategy will act as a guidance document in Habersham County's decision making over the next five (5) years to reduce the tax burden on residential property owners.
 4. With the industrial development marching north up Highway 365 and the future construction of an inland port which will be located about 9 miles south of Habersham County, the time is right for us to plan for the economic growth of the county. We've all seen the results of unplanned growth.
 5. Habersham County completed the Comprehensive Plan in 2018 and the document did not include a section on economic development. This strategy can tie into our Comprehensive Plan and act as a guidebook.
 6. The Development Authority has approved the funding request and views this strategy as an important part of their economic development toolkit. The Authority is unsure of the next steps to take as the Airport Business Park nears full capacity. They've talked of developing a new industrial park on the southern end. In addition, there has been discussion about expanding the Airport Business Park through additional property acquisitions. There is a current lack of funding to accomplish both. It is hoped the strategy can guide the Authority's decision making as they act as good stewards and spur economic growth.
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FACTS AND ISSUES: Carl Vinson proposes to break the economic development planning into three tasks:

- a. Community and Stakeholder Input – The Institute will seek input via three methods.
 1. Stakeholder Input Sessions: These will consist of three (3) listening sessions with the general public. One in the north, one in the south, and one virtually will be conducted to receive input from citizens and other concerned individuals.
 2. Online Feedback Form: Carl Vinson will create an online feedback form stakeholders can complete to provide suggestions and ideas for the economic development strategy.
 3. Individual Interviews: The Institute will conduct up to 15 individual stakeholder interviews. These will be with both internal community stakeholders (elected officials, major employers, staff) and external stakeholders (Georgia Department of Economic Development, Utility Partners, etc.). Up to 165 items in height are reviewed and approved by staff.
- b. Strategy Review and Planning – This will consist of developing the economic development strategy from the stakeholder input. The actual strategy will be developed from a planning committee comprising individuals from the community, government, business, and education. The committee will assess the County's progress to date, review economic development data, examine the existing visions and strategies, and revise the community's strategy, as necessary.
- c. Final Plan Development – The final step in the proposal is to develop an economic development strategy document. The Institute will use input from stakeholders and direction from the planning committee to draft the plan and develop visual elements.
- d. It is anticipated the entire project will take approximately six months to accomplish.

OPTIONS: The Board of Commissioners could act on this application as follows:

1. Approval of the expenditure.
2. Denial of the expenditure.
3. Commission defined alternative.

RECOMMENDED SAMPLE MOTION: Motion to approve the expenditure of \$5,879.33 to partner with the Habersham County Development Authority and Partnership Habersham to enter an agreement with Carl Vinson Institute of Government to create a Habersham County economic development strategy.

DEPARTMENT:

Prepared by: Mike Beecham

Director _____

**ADMINISTRATIVE
COMMENTS:** _____

DATE: _____

County Manager

Habersham Partnership for Growth Economic Development Planning

The Habersham Partnership for Growth seeks to work with the University of Georgia to review and update their community economic development strategy. Specifically, the Carl Vinson Institute of Government and the Archway Partnership will partner with the Habersham Partnership for Growth and other community partners to develop and publish an updated economic development strategy. The project will consist of three major tasks:

- 1) Community and stakeholder input
- 2) Strategy review and planning sessions
- 3) Development of the economic development strategy document

Approach and Scope of Work

TASK 1: COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Stakeholder participation and feedback are paramount to updating the Habersham Partnership for Growth's economic development strategy. UGA envisions collecting stakeholder input through three methods:

- 1) **Stakeholder Input Sessions**: Two in-person and one virtual input sessions are planned for this project. These sessions will be an opportunity to provide an update on economic development efforts over the past several years and gather stakeholder input on future economic development needs.
- 2) **Online Feedback Form**: UGA will produce an online feedback form that stakeholders can complete to provide suggestions and ideas for the economic development strategy. The Habersham Partnership for Growth and other partners will be responsible for distributing this to stakeholders.
- 3) **Individual Interviews**: In addition to the larger stakeholder input opportunities, the Institute of Government will conduct up to 15 individual stakeholder interviews. These will be with both internal community stakeholders (e.g., elected officials, major employers, government staff) and external stakeholders (e.g., Georgia Department of Economic Development, Utility Partners).

UGA will develop a summary document highlighting major themes and takeaways from the input process.

Task 1 Scope of Work

- Plan, facilitate, and document three stakeholder input sessions (1 in the northern part of the county, 1 in the southern part of the county, and 1 virtual session).

- Develop and manage the online stakeholder feedback form.
- Conduct up to 15 individual stakeholder interviews.
- Analyze stakeholder feedback and develop a summary documenting.

TASK 2: STRATEGY REVIEW AND PLANNING

The next step will be to review and update the Habersham Partnership for Growth's economic development strategy. This work will be accomplished by a planning committee representative of Habersham County, including community, government, business, and education leaders. The planning committee will be asked to assess the progress over the past several years, review economic development data, examine the existing vision and strategies, and revise the community's strategy, as necessary. The group will also be asked to help develop a short-term work plan (12-18 months) to guide initial plan implementation.

It is anticipated that the planning committee will meet 2-3 times for planning and development sessions. The Institute of Government will plan, facilitate and support the planning session but the development of the economic development strategy will ultimately be the responsibility of the planning committee.

Task 2 Scope of Work

- Provide guidance on the formation of an economic development strategy planning committee.
- Develop an economic development data packet to inform the planning process.
- Plan and facilitate 2-3 steering committee meetings.
- Document each planning committee meeting.

TASK 3: FINAL PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The final step in the project will be to develop a professionally edited and designed economic development strategy document. The Institute of Government will utilize the stakeholder input and direction from the planning committee to draft the plan text and develop visual elements.

Task 3 Scope of Work

- Develop the strategy document text and visual elements based on the direction from the planning committee and stakeholder input.
- Professionally edit and design the strategy document.
- Print 200 copies of the economic development strategy and provide a digital version (i.e., PDF) of the strategy document.



June 1, 2021

Dr. Gail Thaxton
Habersham County Development Authority
130 Jacob's Way
Clarkesville, Georgia 30523

Dr. Thaxton:

I am writing this letter to request funding from the Habersham County Development Authority to support Partnership Habersham's efforts to create a Five Year Comprehensive Plan to address strategic growth in the county over the next five (5) years, formally known as Forward Habersham 2025. UGA's Archway Partnership has prepared a proposal for services to implement a comprehensive economic development plan for Habersham County, which includes three listening sessions with the community, interviews with community leaders, and a growth plan that summarizes the citizen's long-term growth plans for the county.

The total cost of the Economic Development Plan is \$24,838, and the proposed funding is broken down as follows:

A \$7,200 credit with Archway is left over from a previous engagement with Habersham County, leaving a balance of \$17,638. It has been suggested by Habersham County that the balance be split evenly between the County, the Habersham Development Authority, and Partnership Habersham. Partnership Habersham's executive committee board approved the expense in mid-May. We have a verbal commitment from the County for its portion of the funding.

So, we humbly request that the Development Authority consider funding the Economic Development Plan in the amount of \$5,879.33. We look forward to discussing the concept and benefits of an economic development comprehensive plan at the June development authority meeting on the 3rd. Thank you for considering this investment in the future of Habersham County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Charlie Fiveash", is written over a horizontal line.

Charlie Fiveash
Executive Director

cc: Mike Beecham