

Chapter 4. Economic Element

The local economy affects every aspect of community life from jobs and taxes to environmental quality. A healthy economic climate offers increased income potential for Oconee County residents, a supportive environment for business and industry to succeed, and increased fiscal stability of local governments to maintain and expand community services and infrastructure. A balanced and diversified economy can also help Oconee County, its municipalities, and its residents and employers successfully weather economic downturns.

The Economic Element focuses on the components of the economy of Oconee County, its municipalities, and the surrounding Upstate region. It examines labor force characteristics, an analysis of income and wealth characteristics and distribution, commuting patterns, educational attainment and workforce development, occupational outlook, existing business and industry, market forces, realized and untapped economic assets, diversity of the economic base, the related economics of public health, current economic trends, and economic recruitment strategies.

The Element provides a platform for local officials to identify the types of employment desired and the general location where such opportunities should be directed, while ensuring the distribution of economic benefits to residents throughout the County. The Element also examines the role of the County and its municipalities within the context of the regional and statewide economy.

The intent of this Element is to foster the development of a sound economic base for Oconee County. This base should offer a range of employment opportunities for residents, support the economic competitiveness of existing and future employers, promote a highly trained and educated workforce, complement the County's rich cultural and natural resource base, and strengthen the overall quality of life for all residents.

A. REGIONAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Economic diversity is a vital component in achieving community sustainability. The ability of residents to live near their places of work and the local availability of goods and services are major factors in a healthy economy. Oconee County is situated in multiple and sometimes overlapping planning, economic development, and service delivery regions (Map 4-1). The County is located midway along the highly traveled I-85 corridor that links the Charlotte Metro region to Atlanta. As South Carolina's northwestern-most county, Oconee is the State's closest community to metro Atlanta.

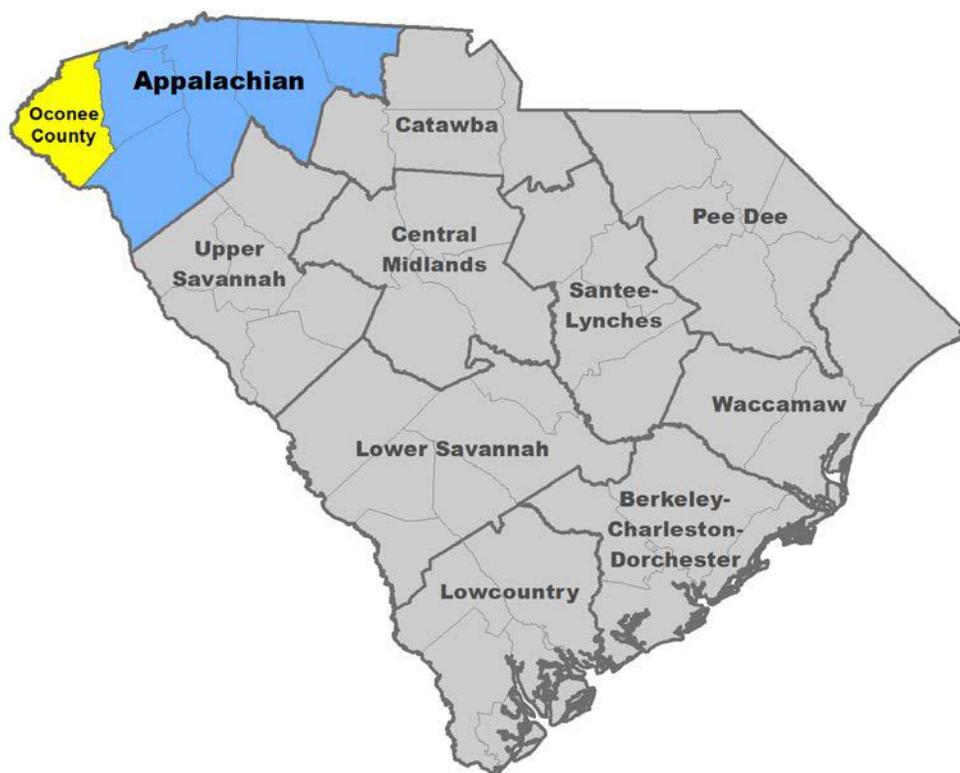
Together with Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Pickens, and Spartanburg Counties, Oconee County is part of the Appalachian Council of Governments region for transportation, transit, aging services, community development and infrastructure grants, and workforce development programs. For purposes of industrial recruitment and economic development activity, Oconee County is a member of the ten-county Upstate SC Alliance. For workforce development and job



training and placement services, the County is within the three-county Tri-County Technical College service area and the WorkLinks Workforce Investment Area that includes Anderson and Pickens Counties. Oconee County is also part of the larger federally-designated Appalachian Regional Commission service area comprised of 420 counties throughout 12 states.

The state's Appalachian region encompasses the northwestern corner of South Carolina. The region is home to a population of more than 1.2 million, nearly one quarter of the State's population. The region has a combined civilian labor force of almost 628,000. Oconee County has a population of 76,972, with an active civilian labor force of more than 35,500.

Map 4-1. Oconee County Economic Location Map



B. INCOME AND WEALTH

Present-day Oconee County was carved out Pickens District in 1868. Agriculture was the dominant economic activity of the area until the westward expansion of rail service in the late nineteenth century. New communities such as Seneca and Westminster were established as a result of extension of rail access to the region. The arrival of the railroad facilitated the rise of the textile industry as a major employer well into the twentieth century.

Following the Second World War, major infrastructure projects such as construction of the Interstate system including a segment of Interstate 85 in the southeastern corner of the County, and construction of a series of dams for power generation created Lakes Hartwell, Keowee, and Jocassee.

Although agriculture continues to be a strong sector in the state and local economies, rapid post-war population growth ushered manufacturing to the forefront of the State's mid-century economy. Oconee County is now home to more than 60 industry-related companies that draw from a regional labor shed of more than 630,000 residents. The continued recruitment of new domestic and international employers – coupled with the expansion of existing industries, tourism, retail businesses, health care, higher education, and agribusiness – strengthens the tax base and increases the number and quality of job opportunities available to County residents.

Economic development is more than job creation. A well-designed economic development strategy raises the standard of living and increases the assets and income levels of residents. In addition to employment rates, companion measures of economic health include the property tax base, sales revenue, diversity of employment sectors, capital investment, income levels, educational attainment, and cost of living.

1. Property Tax Base

The value of the property tax base impacts the ability of the County and its municipalities to provide vital services and facilities and to make the necessary public investments to encourage private investment. Property taxes are also the leading source of revenue for local governments. Assessment ratios applied to manufacturing, commercial, and other classes of real property are based on classifications and rates established by the State of South Carolina (Table 4-1). For residential uses, the assessment ratio is 4% for owner-occupied, principal residences and 6% for other non-principal residential uses. Residential owner-occupied properties are exempt from school property taxes. The State also offers a homestead exemption for residents based on multiple qualifying factors that include age and disability.

A tax rate of 6% applies to other real estate such as commercial and rental properties and agricultural real property owned by corporations, while private agricultural properties are assessed at 4%. Manufacturers pay a tax rate of 10.5% for real and personal property. This rate will be reduced to 9% by 2023 through a manufacturing property tax exemption passed in 2017. The assessment ratio for all other businesses is 6% for real property and 10.5% for personal property. Although the State sets the assessment rates, only local governments levy property taxes.



Table 4-1. South Carolina Real Property Assessment Rates

Property Classification	Tax Rate
Manufacturing and Utilities	10.5%
Residential Real Estate (Owner-Occupied)	4.0%
Commercial and Residential (Non-Owner-Occupied)	6.0%
Agricultural Property (Corporate)	6.0%
Agricultural Property (Private)	4.0%
Motor Vehicles	6.0%
Railroads, Pipelines, Airlines	9.5%
All Other Personal Property	10.5%

Source: S.C. Association of Counties, 2018 Property Tax Report

The County's total assessed value exceeded \$578 million in 2017, with a total appraised value of more than \$5.3 billion (*S.C. Index of Taxpaying Ability, 2019*). Annual property tax collections by type and percentage for Oconee County are shown in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2. Oconee County Annual Property Tax Base by Category

Base Category	Assessed Value
Owner-occupied (4%)	\$ 162,201,150
Agricultural (Private) (4%)	2,070,600
Agricultural (Corporate) (6%)	89,470
Commercial/Rental (6%)	169,576,155
Personal Property (Vehicles) (6%)	37,380,135
Other Personal Property (10.5%)	5,124,649
Manufacturing (10.5%)	8,390,953
Utility (10.5%)	164,428,624
Business Personal (10.5%)	7,367,923
Motor Carrier (9.5%)	3,469,729
Fee-in-Lieu/Joint Industrial Park	23,601,024
Total	\$ 578,700,412

Source: S.C. Department of Revenue, 2018 Local Government Finance Report

The County's base millage rate for 2018 was 71.00 with a value of one mil at \$559,921. This base rate covers county operations, debt service, economic development, Tri-County Technical College operations, and bridge and road maintenance. Table 4-3 compares the most recent value of a mill among Oconee and surrounding counties. Greenville has the highest value per mill at more than \$2.2 million, while Cherokee County has the lowest value at only \$172,125.



Table 4-3. Comparative Value of One Mill in Oconee County and Surrounding ACOG Counties

County	2018 Value of One Mil
Anderson County	\$ 744,000
Cherokee County	172,125
Greenville County	2,230,170
Oconee County	559,921
Pickens County	500,486
Spartanburg County	1,150,900

Source: 2018 Property Tax Report, S.C. Association of Counties

Municipal millage rates range from a high of 99.30 in Westminster to a low of 37.00 in Salem. The Oconee County School District exacts an additional, overlapping millage of 146.30 countywide. Additional mills not included in the County base support fire protection.

Table 4-4. Tax Millage Rates for Oconee County, Municipalities and Oconee County School District

Jurisdiction	2018 Millage Rate
Oconee County - Base Millage	.07100
Salem	.03700
Seneca	.06050
Walhalla	.08400
West Union	.04880
Westminster	.09930
Oconee County School District	.14630

Source: 2018 Property Tax Report, S.C. Association of Counties

Three utilities and seven manufacturers make up the list of the top ten principal taxpayers in Oconee County. These private sector employers collectively provide a third (33.3%) of the total assessed value countywide. Duke Energy tops the list, paying \$33.2 million in 2018 on a total assessed value of nearly \$159 million. This tax bill comprises almost 28% of the total taxable assessed value in the County. Nearly \$24 million of this total was appropriated to the Oconee County School District and Tri-County Technical College (*Oconee County CAFR, 2018*).

An industrial property tax abatement is available to qualified manufacturing businesses that make a minimum capital investment in Oconee County. This incentive provides a five-year property tax abatement from county ordinary operating taxes, excluding the school portion of the local millage. The abatement of municipal taxes is at the discretion of each municipality. Local governments can also negotiate Fee-in-Lieu of Tax (FILOT) agreements with companies making larger capital investments.

In addition to temporary tax incentives, the overall business tax structure of the State can impact economic competitiveness and performance through corporate, individual income,



sales, unemployment insurance, and property taxes. South Carolina ranks 37th nationally in terms of its overall business tax climate, trailing all other southeastern states including neighboring North Carolina (11), Georgia (36) and Florida (4), as well as Tennessee (14), Alabama (35), Mississippi (24), and Virginia (31). However, the State ranks 15th for favorable corporate tax structure, 32nd for sales taxes, and 24th for property taxes (*2018 State Business Tax Climate Index*). There is no state sales tax on manufacturing equipment, industrial power, or materials for finished products. The absence of state property taxes and no local income taxes help minimize operating costs for employers in the County. The County also does not charge a business license tax or business registration fee. This favorable business climate is enhanced locally, as Oconee County has the third lowest property tax in South Carolina.

2. Taxable Sales

Other key indicators of community wealth include revenues from retail sales, the local option sales tax, and accommodations and admissions taxes. The State of South Carolina has established a statewide base sales tax of 6% applied to the retail sale, lease, or rental of tangible personal property. Supplemental taxes based on community needs can be added by local governments, if approved by voters. These include Local Option, School District, Transportation, Capital Projects, Tourism Development, and Education Capital Improvement taxes. Oconee County currently does not have additional sales taxes in effect.

The level of taxable sales generally reflects the overall state of the economy, which influences purchasing decisions. Net taxable sales include automobiles, food, and merchandise. However, consumer money spent on gasoline, accommodations, and admission fees are not included in net taxable income data. Oconee County had nearly \$2 billion in gross retail sales and more than \$558 million in net taxable sales in 2016, ranking among the top twenty South Carolina counties.

Admissions taxes are collected at a rate of 5% of the paid admission for any amusement venue for which an admission fee is charged, including night clubs, sporting events, amusement parks, golf courses, movie theaters, bowling alleys, concerts, and health clubs. Admissions taxes collected countywide totaled \$254,100 in FY 2016, which is the most recent data available. An additional 2% state sales tax is imposed on the gross proceeds from the rental of rooms, lodging, and sleeping accommodations. Accommodations tax collections within Oconee County totaled \$251,846 in FY 2016, ranking 19th highest among the counties.

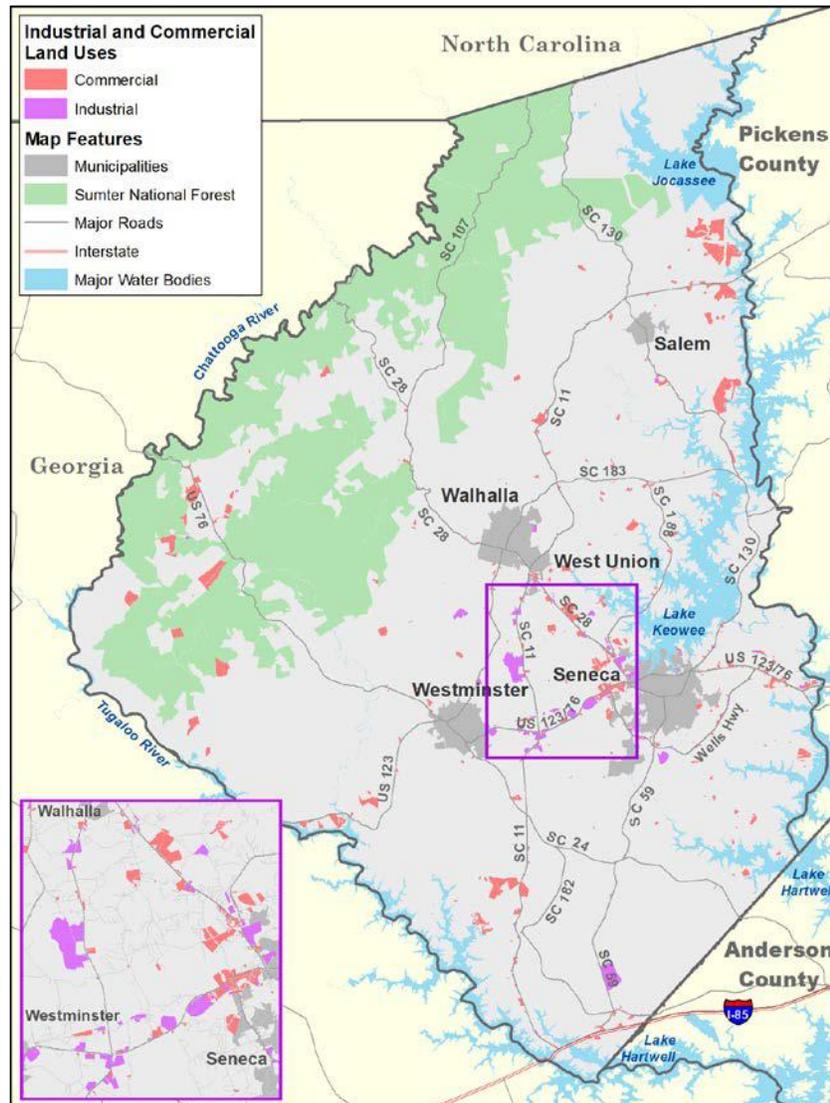
3. Commercial and Industrial Land Uses

The availability of desirable land for industrial and commercial purposes is necessary for economic growth. Land areas classified as industrial are those used to manufacture, assemble, process, or fabricate goods, and to store (warehouse) or transport goods. Examples include manufacturing plants, industrial parks, truck terminals, and warehouses. Countywide, there are nearly 2,000 acres currently in industrial use, representing less than 1% of the total land area.



Most industries in the County are located in the central and southern portion of the County near Westminster and Seneca (U.S. Highways 123 and 76 and S.C. Highways 28 and 11), and along the I-85 corridor (Map 4-2).

Map 4-2. Existing Industrial and Commercial Land Uses in Oconee County, 2019



Sources: Oconee County Assessor, 2018; Oconee County GIS Department, 2019

Commercial land areas are used to conduct business, trade activities, administrative activities, professional activities or services, or personal services. Examples of commercial uses include establishments for retail sale or wholesale of goods and services, restaurants, entertainment facilities, administrative or professional offices, gas stations, grocery stores, hair stylists, dry cleaners, furniture stores, clothing stores, car sales, law offices, doctor offices, CPAs, real estate offices, hotels/motels, lumber sales, private gyms, post offices, and nursery or garden centers. Commercial land uses account for almost 2% of the County's land area at 7,211 acres. Commercial uses are more evenly distributed throughout the County, with concentrations in



and near the City of Seneca and along U.S. Highway 123 and S.C. Highways 28 and 11 leading to the cities of Walhalla, Westminster, and Clemson. Smaller concentrations of commercial uses are also found near Salem, Long Creek, and the lake areas.

4. Capital Investment

Industrial capital investment in equipment, buildings, and land is an important contributor to the local economy, yielding more tax revenue per investment dollar to schools and local governments than residential and commercial development. The economic multiplier for manufacturing industries is typically much higher than for retail, health services, and personal business services.

Efforts to recruit new employers to the County have targeted industries in bioscience, energy, automotive, and advanced manufacturing. Oconee County has also experienced industrial employment growth through international investment. The County is now home to facilities of companies based in China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Sweden.

From 2010 to 2018, new and expanded manufacturing capital investment in Oconee County surpassed \$613 million and yielded 2,278 new jobs (Table 4-5). The highest number of manufacturing jobs was created by BorgWarner in its 2018 expansion, adding 160 new jobs. The County's highest single capital investment to date was also the \$73 million expansion of the BorgWarner facility in Seneca.

Table 4-5. Oconee County Economic Development Announcements, 2010 to Present

Year	Company	Product	Type	Capital Investment	Jobs
2010	JTEKT/Koyo Bearings USA	Bearings/steering systems	Expansion	\$ 5,000,000	0
2010	U.S. Engine Valve	Automotive engine valves	Expansion	18,000,000	10
2010	Schneider Electric	Motor control centers/chargers	Expansion	5,000,000	5
2011	Collins Craft	Woven fiberglass	Expansion	1,750,000	5
2011	BASF	Precious metal catalyst	Expansion	60,000,000	25
2011	Altera Polymers	Polyolefin/engineered resins	New	4,000,000	50
2012	RBC Aerostructures	Aerospace control rods	New	7,000,000	75
2012	BorgWarner	Transfer cases/wheel tech	Expansion	25,000,000	30
2013	Ulbrich Precision Flatwire	Specialty flat wire	Expansion	5,000,000	0
2013	BorgWarner	Transfer cases/wheel tech	Expansion	24,600,000	105
2013	Technology Solutions of SC	Energy information technology	New	1,500,000	7
2013	COE Optics	Optoelectronics research	New	1,000,000	5
2013	Sandvik	Cutting tools	Expansion	12,000,000	0
2013	Greenfield Industries	Cutting tools	Expansion	5,000,000	0
2014	HeliBasket	Helicopter external load equip	Expansion	500,000	8
2014	ACI Plastics	Thermoplastics processor	New	4,110,000	25
2014	US Engine Valve	Automotive engine valves	Expansion	29,500,000	125
2014	Plastic Products	Plastic injection molding	New	3,200,000	68
2014	BorgWarner	Transfer cases/wheel tech	Expansion	0	45
2014	Greenfield Industries	Cutting tools	Expansion	8,200,000	38



2015	ITECH South	Custom injection molding	Expansion	6,030,000	34
2015	ITT Enidine	Hydraulic/pneumatic comp	Expansion	2,500,000	0
2015	CRM Global	CNC machining components	New	500,000	10
2015	BorgWarner	Transfer cases/wheel tech	Expansion	13,350,000	51
2015	U.S. Building Innovations	Advanced coatings	New	1,020,000	31
2015	Casto Development	Commercial	New	30,000,000	300
2016	Nason Company	Pneumatic/hydraulic cylinders	Expansion	2,500,000	26
2016	Baxter Enterprises	Plastic injection molding	New	20,700,000	87
2016	Sealed Air	Plastic packaging/film	Expansion	6,800,000	0
2016	BASF	Precious metal catalyst	Expansion	60,000,000	0
2017	Jantzen (Perry Ellis)	Sports apparel distribution	Expansion	4,000,000	16
2017	Schneider Electric	Motor control centers/chargers	Expansion	7,329,800	56
2017	Itron	Electronic metering/control	Expansion	10,000,000	100
2017	BorgWarner	Transfer cases/wheel tech	Expansion	71,900,000	163
2017	PVS Sensors/Nacan	Hydraulic/pneumatic sensors	Expansion	N/A	N/A
2017	Sharpe Manufacturing	CNC machining	Expansion	N/A	N/A
2017	Vernon NDT	Ultrasound equipment	New	N/A	3
2017	Clemson EPOCH	Academic village commercial	New	60,000,000	30
2018	RBC Aerostructures	Aerospace control rods	Expansion	3,800,000	22
2018	JTEKT/Koyo Bearings USA	Bearings/steering systems	Expansion	19,400,000	56
2018	Keowee Brewing	Food & beverage manufacture	New	600,000	10
2018	Jocassee Brewing	Food & beverage manufacture	New	250,000	5
2018	Lakeside Lodge	Commercial	New	45,000,000	30
2019	Horton, Inc.	Engine cooling solutions	New	22,000,000	125
2019	Baxter	Plastic injection molding	Expansion	5,700,000	2

Source: Oconee Economic Alliance, 2019

5. Employment Centers

The County's list of top employers includes K-12 education, manufacturing, local government, and energy (Table 4-6). Although the County School District tops the list of major employers, manufacturers comprise two-thirds of the list that features producers of automotive products and metal products. These ten manufacturers contribute nearly 5,000 jobs to the local employment base. Six of these employers represent internationally headquartered firms.

Table 4-6. Major Employers in Oconee County

Rank	Employer	Employees	Location	Sector/Product
1	Oconee County School District	1,549	Multiple	Education
2	Duke Energy Corporation	1,314	Seneca	Energy
3	Oconee Memorial Hospital	1,300	Seneca	Healthcare
4	BorgWarner	970	Seneca	Automotive Transfer Cases
5	Itron, Inc.	930	West Union	Electronic Measuring Devices
6	JTEKT/Koyo Bearings USA, LLC	580	West Union	Automotive Bearings
7	Schneider Electric	550	Seneca	Motor Control Centers
8	Oconee County Government	470	Walhalla	Local Government
9	BASF Corp.	400	Seneca	Precious Metal Catalyst & Refining
10	U.S. Engine Valve Corp.	380	Westminster	Automotive Engine Valves
11	Greenfield Industries	350	Seneca	Cutting Tools



12	Sandvik, Inc.	305	Westminster	Cutting Tools
13	Johnson Controls	240	West Union	Plastics
14	Perry Ellis International	180	Seneca	Apparel Distribution
15	Baxter Enterprises	180	Westminster	Automotive Interior Door Panels

Source: Oconee Economic Alliance, 2019

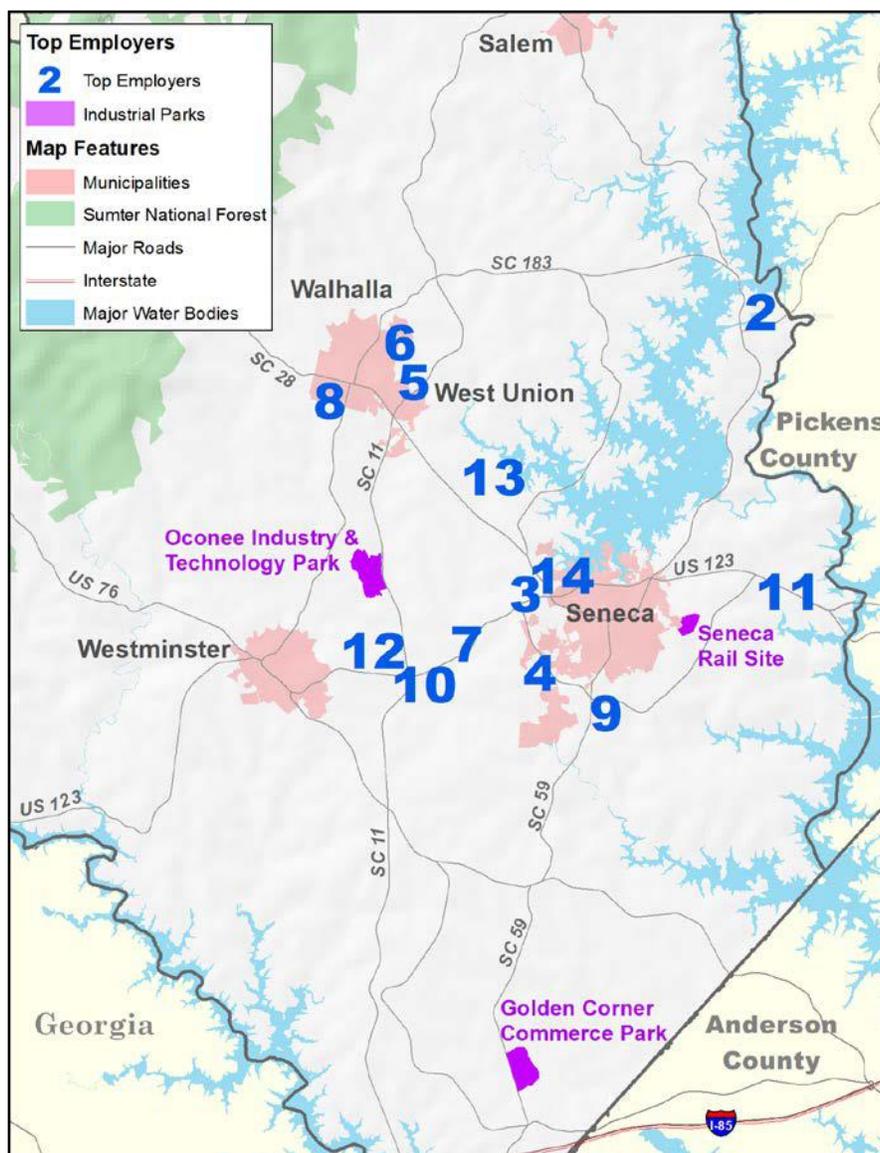
Map 4-3 depicts the location of the County's major employers by numbered rank as listed in Table 4-6, as well as the three county-owned industrial parks. The parks offer more than 700 buildable acres for new industry. All three have attained certification by the S.C. Department of Commerce.

The 322-acre **Golden Corner Commerce Park** (GCCP) is located just north of Interstate 85 on S.C. Highway 59. The certified park is designed to accommodate manufacturing, warehouse, and distribution facilities. Wastewater service has been completed.

The **Oconee Industry and Technology Park** (OITP) is a certified site located on S.C. Highway 11 in the triangle between Walhalla, Westminster, and Seneca. The 422-acre park is the site of the new Tri-County Technical College (TCTC) campus. In addition to college and school district training facilities of the new *Center for Workforce Development*, current employers include Baxter Manufacturing and Horton, Inc.

Located on the east side of Seneca, the certified **Seneca Rail Park** (SRP) is a rail-served manufacturing park on 111 acres near U.S. Highway 123. In addition to its close proximity to Clemson University, this site has been designated as a *certified fiber ready* industrial park, the first industrial park in Upstate South Carolina to receive this designation. The Park is also within a *New Market Tax Credit Zone* and a designated *Qualified Opportunity Zone* with federal incentives.

Map 4-3. Major Employers and Industrial Parks in Oconee County



Source: Oconee Economic Alliance, 2019

6. Income

Income can be assessed through a variety of indicators that include per capita income, total personal income, poverty levels, living wage indicators, and earnings. *Per capita income* is an income average computed for each individual in the population. Per capita income for Oconee County residents at \$25,944 is slightly higher than that of South Carolina at \$25,521, but trails the national income of \$29,829.

Poverty level data is based on thresholds established by the Federal government that are linked to changes in the cost of living and the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Poverty is defined as having



insufficient resources to meet basic living expenses, including the costs of food, shelter, clothing, transportation and medical expenses. The percentage of Oconee County residents living in poverty is 19%, above the percentage of impoverished State residents at 17.2% and the national poverty rate of 15.1%. Among Oconee County households, 16.4% (5,076 households) live in poverty. The highest percentage of County residents living in poverty includes working age adults between 18 and 44 years of age at 42.1%. **Low and moderate income (LMI) households** are those households with incomes below 80% of median family income. As detailed in the *Housing and Population Elements*, 40% of Oconee County households are considered to be LMI.

The **Basic Family Budget Calculator** developed by the Economic Policy Institute estimates the minimum income needed to cover basic living expenses to provide a secure, yet modest standard of living. Under the EPI model, a family of four with two adults and two children living in Oconee County would need an annual income of \$65,570 – or a monthly income of \$5,464 – to adequately provide for basic housing, food, transportation, child care, taxes, and health care costs (*Economic Policy Institute, 2018*).

Living wage indicators have been developed by MIT researchers to determine the market-based cost of living within communities in each state. The living wage estimate for families living and working in Oconee County estimates the full-time hourly rate that a resident (employed full-time at 2,080 hours annually) must earn to support a family for expenses such as food, child care, transportation, medical, and housing costs. Using this formula, the working head of household for a typical family of four in the County would have to make approximately \$23.75 an hour to support the family's basic needs for housing, medical, child care, transportation, and food.

The **average annual wage** is computed by dividing total annual wages by annual average employment. The average weekly and annual wage in Oconee County ranks 5th highest in the State at an hourly rate of \$24.25 per hour and annual earnings of \$50,440 (Table 4-7).

Table 4-7. Comparison of Average Annual Wage for Oconee and Adjacent Counties

Location	Average Annual Wage	State Rank
Anderson County	\$ 41,652	22
Cherokee County	35,620	42
Greenville County	49,972	7
Oconee County	50,440	5
Pickens County	41,652	23
Spartanburg County	47,060	12
South Carolina	46,488	N/A

Source: S.C. Department of Employment & Workforce, Q4 2018



As detailed in Figure 4-8, the highest average annual wages in Oconee County are generated in Wholesale Trade, Administrative & Waste Management Services, and Manufacturing. The Accommodation and Food Services industry yielded the lowest average annual wages in the County at \$15,340. At more than \$57,000, the average Manufacturing sector job in Oconee County offers more than three times the average annual wage of an Accommodation and Food Services sector job.

Table 4-8. Average Annual Salary by Industry for Oconee County, Region and State, 2016

Industry	Oconee County	Worklink Workforce Region	South Carolina
Accommodation and Food Services	\$ 15,340	\$ 15,392	\$ 18,096
Administrative & Waste Management Service	67,860	40,300	35,672
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	26,468	28,392	39,000
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	20,020	15,704	21,996
Construction	40,456	45,916	57,304
Finance and Insurance	55,692	52,572	67,236
Health Care and Social Assistance	52,312	47,736	52,416
Information	50,232	51,584	60,580
Management of Companies and Enterprises	44,668	84,448	82,576
Manufacturing	57,096	56,940	60,788
Other Services (except Public Administration)	31,876	31,824	34,996
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	55,172	55,952	77,376
Public Administration	38,896	38,428	48,048
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	44,668	45,760	49,348
Retail Trade	26,936	26,260	28,288
Transportation and Warehousing	49,296	48,724	46,540
Utilities	52,624	99,164	83,616
Wholesale Trade	176,800	74,932	72,592

Source: S.C. Department of Employment & Workforce (Q4 2018), 2019

Local average wages by sector are particularly relevant when considering the minimum living wage estimates previously provided in Table 4-7. County economic development strategies should consider the need to provide a balanced sector mix to ensure adequate earnings opportunity for Oconee County residents. Although the services sector represents a growing segment of the national and local economy, these jobs often offer lower pay and fewer benefits than many other sector employment opportunities.

7. Retirees

An influx of retirees to a community, coupled with higher numbers of current residents who are aging-in-place, can influence the local economy by spurring growth to meet the demands of a growing and older population. The benefits of growing the retirement base of a community generally include higher incomes and educational levels, economic stability and vibrancy, and a



neutral fiscal impact on service delivery (*Golden Rules, University of Georgia, 2013*). It is estimated that one new job is generated by every two new retirees to a community. As a result, retiree recruitment has become part of the overall economic development strategy for many communities.

Retirees relocating to a community generally seek certain non-work-related amenities and quality of life factors that include mild climate, lower cost of living, low crime rates, quality housing options, medical services, cultural and recreational opportunities, and services for seniors. More recent studies show that retirees are placing an increasing emphasis on cultural, educational, and wellness opportunities as well as technology access in their new communities (*Attracting Retirees to South Carolina, 2016*). Research shows that most retirement relocation decisions are not made in a few months, but are made over a period of years leading up to actual retirement. Opportunities to attract retirees often occur when they first visit a community as tourists much earlier, closely linking tourism and retiree recruitment strategies. As a result, many states including neighboring North Carolina, have launched *Certified Retirement Community* programs similar to initiatives geared toward industrial development. These program assess communities in terms of access to health care, volunteer and part-time employment opportunities, recreation and wellness, climate, tax structure, safety, and lifelong education and entertainment.

South Carolina ranks well in common retirement metrics such as quality of life, climate, health care, and affordability. Approximately two-thirds of the nearly 110,000 people who made South Carolina their new home in 2017 were over the age of 50 (*The Center for Carolina Living*). The State consistently ranks within the top ten retirement destination lists of national publications such as Kiplinger's, Southern Living, Forbes, Conde Nast, and U.S. News & World Report. A retirement preference survey conducted by the University of South Carolina found that most potential retirees to the State prefer to retire in small towns, coastal regions, mountains, rural, and urban areas.

Armed with potentially significant purchasing power, retirees impact the local economy particularly in the areas of health care, retail, and housing. Current retirees in South Carolina generate an annual economic impact of nearly \$30 billion (*Attracting Retirees to South Carolina, 2016*). The annual rate of in-migration of retirees is close to 54,000. The Upstate has emerged as a favorable destination for many of the State's retirees. Oconee County is particularly poised to attract retirees seeking convenient access to the Greenville metro area, Interstate access, the more relaxed climate of smaller cities and towns, the cultural and sports venues of nearby Clemson University, lower traffic congestion, and abundant natural lake and mountain amenities. The City of Seneca was named among the top fifteen retirement cities (*SmartAssets*) and Oconee County was named among the top 10 in the nation for living and boating (*Boating Magazine*).

Communities attracting large numbers of retirees should also plan for the impacts of an aging population. The future needs of the retiree population should be evaluated to determine the

types of cultural activities, amenities, facilities and services needed to serve current and recruit additional retirees to the County. An older population typically has a greater need for specialized health care providers and facilities, aging services, transportation, and housing options. The influences of an older population on the types and focus of community services and programming can also affect the appeal of a community to younger families and young professionals whose interests may differ.

C. WORKFORCE

Employers require access to a qualified workforce to survive and grow, making the composition and size of a community's labor force one of the most critical factors in employer location and for building and maintaining a successful and strong economy. The labor force is the number of residents employed and those seeking employment and available for work. This number represents the combined pool of workers potentially available to employers.

Information on the population base and labor force characteristics can provide insight into the ability of Oconee County and its municipalities to attract and retain sound employers, as well as adapt to changing global economic trends. An understanding of the County's labor base requires an examination of underemployment and unemployment, education and skill levels of the incumbent and entering workforce, population growth, and commuting patterns.

A healthy economy requires a stable and growing population. Population growth is fueled by multiple factors including job creation and capital investment, residential housing supply, fuel prices, rate of natural increase, and migration. The Oconee County population grew from 74,273 residents in 2010 to 75,375 by 2016. Projections indicate that the County population will reach 80,260 by 2023 and 83,459 residents by 2028.

1. Unemployment and Underemployment

The unemployment rate reflects the number of individuals who are without work and are actively seeking employment. Unemployment rates for Oconee County are consistently lower than statewide unemployment for each of the last ten years. Reported job losses due to mass layoffs in the County totaled 357 from 2008 through 2018. This mass layoff occurred in 2012 at the Itron plant in West Union.

The economic recession prompted a sharp rise in the County's unemployment to a high of 13.3% in 2009 that has been followed by a steady decrease over the last nine years to a low of 3.3% by the end of 2018. The County's 2018 annual unemployment rate was lower than both state and national rates.

The most recent data published by the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce reveals that among Oconee County workers filing unemployment claims, more than half had attended,



but not completed, college. Over a third (36%) of jobless residents were between 41 and 55 years old, while another third (33%) were between the ages of 25 and 40 years.

Another key workforce concern is *underemployment*. An underemployed worker is generally one who is overqualified in a current job and interested in other employment. Many underemployed residents are in part-time or temporary jobs that may lack key benefits such as health insurance. Oconee County and the surrounding region has a higher level of underemployment at 16.3% that the State as a whole at 16.2% (*Comprehensive Regional Workforce Analysis, 2018*).

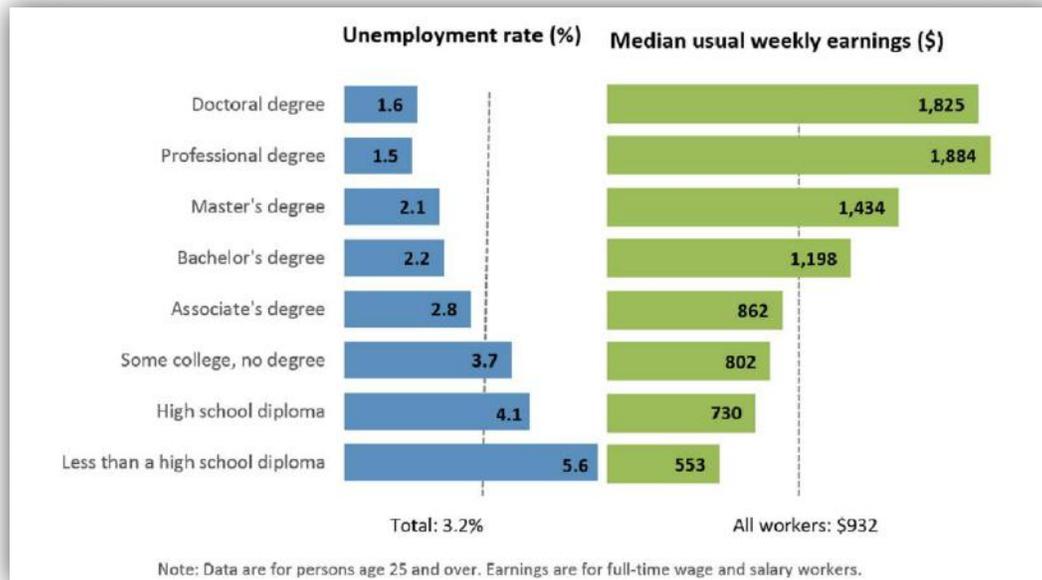
On a positive note, unemployment and underemployment are two contributing factors to the potential pool of qualified labor for new businesses looking to locate in the County. Underemployed workers are often the first to respond to new job opportunities with new and expanding industries, and often have more skills than their jobs require.

2. Education and Skills

An educated and skilled workforce is integral to building a strong local economy. Local educational attainment levels provide an important indicator of the long-term economic competitiveness of Oconee County and its municipalities. County efforts to increase the educational attainment and encourage postsecondary training is yielding results with new and rewarding job opportunities that strengthen quality of life and community prosperity.

Educational attainment is a significant indicator of current and future earnings potential. U.S. Department of Labor data reveals that the national median weekly earnings in 2018 were \$553 for a person without a high school diploma, compared to \$730 for a worker with a high school diploma and \$862 for an associate degree holder (Figure 4-2). Individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher had median earnings ranging from \$1,198 to \$1,884 per week. Unemployment is also generally lower for individuals with higher educational attainment. At the national level, residents with no high school diploma experienced an unemployment rate of 5.6%, compared to the rate for adults with a bachelor's degree at only 2.2%. Individuals with a high school diploma, but no college, had an unemployment rate of 4.1%.

Figure 4-2. National Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2018



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018

In South Carolina, a worker with less than a high school diploma makes an average annual wage of \$19,864, compared to a high school graduate or GED holder who earns \$26,702 (*American Community Survey, 2013-2017*). In Oconee County, the annual earnings gap between a high school dropout (\$16,131) and a high school graduate (\$24,879) is even higher at \$8,748. A South Carolinian with some college or an associate degree earns an average of \$32,022, while income with a bachelor's degree averages \$45,757. Oconee County residents with an associate degree or some college earn an annual average of \$31,207, while those with a four-year degree average \$42,496. A State resident with a graduate or professional degree has an annual average income of \$55,414. County residents with post-graduate degrees average \$62,345.

Nearly 84% of County residents aged 25 and older have completed high school. This percentage is slightly under the state average of 86%. The percentage of County residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher rose from 18.2% to 23.5%. Likewise, the percentage of residents with some college, including those with an associate degree, increased from 22.5% to 28.8%. The percentage of County residents who lack a high school education has steadily declined.

Oconee County is similar to the State in the percentage of residents with postsecondary degrees, with 8.9% of County residents holding an associate degree, 13.9% a baccalaureate degree, and 9.6% a graduate or professional degree. Statewide, 9.1% of South Carolinians have earned an associate degree, 16.9% a baccalaureate degree, and 9.6% a graduate or professional degree.

Educational achievement and skill proficiency levels among the local workforce strongly influence employer interest in locating to the area, as well as productivity and satisfaction with the workforce for existing employers. The path to educational achievement and job readiness starts in the K through 12 school system. Public schools are a vital community resource in attracting new employers and in preparing residents for a knowledge-based, global economy.

Strengthening the college and career readiness of high school graduates is an emerging factor in state and local economic competitiveness. Readiness is demonstrated by additional measures of student achievement such as college entrance scores, Advanced Placement (AP) or dual enrollment course participation and pass rates, and postsecondary enrollment.

The School District of Oconee County (SDOC) operates a total of 16 schools with a combined enrollment of approximately 10,500 students. In addition to 10 elementary schools, three middle schools and three high schools, the District operates an alternative school for academic and discipline referrals, a career center, and an adult education center. The Hamilton Career Center provides career training for high school students in support of area workforce needs. In partnership with local business and industry, Tri-County Technical College (TCTC), and Oconee County, the School District will open a new state-of-the-art, 100,000 ft² facility scheduled for completion by fall 2020.

The school system offers advanced and extended learning opportunities including Advanced Placement courses that offer college-level instruction and credit, career and technology education, virtual classes, and work-based learning. The District also maintains articulation agreements with the technical college to offer dual enrollment opportunities for high school students to gain both high school and college credit before graduation. Dual enrollment courses transfer to any state technical college or public university in South Carolina and can be taken at no cost for students meeting the minimum credit hours per semester. These credits give many local students a head start on postsecondary education and help reduce the total costs associated with college.

Table 4-9 details selected college and career performance data for the School District relative to high school SAT/ACT exam scores, state-mandated *End of Course Test* (EOCT) pass rates, graduation rate, and percentage of high school seniors eligible for the merit-based *Legislative Incentive for Future Excellence* (LIFE) scholarships for students attending postsecondary institutions within the State. The 2018 on-time graduation rate for Oconee County high school students was above the State average. LIFE eligibility for County graduates is almost 75%, with a postsecondary participation rate of nearly 71%. Composite ACT exam scores for County students were on par with the State average, at 18.9 and 19, respectively. Approximately one-third of Oconee County public high school students took the SAT in 2018, posting a composite SAT score average of 1091. This average was 27 points above the State score average.



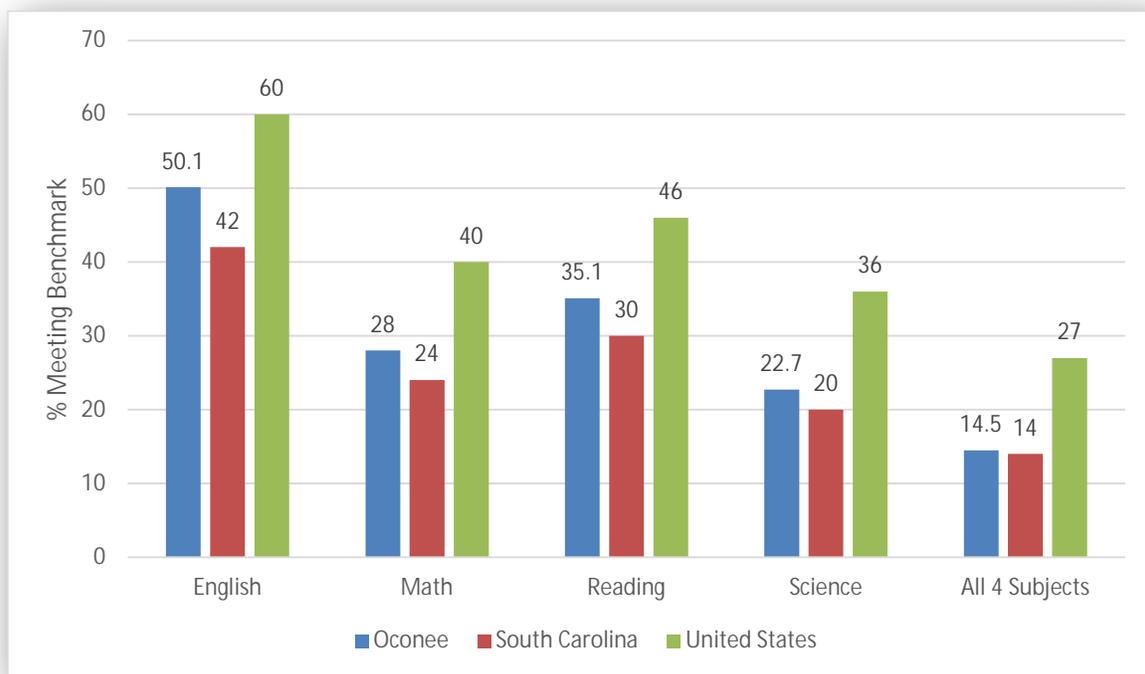
Table 4-9. Comparison of Selected High School Performance Measures

School District	SAT ¹	ACT ¹	% College Ready ²	4-Year Grad Rate	% LIFE Eligible	Postsecondary Enroll Rate ³
Oconee School District	1091	18.9	14.5%	84.1%	74.4%	70.8%
South Carolina	1064	19.0	14.0%	81.0%	N/A	N/A

¹Composite score for public school students; ²All 4 subjects; ³Enrolled in a 4 or 2-yr college by fall after graduation
 Source: 2018 School Report Cards, S.C. Department of Education

Figure 4-3 compares the college readiness of County seniors with graduates in the State and nation using the ACT College Readiness benchmarks.

Figure 4-3. Comparison of ACT College Readiness Benchmark Attainment



Source: ACT Score Reports, 2018

In addition to the ACT and SAT college readiness testing options, South Carolina high school students may take the *Ready to Work* (R₂W) career readiness assessment. The new test is administered to all eleventh grade students to determine student achievement in Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information. Soft skills are also assessed in areas such as problem solving, goal setting, decision-making, and self-direction. Of the 704 Oconee County high school students who tested in 2018, nearly 85% received a certificate of job readiness for a broad range of jobs (*S.C. Department of Education, 2019*).



3. Existing and Projected Employment by Sector

The occupation of employed residents provides an overview of the local and regional economy and insight into individual earnings potential. Approximately 54% of the County's population aged 16 and older are participating in the labor force. Of the Oconee County residents currently in the civilian workforce, 78.5% are private wage and salary workers, 15.2% work in federal, state, and local government, and 6.2% are self-employed (ACS, 2013-2017).

State data on current employment by industry group reveals that Manufacturing is the leading employment sector in Oconee County, employing nearly 20% of the workforce (6,067) in 2018. Retail Trade ranks second highest with a workforce of more than 3,300. Health Care and Social Services ranks third highest at 2,871, followed by the Accommodation and Food Services sector that employs 1,775 Oconee workers. The lowest sector employment is found in Management of Companies, Real Estate and Rental, Transportation and Warehousing, and Agriculture, Fishing and Hunting, each with fewer than 200 jobs. The latest available statewide industry employment projections cover the ten-year period from 2014 to 2024 (Table 4-10).

Table 4-10. WorkLink WIA Comparison of Labor Market Outlook by Industry to 2024*

Industry	% Increase 2014-2024
Health Care and Social Assistance	20.15%
Construction	21.48%
Educational Services	15.43%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management	26.25%
Retail Trade	6.14%
Accommodations and Food Services	10.67%
Manufacturing	3.61%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	25.66%
Other Services (Except Government)	6.63%
Finance and Insurance	8.57%
Wholesale Trade	15.57%
Transportation and Warehousing	14.88%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	8.16%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	9.63%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	8.36%
Information	7.07%
Utilities	0.42%
Mining, Quarrying, Oil and Gas Extraction	Confidential
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	Confidential
All Jobs	8.97

Source: S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce, Industry Projections, 2019

4. Commuting Patterns

Travel time to work, or commute time, can affect a worker's productivity and quality of life. The mean travel time to the workplace for Oconee County residents is 24.7 minutes, slightly above the 24.1-minute commute average for residents statewide. Nearly one-third (31.1%) of Oconee County workers have a commute time of less than 15 minutes to work. Eight percent of County workers drive an hour or more to work.

Personal vehicles are the primary travel mode to work for most Oconee County residents. Only 1.5% of County workers bike, walk, or travel to work on public transportation. Among workers living in Oconee County, 84.2% drive solo to work, while 10% participate in carpools. Only 3.3% of the County workforce works at home, which is slightly lower than the statewide percentage of 3.6% and the national rate of 4.6%.

Worker commuting patterns indicate 71% of the County's workforce live and work in the County, slightly above the statewide average of 70.6% (Table 4-11). Nearly one-in-four residents commute outside of the County to work, and 4.4% commute to jobs outside the state.

Table 4-11. Journey to Work, 2016

Workers 16 and Older	Oconee County	South Carolina	United States
Place of Work			
Worked in Town or City of Residence	4.1%	16.2%	31.5%
Worked in County of Residence	71.1%	70.6%	72.4%
Worked Outside County of Residence	24.5%	24.1%	23.9%
Worked Outside State of Residence	4.4%	5.3%	3.7%
Means of Transport to Work			
Car, Truck or Van – Drove Alone	84.2%	82.8%	76.4%
Car, Truck or Van – Carpooled	10.0%	9.3%	9.3%
Public Transportation	0.7%	0.6%	5.1%
Walked	0.8%	2.2%	2.8%
Bicycle	0.0%	0.3%	0.6%
Other Means - Taxi, Motorcycle, etc.	1.0%	1.2%	1.2%
Worked at Home	3.3%	3.6%	4.6%
Travel Time to Work			
14 minutes or less	31.1%	27.3%	26.7%
15 - 29 minutes	39.0%	39.5%	36.3%
30 to 59 minutes	21.6%	27.5%	28.4%
60 or more minutes	8.1%	5.6%	8.7%
Mean Travel Time to Work (minutes)	24.7	24.1	26.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey



Geographic data on worker commuting patterns is detailed in Table 4-12. Of the 7,870 Oconee County residents who travel outside the County for work, more than 45% commute to Pickens County employers, followed by workers commuting to Anderson (22.9%) and Greenville Counties (13.1%). These outgoing commuters offer a potential labor pool for new and expanding industries and businesses as more job opportunities are created closer to home.

Table 4-12. Oconee County Commuter Workforce - Leading Counties

Commuters into County		Commuters out of County	
County of Residence	Commuters	County of Employment	Commuters
Pickens County, SC	2,786	Pickens County, SC	3,553
Anderson County, SC	2,061	Anderson County, SC	1,802
Greenville County, SC	491	Greenville County, SC	1,034
Stephens County, GA	183	Stephens County, GA	213
Spartanburg County, SC	101	Jackson County, NC	168
Franklin County, GA	84	Spartanburg County, SC	137
Jasper County, SC	74	Fulton County, GA	77
Abbeville County, SC	73	Rutherford County, NC	67

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey

Nearly 6,580 workers from surrounding counties and nearby states travel to employers in Oconee County.

D. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Bolstered by a workforce development emphasis, direct Interstate access, expanded access to higher education, and strong tourism and natural resource assets, Oconee County is well-positioned for continued economic development growth. The County offers a comparably low cost of doing business that includes factors such as low taxes and utility rates, as well as a generally lower cost of living. As a right-to-work state, South Carolina ranks among the nation's least unionized states at a rate of only 1.6%.

State and local jurisdictions have the option of further creating a positive business climate by offering tax incentives that help employers reduce operating costs and boost return-on-investment, the provision of infrastructure, and the availability of low to no-cost specialized workforce development and training programs. Local governments can also streamline development review and permitting processes to facilitate clear communication of expectations and regulations and ensure the consistent enforcement of codes, ordinances, and regulations. The County can also promote the protection of existing and future business operations through sound planning for infrastructure and compatible land use.



1. Incentives

Public investments and incentives, when part of a well-planned development strategy, can provide an attractive business climate and increase private investment. The State and County can provide multiple tax incentives to existing and new businesses to encourage economic growth and investment. Among the strongest incentives available to State and local economic developers are the jobs tax credit, the fee-in-lieu of property taxes, and job development and retraining credits. Because the State does not tax real or personal property, property tax incentives must be implemented in conjunction with each county.

The State's 46 counties are ranked by the S.C. Department of Revenue each year in one of four tiers, with Tier I including the highest ranked counties and Tier IV including the lowest. Rankings are based on employment rates and per capita income. Oconee County is currently ranked among twelve counties in the second tier. This ranking is used by the State to determine the amount of jobs tax credits allocated to eligible employers in each county, with the larger credit amounts going to counties with the greatest economic need. The 2019 jobs tax credit amount for Oconee County is \$2,750.

The ability to offer many of these incentives depends on the formal approval of the S.C. Department of Revenue and local city and county councils. In addition to the incentives listed in Table 4-13, the wide range of tax credits available to employers includes credits for hiring displaced workers, conservation and habitat management, child care, textile mill and abandoned sites revitalization, and minority businesses. Green incentives are available to promote recycling facilities and energy conservation and renewable energy improvements with recycling, solar, biomass, and renewable fuels.

Table 4-13. State and Local Business Incentives

Available Incentives by Type	Authority	
	State	Local
<i>Corporate Income Tax and Incentives</i>		
Job Tax Credits	✓	
Investment Tax Credit	✓	
Corporate Headquarters Credit	✓	
Research & Development Tax Credit	✓	
Sales Tax Exemption	✓	
Port Volume Increase Tax Credit	✓	
Agricultural Products Purchases Credit	✓	
Corporate Income Tax Moratorium	✓	
<i>State Discretionary Incentives</i>		
Job Development Credit	✓	
Job Retraining Credit	✓	
Economic Development Set-aside Program	✓	
Rural Infrastructure Fund	✓	
Enterprise Zone Retraining Credit Program	✓	



Local Property Tax Incentives		
Fee-In-Lieu of Taxes (FILOT)		✓
Five-Year Property Tax Abatement		✓
Property Tax Exemptions	✓	✓
Textile Revitalization Credit		✓
Revitalization of Abandoned Building Credit		✓

Source: 2019 S.C. Business Incentives Guide, S.C. Department of Commerce

2. Workforce Development

Workforce development is a leading challenge in economic development efforts. The availability of a trained and highly skilled workforce is a major consideration in business location decisions for most employers. Workforce quality is also important. The emphasis of state, regional, and county recruitment efforts on attracting higher-wage, higher-tech employers requires a better-educated and more technologically proficient workforce.

Employment and training resources are offered by State and local providers in Oconee County through the K-12 school system, the technical college system, adult education, and specialized workforce training and job placement programs. Expanded access to training resources has contributed to the rising educational attainment and employability of Oconee County residents. The **School District of Oconee County (SDOC)** offers diverse academic and elective programs in its middle and high schools. The District's **Hamilton Career Center** is the center for high school technology education in Oconee County. The Center currently enrolls 1,000 students from the three district high schools. The District offers technical electives that support 13 career clusters that range from health science and culinary arts to welding and computer science. Students can explore career interests, train for a specific career, gain employability skills, earn state and national certification, and prepare for postsecondary education. County students can also learn about careers, specific job skills and other workplace expectations by participating in work-based opportunities such as job shadowing and internships. Oconee County conducts a **Youth Apprenticeship Program** in partnership with the School District and Apprenticeship Carolina. Students acquire hands-on experience in various business settings and gain a deeper understanding of today's global business environment.

The SDOC also operates the **Oconee County Adult Education** program to prepare residents to obtain the High School Equivalency (GED) diploma. Housed at the Code Learning Center in Seneca, SDOC programs include adult and family literacy, career ready certification, and workplace skills.

To help future Oconee County graduates prepare for productive futures, the SDOC and the Oconee Economic Alliance created NOW (Nurturing Oconee's Workforce) as a manufacturing focused workforce development initiative launched in the fall of 2016. Thirty students, ten from each local high school, are selected each year as NOW Scholars. Participants attend monthly advanced employment skills and career awareness workshops, industry exposure and networking, and tours and internships with Oconee County's top manufacturing employers. The



inaugural class graduated in 2018 to pursue specializations in diverse, high demand fields including mechatronics, machine tool technology, welding, mechanical engineering, and agricultural mechanization.

Oconee County is served by *Tri-County Technical College* (TCTC), one of 16 public, two-year colleges that comprise the S.C. Technical Education System. The College serves a combined enrollment of 6,082 in its three-county service area from its main campus in Pendleton, as well as through satellite campuses in each of the three counties. The new Oconee County campus opened in the fall of 2018 and is located at the Oconee Industry and Technology Park on S.C. Highway 11 in Westminster. The campus is designed to support regional manufacturing with programs that include CNC Programming and Operations, Manufacturing Management and Leadership, Business Administration and Operations Management, Industrial Electronics Technology, and Mechatronics. The campus also offers dual enrollment for area high school students, university transfer courses, and S.C. Manufacturing Certification. By 2020, the campus will also house the new School District of Oconee County Career Center. The TCTC campus co-location with the SDOC career center and local industry will form an innovative center for technical education, work-based learning, and economic development.

In addition to formal K-12 and postsecondary learning opportunities, the State also offers targeted training programs specifically tailored to the workforce development needs of businesses and industries. Oconee County residents and employers have access to proven workforce development programs that play a critical role in economic development. These job training and re-training programs help attract and retain employers by providing a pool of highly-skilled labor.

Table 4-14. Oconee County Workforce Development Resources

Partner	Workforce Development Role
Worklinks Workforce Development Area (SCWorks)	Leverages <i>Workforce Investment Act</i> funds and other resources as part of the 10-region workforce development system. Partners include the S.C. Department of Employment and Workforce, Tri-County Technical College, and the S.C. Vocational Rehabilitation Department. Centers provide multiple services to help employers find qualified workers, while job seekers and incumbent workers can access employment and training services. Services include internet access, labor market information, resume writing assistance, job search workshops and placement services, adult education and literacy programs, senior employment assistance, veteran employment and training programs, community-based agency assistance, unemployment insurance, and skills assessment.
readySC™	Statewide training resource administered by the S.C. Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education for new and expanding companies in South Carolina, with an estimated value per employee of up to \$9,500. Short-term training is customized to meet the specific needs of employers and conducted on-site as needed. Includes tailored employee recruitment, screening, and training for businesses at little or no cost. The program has trained 298,000 South Carolinians to date.
Apprenticeship Carolina™	The S.C. Technical College System and the S.C. Department of Commerce launched the program as a statewide, coordinated approach to the promotion and support of

	registered occupational apprenticeships. The program provides supervised on-the-job training and related technical instruction (RTI) through registered apprenticeships in nearly 1,000 occupations. Regional workforce investment funds can be leveraged for eligible expenditures including instruction, training, and wages, while trainees can also use lottery tuition assistance for apprenticeship programs. Participating employers qualify for income tax credits.
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3. Utilities

The development and expansion of infrastructure is one of the most significant challenges to future economic growth in Oconee County. The location, timing, and pace of new infrastructure impacts the ability of Oconee County to service new and existing employers. To maximize the economic benefit of costly investments in infrastructure, the County and its municipalities must maintain a coordinated process for planning and prioritization of capital facilities and infrastructure needs. Industrial recruitment efforts generally center on sites and communities where water and sewer are either already available or can be extended at reasonable expense. The County's infrastructure resources are described in greater detail in the *Community Facilities, Transportation, and Priority Investment Elements*.

4. Transportation

Commercial transportation is critical for business and industrial development in today's global economy. Although size and space needs for new businesses and industries can vary widely among employer types and sectors, an accessible transportation infrastructure that provides easy access to materials, supplies, and markets is a common requirement. Convenient connectivity to areas nationwide and overseas is an attractive incentive for businesses and industries, making freight mobility a high priority when considering transportation infrastructure investments. Depending on industry-specific needs, this infrastructure network can include interstates and highways, aviation facilities, rail service, and ports.

The County has nearly nine miles of direct frontage on Interstate 85, with four interchanges. U.S. Highways 123 and 76 traverse the County, as well as South Carolina Highways 28, 183, 130, 59, and 11. Of the 1,700 miles of roads in the County, more than 1,000 are federal and state highways maintained by the State of South Carolina. These transportation corridors open employment, shopping, and recreation opportunities to residents and provide workers with access to employers.

Rail service offers a cost-effective option for manufacturers that require bulk raw materials and shipment of finished products. Oconee County is bisected by the main Norfolk Southern rail line that links Charlotte, North Carolina with Atlanta, Georgia. The line provides direct access to the County's Seneca Rail Park.

Located between Seneca and Clemson, the *Oconee County Airport* offers a 5,000-foot runway, GPS navigation systems, and general aviation support services and amenities that can



accommodate the needs of smaller recreational aircraft as well as larger turboprops and business jets. Commercial passenger service for domestic and international flight connections is accessible at the *Greenville-Spartanburg International Jetport* (GSP) within an hour drive. Six major airlines serve more than 2.3 million passengers through an average of 50 non-stop flights to 19 major airports daily. GSP handles 60,000 tons of cargo annually and is the site of a 120,000 ft² FedEx cargo facility. The *Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport* (ATL) is a two-hour drive to the west. As the world's busiest airport, ATL provides international and domestic flights to more than 100 million passengers each year to 150 domestic and 75 international destinations. Both airports offer significant air freight capacity that includes large shipping distribution facilities.

Traditional port service for Oconee County businesses is available through South Carolina seaports at terminals in Charleston and Georgetown. The *Port of Charleston* ranks as one of the busiest container ports on the East coast and provides the primary port service for State businesses. The facility handles 2.2 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) annually, while moving 760,500 tons of breakbulk cargo. A deepening project now underway will make Charleston the deepest harbor on the east Coast by 2020. The first *South Carolina Inland Port* opened in Greer in 2013, extending the Port of Charleston's reach more than 200 miles inland to the Upstate. The inland port provides access to more than 95 million consumers a day and boosts intermodal efficiency for international freight movements between the Port of Charleston and companies located across the Southeast.

Additional details on Oconee County's transportation resources are presented in the *Priority Investment and Transportation Elements*.

5. Environmental Considerations

The preservation of natural and environmental assets is an aspect of sound economic development. Clean air and water are essential to a desirable quality of life and public health in Oconee County. Air quality problems that trigger non-attainment measures can ultimately impede the recruitment of new industries and businesses to the area, resulting in reduced investment and employment opportunities. All South Carolina counties currently have attainment status with the national ambient air quality standards of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Given the County's location adjacent to the high-growth Greenville-Anderson-Mauldin metropolitan area, it is important that local leaders continue to analyze and monitor the factors related to air quality as they influence the County's long-range economic health and potential.

Oconee County has abundant surface water resources that include Lakes Hartwell, Jocassee, and Keowee, and numerous rivers, creeks, and streams. Detailed data on water quality in the County is provided in the *Natural Resources Element*.

Agriculture and forestry are important components of the landscape and the economy of Oconee County. As noted in the *Agriculture Element*, more than half of the County's land area is

currently in use for agriculture or forestry. Such lands are critical natural resources that provide valuable wildlife habitat, windbreaks, enhanced water quality, groundwater recharge areas, decreased ambient temperatures, stormwater and erosion mitigation, and open space. Preserving important farmland and forests requires economic strategies that focus on areas suitable for growth and discourages intensive development in the County's environmentally sensitive areas.

6. Energy Conservation

Energy conservation influences all aspects of the local economy. A balanced discussion of energy use and conservation must include industrial and commercial interests, as well as large-scale institutional uses. Industrial and commercial uses combined account for well over half (58%) of all energy consumption in South Carolina (*S.C. Energy Office, 2019*). The industrial sector is the State's largest energy user at 45% of all energy consumed. The transportation sector consumes the second largest amount of energy at 28%, while commercial users consume 13%.

Table 4-15 provides a listing of federal and state incentive programs for commercial and industrial businesses to encourage energy efficiency. Nearby Clemson University also operates an Industrial Assessment Center that provides energy assessments to small and medium-sized industrial facilities statewide at no cost.

Table 4-15. Federal and State Energy Conservation Incentives for Businesses

Available Incentives	Source	
	Federal	State
Business Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC)	✓	
Energy-Efficient Commercial Buildings Tax Deduction	✓	
Renewable Electricity Production Tax Credit (PTC)	✓	
Energy Efficiency Revolving Loan		✓
Alternative Fuel Vehicle (AFV) Revolving Loan Program		✓
Alternative Fuel Vehicle and Infrastructure Financing		✓
Alternative Fuel Project Grants		✓
Alternative Fueling Infrastructure Tax Credit		✓
Battery Manufacturing Tax Incentive		✓
Biofuels Production Facility Tax Credit		✓
Biofuels Distribution Infrastructure Tax Credit		✓
Biomass Resource Tax Credit		✓
Biomass Energy Production Credit		✓
Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Tax Exemption		✓
Idle Reduction Weight Exemption		✓
Natural Gas Vehicle (NGV) Weight Exemption		✓
Solar Energy System Tax Credit		✓

Source: *S.C. Energy Office, 2019*



7. Industrial Development Sites

Adequate land area and suitable sites are necessary to provide space to accommodate new and expanding business and industry. Planning is needed to ensure the long-term availability of sites that minimize development constraints and potential conflict with surrounding uses. Land targeted for industrial development should be provided with the necessary infrastructure in advance to attract new employers.

Oconee County has four interchanges along an 8.6-mile segment of the Interstate 85 corridor that runs through the southern tip of the County. Economic development strategies emphasize the potential of an industrial corridor in this southern portion of the County. The Golden Corner Commerce Park and four of the eight industrial sites are located in this area (Tables 4-16 and 4-17).

Table 4-16. Oconee County Industrial Parks

Park	Acres*	Features	Location
Oconee Industry & Technology Park	180	Site of new Oconee Workforce Development Campus that will include TCTC Campus and SDOC Career & Technology Education Center	Westminster
Golden Corner Commerce Park	260	Located on I-85; Closest S.C. park to Atlanta, GA	Fairplay
Seneca Rail Park	83	Offers direct rail access	Seneca

*Available, developable acres remaining

Source: Oconee Economic Alliance, 2019

Sensible growth strategies encourage the development of land closer to existing development, provide incentives for infill and the redevelopment of previously developed areas, and avoid encroachment of new development into areas that lack the necessary public facilities, services, and infrastructure. The use of vacant buildings to house new business and industry supports this strategy. These facilities can range from former strip commercial centers to big box retail and abandoned mills. Often referred to as *greyfields*, these properties generally consist of a large structure with significant land area. These sites represent infill opportunities that do not require the expansion of new infrastructure and are convenient to existing transportation networks and housing markets. Table 4-17 lists currently available industrial facilities and sites that take advantage of existing infrastructure and accessibility.

Table 4-17. Oconee County Industrial Buildings and Sites

Site/Building	Size	Acreage	Type	Community
Dunlop	200,000 ft ²	44 acres	Bldg	Westminster
Jacobs Road	135,910 ft ²	14 acres	Bldg	Seneca
Stamp Creek	30,000 ft ²	6 acres	Bldg	Salem
Fairplay Boulevard	N/A	46 acres	Site	Fairplay
I-85 Exit 2	N/A	46 acres	Site	Fairplay
Grubbs Road	N/A	18 acres	Site	Fairplay
Morgan Site	N/A	20 acres	Site	Townville

Source: Oconee Economic Alliance, 2019

8. Economic Development Strategies and Focus Areas

Over the last decade, South Carolina has increasingly shaped its economic development strategy around target industries as part of a long-term economic strategy that aims to foster growth and raise the State's per capita income to the national average. Clusters, targets, and specialty sectors have been identified in multiple State and regional studies. These targets are used to identify areas for collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries that combine public and private investment to promote growth within each region.

Statewide economic growth potential is focused on the Advanced Manufacturing, Advanced Materials, Aerospace, Agribusiness, Automotive, Distribution & Logistics, Life Sciences, and the Office/Shared Services sectors. For the ten-county region that includes Oconee County, the Upstate SC Alliance has identified five targeted sectors in Aerospace, Automotive, Engineered Materials, Food Manufacturing, and Life Sciences (Table 4-18). At the County level, the Oconee Economic Alliance (OEA) seeks to build a vibrant economy by focusing on four related industry targets in Advanced Manufacturing, Automotive, Metal Fabrication, and Plastics Injection Molding.

4-18. Economic Development Target Industry Clusters

Target Sector	Description	South Carolina	Upstate Alliance	OEA
Advanced Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides 11% of the State's non-farm employment Prevalent in Oconee County, with sector employers that include BASF, Greenfield Industries, Sandvik, ACI Plastics, Vermont NDT, and Lift Technologies 	✓		✓
Advanced/Engineered Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cluster includes metal working and fabrication, technical textiles, plastics, innovative polymer and advanced composites, optics, metals, chemicals, and ceramics Upstate cluster has 883 businesses with 40,384 employees Oconee employers in this sector include BASF, Baxter, U.S. Building Innovations, CRM Global, Sealed Air, and CollinsCraft 	✓	✓	
Aerospace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual statewide economic impact of more than \$19 billion Upstate has 38% of State's aerospace employers Oconee sector employers include RBC Aerostructures and ITT 	✓	✓	
Agribusiness/Food Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encompasses traditional agriculture and forestry, food production, wood processing, and ancillary support Statewide economic impact of \$41 billion and more than 68,000 direct jobs Annual output of \$26 billion (9% of the State total) with a 23% growth rate over the last decade Recent Oconee additions include Keowee Brewing and Jocassee Valley Brewing 	✓	✓	
Automotive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes all aspects of automotive manufacturing - parts suppliers, assemblers, and raw material producers Sector quadrupled in size over the last 2 decades to reach an annual economic impact of \$27 billion S.C. is national export leader of completed passenger vehicles and ranks 1st in production and export of tires Automotive manufacturing has a strong presence in Oconee County that includes BorgWarner, U.S. Engine Value, Koyo Bearings, Parkway, Baxter, and Horton. 	✓	✓	✓
Bioscience/Life Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biotechnology and pharmaceutical bulk manufacturers, healthcare, medical devices, chemical processors, generic and proprietary pharmaceutical developers, hygiene product producers and packagers, and related research and development Annual statewide economic impact of \$11.4 billion County advantage with proximity to Clemson University and cutting-edge research and innovation Local sector employers include Oconee Memorial Hospital (Prisma Health) and Ulbrich Precision 	✓	✓	✓



4-18. Economic Development Target Industry Clusters, *Continued*

Target Sector	Description	South Carolina	Upstate Alliance	OEA
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oconee County offers a convenient location with extensive transportation infrastructure including rail, Interstate 85, and Inland Port at Greer ▪ County distribution facilities include Perry Ellis, Clarios, and International Kitchen Supply 	✓		✓
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on mechanical and electrical components for renewable energy technologies, nuclear energy industry components, and electrical distribution systems ▪ Oconee employers include Duke Energy, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, Itron, Ulbrich, ITT, and Schneider Electric. 			✓

Sources: S.C. Department of Commerce, Upstate SC Alliance, and Oconee Economic Alliance, 2019

In addition to these targeted manufacturing sectors, Oconee County can diversify its economic base with development of agribusiness and tourism, with support for small business development and downtown revitalization.

As described in the *Agriculture Element*, agriculture and forestry continue to be an integral part of the South Carolina and Oconee County economy. A 2013 joint study released by the South Carolina Departments of Agriculture and Commerce, *Making Small Farms into Big Business*, identified the development potential of *food nodes*. A *food production node* is a cluster of farms near each other, working in collaboration and using common food production infrastructure. Strengthening these clusters of independent farms presents an opportunity for South Carolina communities to maintain a sustainable agriculture system and build local efficiencies in food trade. Savings in fuel and energy costs make local producers more attractive as suppliers to regional markets. The continued growth in consumer interest and demand for organically grown produce and livestock also creates new markets for smaller farming operations.

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture, along with the Palmetto AgriBusiness Council and the Farm Bureau, implemented the *50 by 20 Plan* that calls for increasing the economic impact of the State's Agribusiness cluster to \$50 billion by the year 2020. As part of this effort, a growing number of South Carolina and Oconee County farmers are looking beyond traditional agricultural markets to find new opportunities and markets that diversify their operations through agritourism. These programs are outlined in the *Agriculture Element*.

Strategies that protect agricultural uses and productive agricultural and forest lands are necessary to maintain profitable farms. The agribusiness strategy strongly complements revitalization efforts to strengthen existing urban centers in the County and reduce encroachment into prime farmlands and forests. Recruitment efforts can also seek industries that use locally grown products or by-products for value-added production. The County has established an Agriculture Advisory Board with responsibility for representing the interests and needs of the agricultural sector. The Board advises the County on issues ranging from land use to the promotion of all sectors of agribusiness.



The same abundant natural resources that support agriculture can also serve as a major tourist draw. The recreation and tourism sector also plays an important role as a provider of jobs and income in many South Carolina communities, both large and small. The economic impact of tourism in South Carolina is significant, supporting one in ten jobs statewide in a \$22.6 billion industry that now accounts for nearly three percent of the State GDP (*U.S. Travel Association, 2019*). Domestic travelers to the State spent more than \$12 billion on transportation, lodging, food, entertainment, recreation, and incidentals. Sector spending also generated \$1.7 billion in State and local tax revenue. This equates to a tax burden transfer from residents to tourists of \$895 per household.

Oconee County benefitted from more than \$64 million in travel and tourism related expenditures, with \$3.3 million in local tax revenues, in 2017. This activity ranked Oconee among the top half of South Carolina counties in total travel expenditures (*SCPRT, 2018*). Tourism generated nearly \$10 million in local payroll. Tourism employment includes numerous sectors such as public and auto transportation, lodging, food service, entertainment and recreation, and general retail. Tourism-related jobs offer opportunities for residents with diverse skills and educational backgrounds, ranging from first-time job seekers to senior citizens and from part-time work to alternative work schedules.

A new tourism development plan for Oconee County was completed and adopted in 2015. The Plan, *Destination Oconee: Realizing the Future of Oconee County*, outlines recommendations for tourism, growth policies, branding, funding, and marketing for the County and its communities. The initial recommendations addressed a variety of needs that ranged from downtown street audits and design review ordinances, to overlay districts, coordinated signage, and ongoing support of tourism projects. These efforts will strongly complement the County's overall economic development goals by diversifying the local economic base, enhancing and preserving the County's rich cultural and natural resource base, strengthening existing downtowns, and providing increased job opportunities for area residents through the creation of locally-owned, small businesses.

As tourist activity increases, downtown development and revitalization initiatives continue to gain momentum in the Upstate. Rural communities with attractive cultural, scenic, and historical resources are among the fastest growing heritage tourism destinations. As identified in the *Cultural Element*, local governments, cultural and civic organizations, and the private sector can play a valuable role in providing recreational, cultural, and entertainment opportunities that enhance the sense of community for residents, attract tourists, and boost activity in traditional downtown districts. Economic development efforts in downtown districts typically focus on encouraging retention of existing businesses, facilitating the location of new businesses that strengthen the downtown, and promoting the revitalization and infill of commercial areas. Among the strategies to revitalize and strengthen these historic commercial centers are policies that preserve and promote the unique nature of the downtown area, along with its key buildings, streets, and public spaces. This includes the redevelopment of blighted structures and properties, streetscaping, and the installation of wayfinding signage that



facilitates identification and access to neighborhoods and businesses. These are among the key recommendations of the *Destination Oconee Plan* for the County and its municipalities.

The Plan defines a unified brand that promotes the County. This character is derived from the County's physical location at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains and the distinct Appalachian heritage of the community. Each municipality has potentially unique commercial areas, such as Ram Cat Alley in the City of Seneca. As the County seat, the City of Walhalla provides a focal point for creating a vibrant arts and outdoor recreation destination that carefully weaves together business, cultural, and governmental uses. Neighboring Westminster also offers an emerging music and arts scene combined with welcoming small-town charm. Community festivals, museums, visual and performing arts venues, complemented by dining and lodging options, can strengthen the draw of these historic communities.

In addition to creating jobs and boosting downtown revitalization efforts, tourism provides new small business opportunities that enable County residents to capitalize on its natural, recreational, and historic assets. For example, the 2018-2022 *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (CEDS) for the six-county Appalachian Region of South Carolina notes that smaller Upstate communities such as Westminster have limited lodging options for visitors. The plan calls for increased collaboration and incentives to establish options such as bed and breakfasts, short-term rentals, and RV parks.

Small business development strategies are an integral part of local economic development plans. More than half of the State's private sector employees work for small businesses. A distinct advantage of smaller firms is that they are locally-owned and typically employ residents within the local community, do business with other community-based firms, and reinvest profits within the community. Small business development can also provide alternative employment for residents impacted by downsizings and plant closures. Small businesses also tend to be more diverse with higher levels of minority, veteran, and women ownership. Smaller firms are well-positioned to serve the larger corporations recruited to the region, opening new opportunities for small business start-ups.

Local government support for downtown entrepreneurs can include financial incentives for qualifying businesses, physical site improvements, advertising, signage, and other marketing needs. Municipalities can also simplify permitting and remove barriers for new and existing businesses to obtain or renew business licenses to facilitate downtown economic activity. Rehabilitation and reuse of older buildings generally has a higher local economic multiplier than new construction, keeping more dollars in the community.

9. Organizations and Partnerships

The involvement of public and private organizations as economic development allies supports a sound economic growth strategy that addresses community needs and advances the County's economic vision. Economic allies include municipal, state, and county organizations involved in planning, finance, education and training, construction, utilities, and engineering, as well as



related regional and state economic resources (Table 4-19). This continued partnership approach to economic development will fuel Oconee County's a diverse economic base, support economic and community development, and provide a quality living environment for residents.

Table 4-19. Oconee County Economic Development Allies

Economic Partner	Role
Oconee Economic Alliance (OEA)	Public-private nonprofit tasked with accelerating job creation and capital investment, increasing per capita income, diversifying the local tax base and generating greater awareness of Oconee County as a business location.
Oconee County Industrial Group (OCIG)	Collaboration of industrial base representatives countywide with a focus on information sharing, benchmarking, and support of workforce development initiatives that will help the local economy prosper. Membership is limited to plant managers or their designees.
Tri-County Entrepreneurial Development Corporation (TCEDC)	Local volunteer non-profit emphasizing entrepreneur development by offering expert training and on-one-one mentorship to new and existing businesses. Certified SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) Mentors work closely with Tri-County Tech, Clemson SBDC, and the Oconee Economic Alliance to offer free business counseling and a free monthly Business Start-Up Workshop. Operates the Oconee Business Center (business incubator) in Walhalla.
Oconee County Chamber of Commerce	Private, non-profit that promotes a positive business climate in the market areas of Fair Play, Long Creek, Mountain Rest, Salem, Seneca, Walhalla, West Union and Westminster. Partners with area business leaders and the School District to offer Leadership Oconee, special events, and educational and networking opportunities. Small Business Council offers mentoring programs to facilitate small business startups and foster growth with existing businesses.
Upstate SC Alliance	Coordinates growth of domestic and international investment through market research, economic impact and labor analysis, community profiles, project administration, site identification, product development, domestic and international marketing missions, incentive facilitation, new and existing industry assistance, corporate relocation assistance, and event coordination for the ten-county region that includes Oconee.
Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG)	Voluntary organization of local governments serving the six-county region of Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens, and Spartanburg counties, as well as 42 municipalities. Coordinates the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Appalachian Region that is used as the basis for federal economic investment and workforce development funding.
Appalachian Development Corporation (ADC)	Organized to further economic development, job creation and retention and financially assist in the growth and development of business in six Upstate counties. Provides technical assistance and funding through the Appalachian Loan Fund to businesses located in Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg and other Upstate counties in conjunction with the U.S. Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Economic Partner	Role
Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)	Federal-state partnership that builds community capacity and strengthens economic growth in 420 counties across the 13 Appalachian states. Strategic plan identifies five goals to advance this mission: creating economic opportunity; preparing a ready workforce; building critical infrastructure; leveraging natural and cultural assets; and cultivating leadership and community capacity. <i>Oconee is designated as a transitional county by the ARC for economic development.</i>
South Carolina Research Authority/SC Launch	Public, non-profit that supports the innovation economy by accelerating technology-enabled growth in research, academia, entrepreneurship and industry. Supports start-ups with early-stage funding through SC Launch, an independent, non-profit corporation providing grants, loans, investments and mentoring support to participating state-based companies aligned with Information Technology, Life Sciences or Advanced Manufacturing and Materials sectors. Two participating industries in Oconee County.
S.C. Division of Small and Minority Business Contracting and Certification	Links minority and women-owned small businesses to State contracting and procurement opportunities. Services include one-on-one consultation, training, potential vendor lists, participation reports, and dispute resolution. Sponsors the SC Launch program with acceleration assistance for fledgling companies.
South Carolina Innovation Hub	Online tool that provides individual entrepreneurs and businesses within the technology sector a platform to access and connect with resources.
S.C. Manufacturing Extension Partnership (SCMEP)	Private, non-profit resource for small to mid-size South Carolina businesses to improve their competitiveness through hands-on consulting and training services and competitiveness reviews.
Clemson Regional Small Business Development Center (SBDC)	Statewide network of business training and counseling centers for prospective and existing businesses. Entrepreneurial services include marketing analysis, managerial and technical assistance, business plan preparation, feasibility studies, and seminars at little to no cost. Specialized programs are offered to veterans, women, and young entrepreneurs, along with government contracting, export assistance, and manufacturing ventures technology commercialization. Clemson is the closest SBDC location for Oconee County residents and businesses.
Upstate Carolina Angel Network (UCAN)	Group of Upstate accredited investors who invest in start-up and early-stage, high growth businesses in the Southeast. UCAN has invested more than \$5.6 million in 22 companies since 2008.
Worklinks Workforce Development Area (SCWorks)	State office providing employer assistance in hiring qualified workers, labor market information, job skills assessment and placement, and employment training programs for youth, seniors, veterans and other special populations.

E. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The table of goals, objectives and implementation strategies (GOIS) summarizes the actions that will be undertaken in the coming decade to achieve the goals and objectives identified in the Economic Element.

Goals/Objectives/Strategies	Accountable Agencies	Time Frame for Evaluation
Goal 4.1. Increase the County's tax base through a thriving and diversified economy.		
Objective 4.1.1. Strengthen Oconee County as an employment center.		
<u>Strategy 4.1.1.1.</u> Maintain economic incentives for new and expanding industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce 	2021
<u>Strategy 4.1.1.2.</u> Maintain communication with existing business and industry to assess the local business climate, public services, workforce quality, and potential areas for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Oconee County Industrial Group (OCIG) • Oconee County Chamber of Commerce 	On-Going
<u>Strategy 4.1.1.3.</u> Continue to develop the I-85 industrial corridor with associated infrastructure to support fully utilized industrial parks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Utility Providers • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce 	On-Going
<u>Strategy 4.1.1.4.</u> Promote the inventory of industrial sites and buildings in Oconee County with an emphasis on vacant and certified industrial sites and parks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce • ACOG 	2025
<u>Strategy 4.1.1.5.</u> Recruit new industry to the County and assist in expansion of existing employers in the target sectors of advanced manufacturing, biosciences, automotive, and energy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce 	On-Going
<u>Strategy 4.1.1.6.</u> Continue to support the Oconee Economic Alliance as the primary entity to represent the County and pursue industrial development with broad-based public and private representation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce 	On-Going
Objective 4.1.2. Balance support for retention, expansion and recruitment of businesses.		
<u>Strategy 4.1.2.1.</u> Strengthen relationships and partnerships among the County, civic organizations, municipalities, educational institutions, service agencies, and the private sector to support economic development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Chamber of Commerce • OCIG • School District of Oconee County (SDOC) • Tri-County Technical College (TCTC) 	On-Going



Goals/Objectives/Strategies	Accountable Agencies	Time Frame for Evaluation
Strategy 4.1.2.2. Maintain a formalized business and retention program (BRE) dedicated to existing employers in Oconee County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • OCIG • Municipalities 	2025
Strategy 4.1.2.3. Conduct annual visits and tours of County industrial facilities to establish and maintain rapport and working relationships with existing businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • OCIG • Workforce Development Partners 	Annually
Strategy 4.1.2.4. Develop and coordinate positive economic and business messages and case studies and marketing for local, regional, and national media outlets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • OCIG • Employers • Media 	2025
Goal 4.2. Improve the skills, productivity, and economic competitiveness of the Oconee County workforce.		
Objective 4.2.1. Increase employer satisfaction with workforce readiness.		
Strategy 4.2.1.1. Align workforce development and training programs with economic development efforts to include targeted industries, current and projected workforce needs and provide robust apprentice and internship opportunities in a wide variety of County businesses and industries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • SDOC • TCTC • WorkLinks • ApprenticeshipSC • Employers • Clemson University 	2023
Strategy 4.2.1.2. Work to improve the completion rate including alternative credit sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDOC 	On-Going
Objective 4.2.2. Raise incomes and earnings potential of the County workforce.		
Strategy 4.2.2.1. Increase the number of jobs with higher than average County wages and demand outlook.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce 	On-Going
Strategy 4.2.2.2. Prepare Oconee County graduates and residents for high demand, higher wage careers and occupations, equipping them with the training and education to apply their skills in a broad and diverse economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • SDOC • TCTC 	2021
Strategy 4.2.2.3. Increase access to local employment opportunities that can reduce overall commuting distance and costs for residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Upstate SC Alliance • SC Dept. of Commerce 	2021
Strategy 4.2.2.4. Support and promote the continued expansion of the consolidated Oconee County Workforce Development Center Campus at the Oconee Industrial and Technology Park to include Tri-County Technical College and the new School District Career Center.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • SDOC • TCTC • Business/Industry 	2023



Goals/Objectives/Strategies	Accountable Agencies	Time Frame for Evaluation
<u>Strategy 4.2.2.5.</u> Add defined career pathways for existing and projected opportunities in sectors including advanced manufacturing, automotive, healthcare, entrepreneurship, retail, hospitality, and biosciences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDOC • TCTC • Workforce Development Partners 	2025
<u>Strategy 4.2.2.6.</u> Leverage corporate giving by employers for academic, career, and cultural enrichment programs that raise college and work readiness of County students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate and Community Foundations • SDOC • TCTC 	2025
Goal 4.3. Increase business and commercial activity in priority areas.		
Objective 4.3.1. Strengthen downtown commercial districts.		
<u>Strategy 4.3.1.1.</u> Promote the development of downtown retail and commercial niche markets in Seneca, Walhalla, West Union, Westminster, and Salem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Oconee County • Chamber of Commerce 	2025
<u>Strategy 4.3.1.2.</u> Promote policies that preserve and promote the unique nature of downtowns, key buildings, streets, and public spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Oconee County 	Annually
<u>Strategy 4.3.1.3.</u> Identify and inventory commercial and industrial infill and greyfield sites throughout the County and prioritize for reuse and redevelopment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Oconee County 	2023
<u>Strategy 4.3.1.4.</u> Explore local incentives for location of businesses and industries in existing properties and the use of infill properties such as tax or fee reductions or zoning incentives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Oconee County 	2025
<u>Strategy 4.3.1.5.</u> Establish a county-wide loan pool, in partnership with area banks, focused on downtown revitalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Oconee County • Chamber of Commerce 	2023
Objective 4.3.2. Foster a climate of entrepreneurial activity and small business success.		
<u>Strategy 4.3.2.1.</u> Support small business start-up and expansion and assist in clearing key steps in the development and start-up process to include permitting and inspections, licensing, and eligibility for State and local incentives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Small Business Development Center (SBDC) • Chamber of Commerce • Tri-County Entrepreneurial Development Corporation (TCEDC) 	Annually
<u>Strategy 4.3.2.2.</u> Establish and maintain local business incubation capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • SBDC • Clemson University • Chamber of Commerce • TCEDC 	On-Going

Goals/Objectives/Strategies	Accountable Agencies	Time Frame for Evaluation
<u>Strategy 4.3.2.3.</u> Support efforts to expand the reach and economic impact of the <i>Think Oconee</i> buy local campaign throughout the County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Chamber of Commerce 	On-Going
<u>Strategy 4.3.2.4.</u> Explore the benefits of <i>Certified Connected Community</i> status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Utility Providers • Telecommunication Providers 	2025
<u>Strategy 4.3.2.5.</u> Identify projects and promote Opportunity Zone incentive areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County 	2021
Objective 4.3.3. Leverage the County's cultural, historic, agricultural, and natural resources as economic assets.		
<u>Strategy 4.3.3.1.</u> Continue implementation of the <i>Destination Oconee</i> plan objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Municipalities 	2023
<u>Strategy 4.3.3.2.</u> Capitalize on the local traditional arts, culture, and heritage of the County as an economic opportunity for small business development, downtown revitalization, and tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • Municipalities • Chamber of Commerce • Arts and Cultural Groups • Festival and Event Organizers 	2025
<u>Strategy 4.3.3.3.</u> Support economic development activity that leverages the assets and strengths of the County's rural areas to include agribusiness and agritourism, outdoor recreation, heritage tourism, and eco-tourism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oconee County • SBDC • Chamber of Commerce • TCEDC 	2023