

DECEMBER 2015

AVL 5X5 VISION 2020
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN
PREPARED FOR THE ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE COUNTY
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COALITION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



AVL 5X5
VISION 2020

INTRODUCTION

Asheville, North Carolina, occupies a unique place in the national dialogue. The Asheville region’s undeniable “buzz” has made it a national draw and an exciting location for businesses and entrepreneurs. The Asheville-Buncombe County Economic Development Coalition (EDC) will continue its efforts in growing the regional economy for the benefit of the community. The EDC’s activities are carried out through its business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts which have been instrumental in adding 2,860 new direct jobs and more than \$1 billion in new capital investment over the last five years. The community’s economic development strategic plan, AVL 5x5, set a high bar, and the transition to AVL 5x5 Vision 2020 will move to the next level, emphasizing new niches and fresh initiatives that will engage the EDC and local business community for the next five years.

APPROACH

Over the course of several months during 2015, the TIP Strategies consulting team worked closely with EDC staff and board members to evaluate the region’s most promising opportunities for economic development. Valuable roundtable discussions and stakeholder interviews were held with over 100 public sector, private sector, academic leaders and others from the region. The consulting team utilized this stakeholder input as part of a three-pronged approach—**quantitative, qualitative, and strategic**—to identify Asheville-Buncombe County’s best prospects for future growth.



Source: TIP Strategies

ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES

Asheville-Buncombe County’s positive reputation includes a strong contribution from the tourism industry and a wide range of amenities and assets. It is increasingly reflective of the region’s successful businesses, as well as expansion and recruitment efforts. Recent business expansions such as GE Aviation and the addition of Linamar and New Belgium Brewing will bring thousands of new jobs (indirect and induced jobs) and hundreds of millions in new capital investment. Just as importantly, world-class companies in Asheville-Buncombe are elevating the region’s image as a great place to do business. In addition, **the region has major competitive advantages** that can be leveraged for economic development, including:

- The unique combination of a progressive, well-educated community operating within a business-friendly state with low levels of taxes and regulation (similar to Austin, Texas)
- A robust entrepreneurial community with dozens of high-growth startups (including six Inc. 5000 firms), a growing pool of talent, and a strong track record of attracting entrepreneurs and skilled workers from large urban areas across the eastern U.S. (like New York, Boston, DC, Chicago, and Atlanta)

The EDC has been instrumental in adding 2,860 new direct jobs and more than \$1 billion in new capital investment over the last 5 years.

- A rapidly growing cluster of industry-leading firms operating in aerospace, automotive, environmental sciences, and other technology-based industries
- National recognition as a hub for craft breweries and outdoor equipment companies
- An outstanding quality of place with a diverse array of natural amenities (beautiful mountains, rivers, lakes, outdoor recreation) and cultural/entertainment attractions such as a thriving downtown district, dozens of breweries, a robust arts community, and Biltmore Estate
- The nation’s largest concentration of climate scientists and researchers, centered on the National Centers for Environmental Information (formerly known as the National Climatic Data Center)
- A robust health care sector, anchored by Mission Health System (the largest employer in the state west of Charlotte), which provides thousands of well-paying jobs and serves as a key amenity for the region.

SELECT RECENT BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENTS

COMPANY	DIRECT JOBS	CAPITAL INVESTMENT (\$ Millions)
GE Aviation	52	\$126.0
Linamar	400	\$190.0
New Belgium Brewing	174	\$175.0
AVL Technologies	90	\$11.5
BorgWarner Turbo Systems	154	\$55.8
White Labs	65	\$8.1
Kearfott Corporation	75	\$11.9
Wicked Weed Brewing	82	\$5.0
Nypro Inc.	156	\$83.0
Jacob Holm	66	\$45.9

Source: Asheville-Buncombe County EDC

CHALLENGES & RISKS

“Good enough” will never be good enough for Asheville, nor should it be. The community has experienced solid economic growth, but not the same level of job and wage growth of several selected benchmark communities examined in the quantitative study. Total employment in the Asheville metro area grew by 7.1 percent from 2010 to 2014, much higher than the 4.1 percent growth rate for the U.S. as a whole, but slower than other comparisons. At the same time, the 2014 median hourly wage in the Asheville metro area was \$17.28, lower than benchmarks and significantly below the US median hourly wage, \$20.06.

MARKET ACCESS

Asheville-Buncombe County’s position in the middle of the eastern U.S. is a major competitive advantage in comparison to cities west of the Mississippi River, thanks to access to a larger base of population within a one-day drive. In fact, Asheville has a population of 100 million living within a 500-mile radius, compared to 38 million for Austin, 14 million for Boulder, and 28 million for Bend, OR.

THE RESPONSE

This plan focuses primarily on core areas where the EDC has the greatest potential to affect positive change, beginning with the traditional areas of industry-specific business retention, expansion, and recruitment. A set of eight new target industries for the region are profiled. The plan also continues and expands on entrepreneurship and innovation as a priority for the EDC. And lastly, the plan introduces a new concentration on talent attraction and development. These are the areas where the EDC will continue to channel its efforts over the next several years. The EDC should play a secondary role in other areas that impact the region's economic development potential but that fall outside of the core activities outlined in this plan. These five areas are—infrastructure, community development, arts and culture, education, and tourism.

The largest risk to the region is not a decline in jobs or economic activity but a failure to capitalize on new opportunities for economic development.

AVL 5x5 Vision 2020 provides a roadmap based on input from the community and lessons from successful communities across the U.S. The ultimate success of the initiatives, however, will rest on the commitment of the EDC and the business community. *The largest risk to the region is not a decline in jobs or economic activity but a failure to capitalize on new opportunities for economic development.*

If the region embraces the opportunities presented in the plan, it can establish itself as one of the nation's leading employment centers. With that commitment, there is every reason to believe that the region will be on a trajectory for long-term prosperity.

STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Smart
- Innovative
- Capital-Intensive

GOALS

1. Entrepreneurship & Innovation
2. Advanced Manufacturing
3. Science & Technology
4. Health Care
5. Talent Attraction & Development

SUPPORT STRUCTURES

- Infrastructure
- Community Development
- Arts & Culture
- Education
- Tourism

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

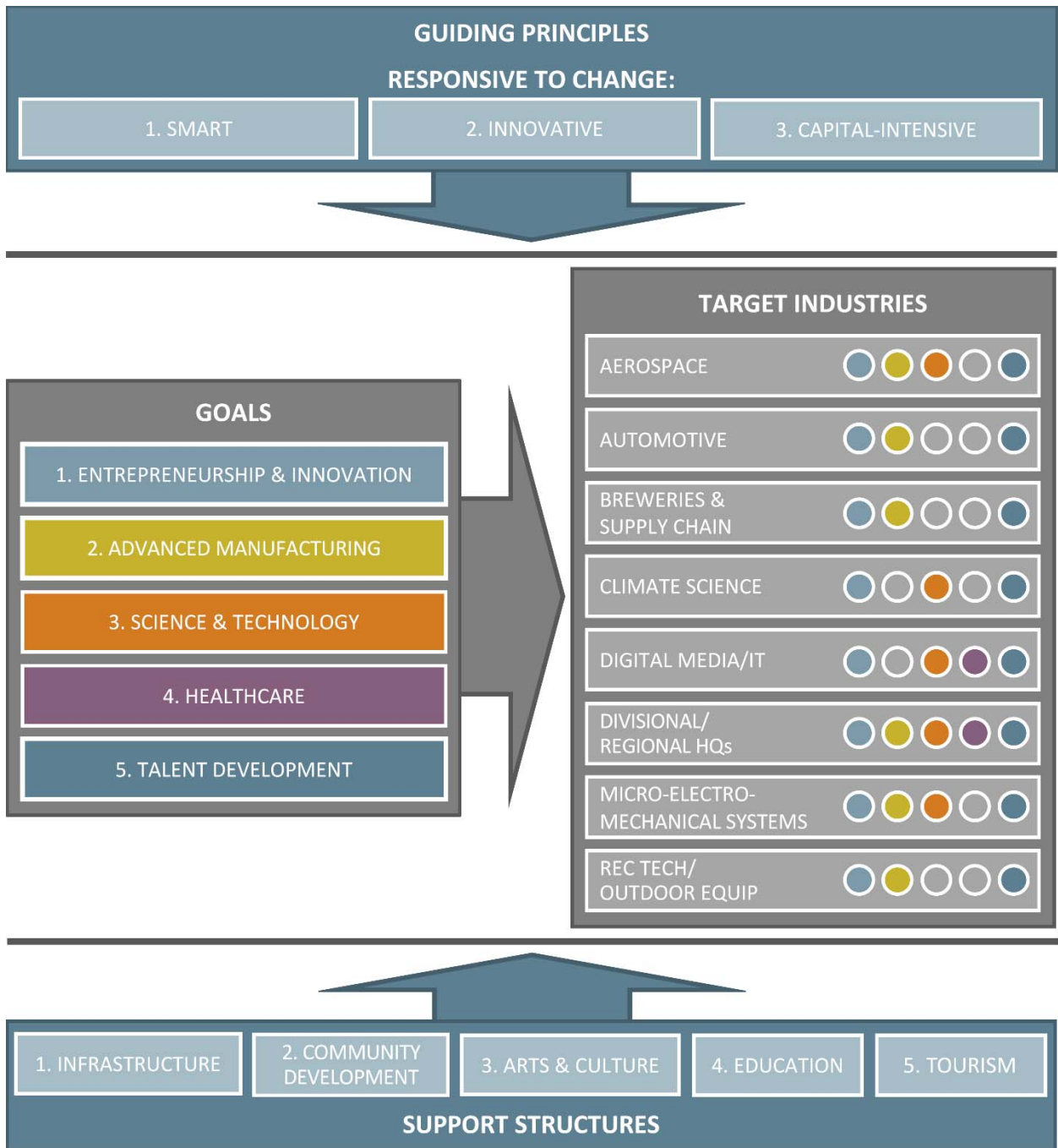
- **3,000 new direct jobs**
- **\$50,000 average annual wage**
- **\$650,000,000 of new capital investment**
- **50 new high-growth companies**
- **\$10 million of new equity investment**



AVL 5X5 VISION 2020

AVL 5X5 STRATEGIC PLAN

The strategic plan for the Asheville-Buncombe County EDC offers bold new initiatives for the region’s leadership. While integrating with the existing AVL 5x5 framework, it stretches the boundaries of the current activities. The graphic below summarizes the structure of the new plan and how it fits into the AVL 5x5 framework.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In the context of an economic development strategy, guiding principles provide a set of statements expressing how a community defines economic development. The AVL 5X5 plan’s guiding principles are designed as cross-cutting themes and reference points for the goals and strategies. Each guiding principle is forward-looking and helps point the community toward growth and improvement.

1. SMART

Asheville-Buncombe County is a quality-focused community that supports the growth of high-wage jobs, socially responsible companies, and long-term economic vitality.

2. INNOVATIVE

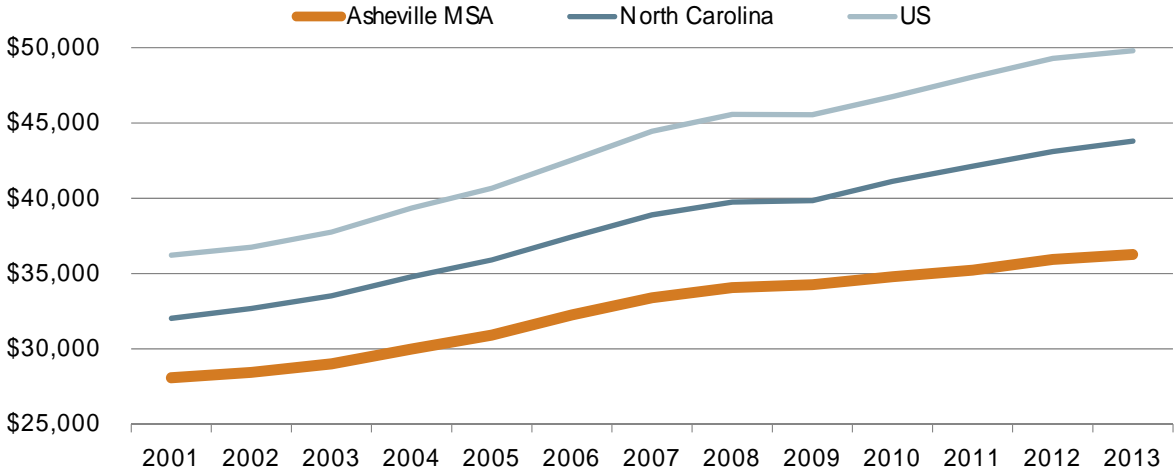
Asheville-Buncombe County is a national center for innovation and creativity built on industry-leading companies, a robust network of entrepreneurs, and a history of creative, talented workers.

3. CAPITAL-INTENSIVE

Asheville-Buncombe County is a leading destination for new capital investment and high-growth businesses that create lasting value for the regional economy.

AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGES 2001-2013 ASHEVILLE MSA IS SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER THAN U.S. AND NORTH CAROLINA WAGE RATES

The Asheville MSA’s average annual wages grew from \$28,095 in 2001 to \$36,277 in 2013, an increase of nearly 29.1%. However, this increase lagged that of the U.S. (37.5%) and the state (36.8%). AVL 5x5 Vision 2020 recognizes that wages in the 4-county Asheville MSA are lower than the state and U.S. Although other factors affect overall wages in the economy beyond the EDC’s control, goals of the strategy work to bring higher wage jobs to the region.



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



GOAL 1: ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION

Grow the regional economy through the retention, expansion, and attraction of **innovative companies**. Cultivate a robust entrepreneurship eco-system. Consistently focus on **high-growth, technology-driven industries**.

STRENGTHS

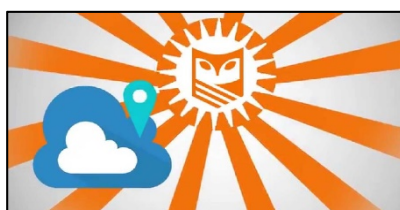
- Home to six of Inc. 5000's fastest growing U.S. companies
- Well-established as a premier destination for visitors and new residents
- Wealth of amenities and high quality of life
- Entrepreneurs, innovative companies, creative workers, and technology that differentiate Asheville from other communities in respect to talent and the economy

Buncombe County already has many of the ingredients needed to transform the regional economy around innovation. Venture Asheville, the EDC's entrepreneurship program, has planted seeds that will yield future economic growth. In addition, much of the region's recent job growth is taking place in technologically advanced companies. Embracing innovation, creative industries and technology as core components of its economic development strategy is vital for the community's long-term success.

FOCUS AREAS

- Support of Venture Asheville
- Satellite offices of high-growth firms based in large East Coast markets
- Sustainable Business

Venture Asheville grows Asheville's startup community and connects entrepreneurs to talent, mentors and funding.



Visuals left-right: Digital Chalk, Brightfield Transportation Systems, Plum Print, Cloud for Good, RISC Networks, and Theraworx

ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION



Visuals: 1) FLS Energy, 2) The Cheat Sheet, 3) 1 Million Cups Asheville, and 4) Asheville Startup Weekend

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGIES

- Through VentureAsheville.com, promote Asheville’s entrepreneurship ecosystem, acting as a centralized hub to efficiently connect entrepreneurs, talent, and investors to one another and to startup resources.
- Showcase Asheville and Buncombe County as a community that is welcoming and supportive of businesses that value and practice sustainability.
- Work with the Asheville Angels to expand access to equity funding within the greater Asheville area, and form a regional syndication network to improve deal flow for Asheville area companies and investors.
- Launch a mentor program that connects regional business executives with entrepreneurs to expose emerging business leaders to the experience and expertise of seasoned executives.
- Support an “Asheville Fiber” initiative.
- Target high-growth and Inc. 5000 firms from major East Coast markets (like Boston, New York, and D.C.) where there are existing business ties to Asheville for expansion/relocation into Asheville-Buncombe County.



GOAL 2: ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Continue to focus on retaining, expanding, and recruiting advanced manufacturing firms to create **high-wage jobs** and attract new corporate **capital investment** into the regional economy.

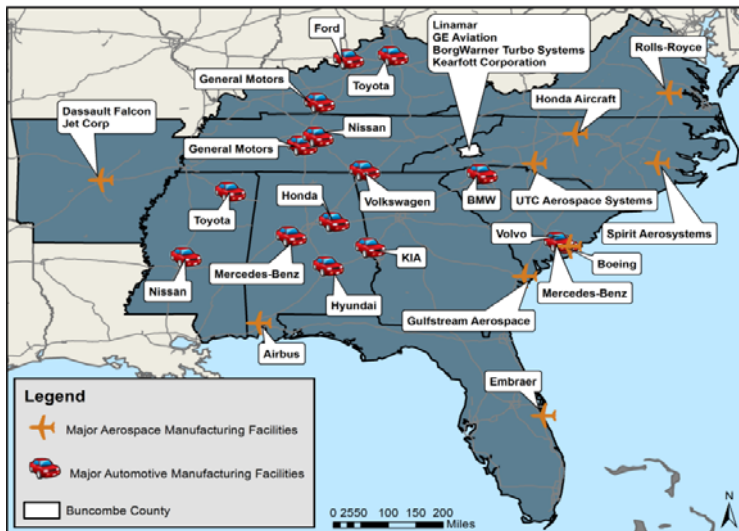
STRENGTHS

- Advanced manufacturing accounts for the vast majority of the EDC's direct capital investment and direct job growth.
- Recent and planned expansions from several high-tech manufacturing operations, such as Linamar and GE Aviation, will continue to drive growth.

Channeling efforts into growing this sector is critical for 3 reasons:

- Advanced manufacturing operations provide middle-wage jobs, many of which do not require a four-year degree.
- Technology-driven manufacturing facilities represent significant long-term investments in the community and add value to the regional economy through high levels of capital investment.
- The recruitment of large corporate production facilities opens up opportunities for the attraction of other corporate functions (e.g., divisional headquarters, sales & marketing, R&D, customer and technical support).

The southern U.S. recently garnered a large share of the nation's new manufacturing plant investments, due to favorable business climates, an affordable skilled workforce, and aggressive economic development efforts, particularly in automotive and aerospace.

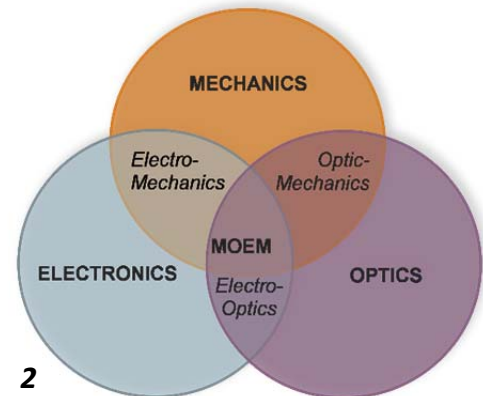


Visuals: 1) Major southeast automotive & aerospace manufacturing facilities
Source: TIP Strategies

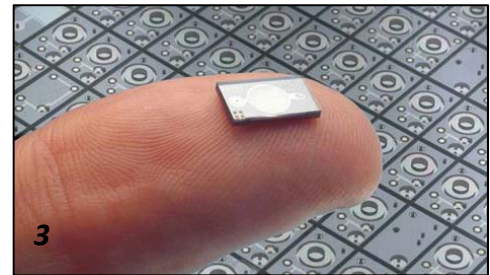
FOCUS AREAS

- Aerospace
- Automotive
- Breweries & supply chain
- Micro-electromechanical systems (MEMS)
- Recreational technology / outdoor equipment

The Asheville region has added thousands of manufacturing jobs since 2010, outperforming most of the U.S. economy.



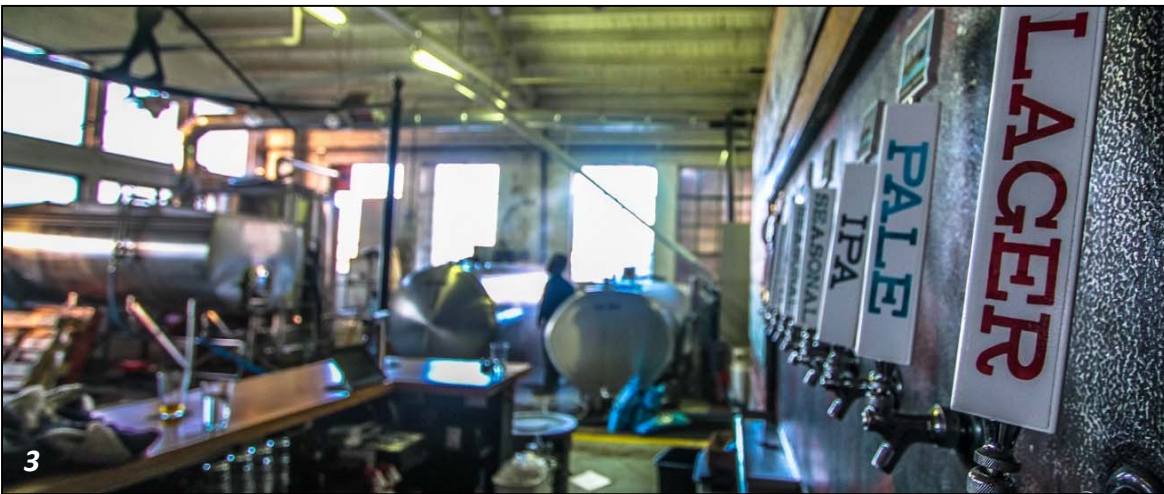
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2 & 3) **Micro-Electromechanical Systems (MEMS)** combine silicon-based microelectronics with micromachining technology to produce devices used in industrial and consumer products. An emerging trend further integrates MEMS with optics for micro-opto-electromechanical (MOEMS).

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING



Visuals: 1) Automotive, 2) Aerospace manufacturing of CMCs, and 3) Breweries & supply chain

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGIES

- Continue to focus on Asheville-Buncombe County's strong Business Retention & Expansion program to support the growth of existing businesses.
- Promote Asheville-Buncombe's new target industries and explore targeted niche opportunities such as MEMS (micro-electro-mechanical systems).
- Build awareness of the Asheville region as a center for advanced technology-based manufacturing.
- Work with partners to ensure real estate options, infrastructure, and other attraction components meet the needs of current and prospective employers, and in partnership, evaluate gaps with respect to the needs of target and expanding industries.
- Further establish and leverage Asheville's status as a premier location for breweries and supply chain.
- Grow the region's outdoor equipment and "rec-tech" (recreational technology) sector and target outdoor product manufacturers by leveraging both existing industry referrals and the growing national reputation of Asheville as an innovation hub in "rec-tech" activities.



GOAL 3: Science & Technology

Leverage Asheville-Buncombe County's science and technology assets. Support efforts to create new industry clusters centered on **climate science, adaptability, and digital media/information technology**.

STRENGTHS

- The concentration of climate scientists and related professionals in Asheville is unparalleled in the U.S.
- The Collider presents an opportunity to support a next generation innovation place for climate science and environmental data with the potential to bring commercialization opportunities to the marketplace. A goal is to recognize this potential and the prospect of building a center of excellence for climate and environmental science that serves to bring business and science together to solve problems.
- Partnership opportunities with the National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), the Collider, and institutions of higher education (UNC-Asheville, NC State University, and others) will be advantageous. There may also be partnership opportunities with related out-of-state entities.

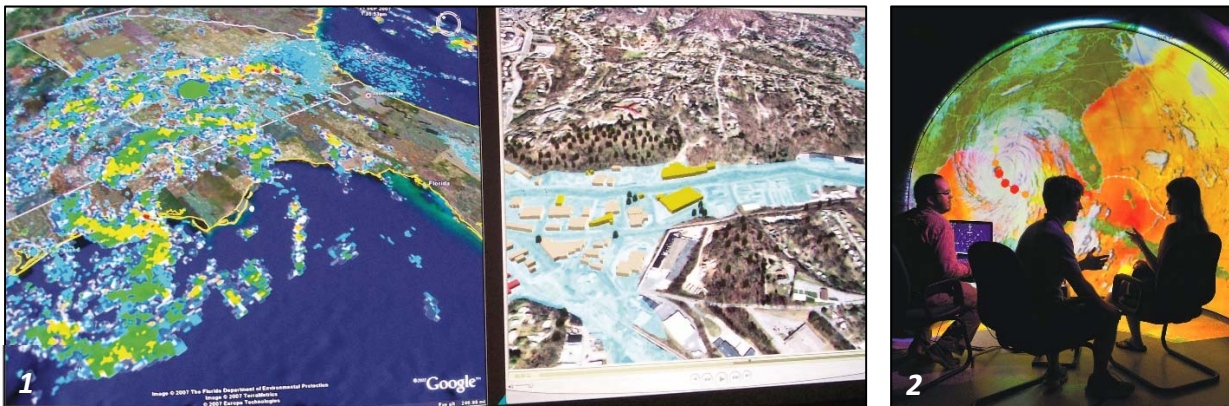
FOCUS AREAS

- Climate and environmental data
- Sustainability and clean technology
- Digital media/information technology
- Private sector R&D

The Collider, currently in the early stages of development, represents a unique opportunity to align public, private, nonprofit, and academic initiatives related to climate science innovation and commercialization.

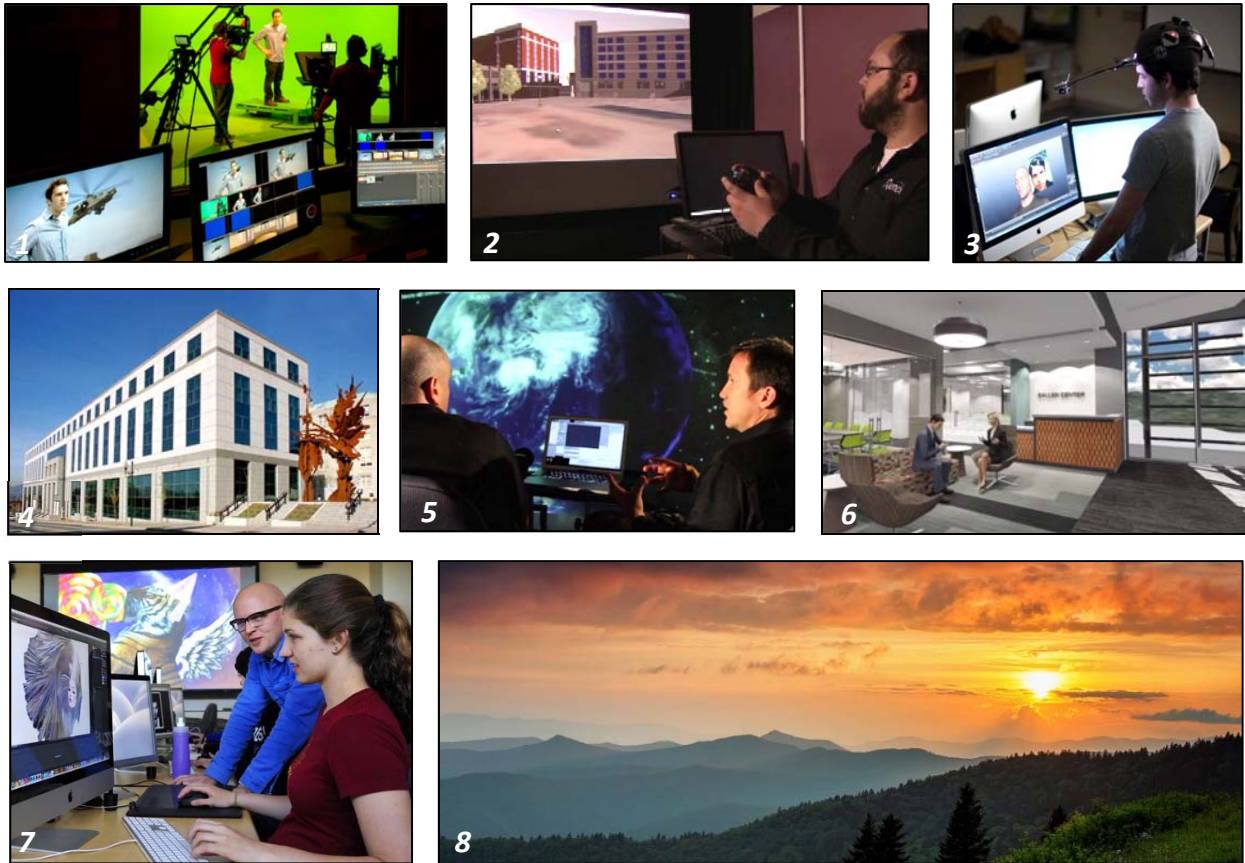
Sustainability and clean technology represent major economic development opportunities for Asheville-Buncombe County. The area's innovative manufacturing companies, a forward-thinking public sector, and creative workers and entrepreneurs can each play a role in promoting the growth of environmentally conscious businesses.

Calling attention to the IT aspect of Digital Media recognizes the increasing difficulty of separating content creators from their distribution channels and the important role these firms play in the support of retention and attraction of businesses and people generally. Regions with a high concentration of technology firms/occupations are more successful in their efforts to attract talent.



Visuals: 1) Risk mitigation visualization tools, and 2) Climate students at UNC Asheville's NEMAC

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



Visuals: 1) Digital Media/IT 2) 3D visualization model, 3) New Media program at UNC Asheville, 4) NCEI, 5) Climatologists at NEMAC's 3D GeoDome, 6) Rendering of the Collider, 7) Graphic design & digital art, and 8) Sunset in the Appalachian Mountains

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGIES

- Utilize the EDC and CVB, and partner with climate focused organizations, to host a “Climate Science & Tech Transfer” conference/summit in Asheville.
- Shed light on the opportunity for commercialization of climate and environmental data and climate science, and identify potential uses/needs for climate adaptation and resiliency.
- Establish a task force to identify strategies to capitalize on the region’s climate science assets to stimulate business expansion and investment. Work with the NCEI and the Collider to cultivate relationships with private sector businesses, government and nonprofit climate researchers, and academic institutions.
- Establish Asheville-Buncombe County as a premier location and center of excellence for the development of environmental science talent and businesses.
- Target high-growth companies involved in sustainability and clean technology, disaster preparedness, environmental data, energy efficiency, GIS and related activities.
- Work with the region’s tech companies and larger firms reliant on tech workers to promote the region’s technology business climate for the purpose of talent attraction.
- Build an inclusive ecosystem that enables broader population and more people to be part of innovative climate solutions.



GOAL 4: HEALTH CARE

Support the continued growth and diversification of the region’s health care industry, both as a **driver of economic growth** and as a **means for attracting and retaining talent**. Emphasize affordability and access to **quality health care** for the region’s citizens.

STRENGTHS

- Mission Health has ranked among the Top 15 Health Care Systems in the nation based on quality and outcomes for the past four years, the only health care system to ever achieve that.
- The health care industry accounts for more jobs than any other industry in the Asheville metro area.
- Mission Health is the largest employer in North Carolina west of Charlotte.

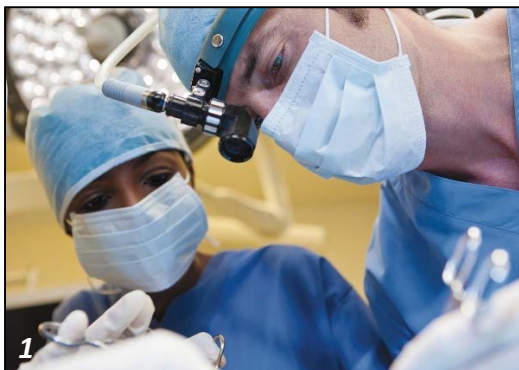
This sector will continue to play a leading role in the regional economy, both as a source of employment and income for thousands of workers and as an amenity that attracts and retains talent. In this way, health care plays a supporting role for the growth of other sectors. The EDC should focus its efforts to support the health care industry in three areas:

- 1) Retention and expansion of existing health related companies
- 2) The recruitment of additional medical specialties, health care suppliers, and related service providers (including health technology firms)
- 3) The creation of a med-tech innovation district that connects the Mission Health district to downtown Asheville, which could be transformative from an economic and community development viewpoint.

FOCUS AREAS

- Retention and expansion of existing health care operations
- Growth and recruitment of med-tech innovation firms
- Development of medical district to downtown corridor

Health care will continue to play a leading role in the regional economy, both as a source of employment and income for thousands of workers, and as an amenity that attracts and retains talent in the region.



Visuals: 1) Surgical operation, 2) Physical therapy, 3) Medical tech devices



Visuals: 1) Medical innovation, 2) Child disease treatments, 3) Neonatal & delivery, 4) Mission Hospital

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGIES

- Work with Mission Health and other regional medical organizations to target service providers, suppliers, and other related companies for relocation or expansion into the Asheville area, including medical records/data providers, health information technology, health insurance providers, medical devices, and medical supplies.
- Encourage collaboration among the region's health care organizations and area entrepreneurs to identify the biggest challenges facing the health care industry and create solutions for these needs through the development of new technologies and health care businesses.
- Focus recruitment efforts on high-growth firms that would gain an advantage by having close proximity and scaling an existing technology.
- Build on the positive momentum around the Mission Hospital campus and in downtown Asheville to create a vibrant mixed-use corridor that connects these two districts.
- Aid in building a pipeline of talent to support the growth of the region's health care sector.
- Work with Mission Health and the City of Asheville to ensure the planned medical tower is a fully integrated centerpiece of the district.
- Engage in opportunities with wellness providers and innovators, including alternative care, to further promote this regional asset and connect to larger health care initiatives.



GOAL 5: TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Build a strong **pipeline of talent** to enhance the **productivity and competitiveness** of current and future employers.

STRENGTHS

Access to a skilled workforce is the most important factor affecting the success of businesses in today's economy. Fortunately, the Asheville region has key advantages it can leverage to attract skilled workers.

- The community has attained a reputation as a premier place for Millennials, entrepreneurs, and creative workers.
- Asheville-Buncombe County has proven its ability to attract talent from large metro areas, as evidenced by migration data, which show positive in-migration from large markets like Chicago, D.C., and New York.
- The region also benefits from several top-notch higher education institutions that play an important role in attracting and developing talent.

FOCUS AREAS

- Capitalizing on Asheville's "buzz"
- Leveraging tourism for talent attraction
- STEM education

One of the most urgent priorities for communities is to develop a pipeline of talent to support the growth of existing and future employers.

Demographic trends at the national level will lead to a decline in the working-age population over the next couple of decades. If economic and job growth continue, even at a minimal rate, employers will continue to have difficulty finding skilled workers. Thus, one of the most urgent priorities for communities is to develop a pipeline of talent to support the growth of existing and future employers. Communities with an educated, skilled population have a big advantage in the competitive landscape of economic development because employers are increasingly drawn to areas with concentrations of skilled workers.



Visuals: 1) Thermo Fisher Scientific employees (a 2014 Best Plant by Industry Week), 2) the Martin L. Nesbitt Discovery Academy, Buncombe County's first STEM high school

TALENT DEVELOPMENT



Visuals: 1) Mission Health talent recruiter at the EDC's Annual Homecoming Career Fair, 2) GE Aviation employees at new CMC facility, 3) Mechatronics & engineering at UNC Asheville, 4) Digital Media program at AB Tech, 5) UNCA Mechatronics student

HIGHLIGHTED STRATEGIES

- Assist the manufacturing workforce pipeline development efforts with leading-edge, research-based, and youth-oriented target marketing.
- Convene a coalition of senior leadership in education and business industry to lead tactical efforts in workforce development.
- Establish the EDC as the go-to expertise for talent recruitment and leverage all resources under the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce umbrella (Economic Development Coalition, Venture Asheville, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Membership Services) to impact recruiting efforts for local companies.
- Launch a tech talent attraction campaign with the support of local employers to create awareness of the opportunities in Asheville-Buncombe County, highlighting the area's tech and outdoor presence and the growing "buzz" around Asheville.
- Form coalitions representing industry-specific employers to support efforts targeting rising STEM workforce at regional universities and raise brand awareness of world-class career opportunities in the Asheville market.
- Host Annual Homecoming Career Fair, the region's largest career fair connecting employers with job seekers.
- Connect managerial and professional talent to startups, tech companies, and high growth ventures through Venture Asheville. Further expand, reach out and populate the Venture Asheville Job Board site.

PERFORMANCE METRICS

Critical to a successful strategic plan are metrics by which a plan’s implementation can be tracked.

1. EDC METRICS

- a. New job creation
- b. New capital investment
- c. Average wages of new jobs created

2. COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

These are the broader outcomes that reflect the performance of the Asheville-Buncombe County economy, including:

- a. Annual employment growth
- b. Annual unemployment rate
- c. New business formation rates
- d. Angel capital and venture capital investments
- e. Median household income levels
- f. Levels of educational attainment (e.g., percentage of adults with a Bachelor’s degree or higher)
- g. Commercial real estate market trends (e.g., office & industrial vacancy rates, rental rates, absorption rates)

The EDC will measure success primarily through the following metrics:

- **3,000 new direct jobs**
- **\$50,000 average annual wage**
- **\$650,000,000 of new capital investment**
- **50 new high-growth companies**
- **\$10 million of new equity investment**

This plan recommends setting ambitious goals for specific numbers of new jobs, capital investment, and average wages, while also setting benchmark goals for the EDC to out-perform the state and national economies. This approach to metrics will allow the EDC to maintain a realistic view of progress, especially in the event of national economic downturns. If goals cannot be met because of national recessions, the EDC should not be held to unrealistic expectations.

Under the previous AVL 5x5 plan, the EDC created 2,860 new direct jobs with average annual earnings of \$48,742 and \$1 billion in new capital investment. Taking into account direct, indirect, and induced jobs, the previous plan yielded a total of 6,385 new jobs with average annual earnings of \$44,672.

SUPPORT STRUCTURES

There are factors beyond the traditional scope of the EDC that will impact Asheville-Buncombe County’s ability to grow its economy. This section highlights important considerations for economic success beyond the EDC’s business retention, expansion, and recruitment activities.

1. INFRASTRUCTURE

THE TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES NEEDED FOR MOVING PEOPLE AND PRODUCTS WITHIN THE ASHEVILLE AREA AND CONNECTING THE REGION TO THE REST OF THE US, AS WELL AS OTHER CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE (ELECTRICAL UTILITIES, NATURAL GAS, WATER/WASTEWATER, AND BROADBAND).

It is critical for communities to have the appropriate infrastructure available to attract new businesses and to take advantage of the economic development opportunities available to them. Well-functioning basic infrastructure (water, wastewater, electricity, and natural gas) and transportation networks (including highways and rail, public transportation, and air travel access) that allow for the efficient flow of people, products, and ideas (digital infrastructure) are essential for the long-term success of regional economies.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND URBAN VITALITY IN ASHEVILLE, REGIONAL SCENIC AND OUTDOOR RECREATION AMENITIES, AS WELL AS HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & AVAILABILITY ACROSS THE METRO AREA.

It is well-established that the region’s quality of place is a significant competitive advantage for economic development. This includes urban vitality, downtown Asheville and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the region’s natural, scenic, and outdoor recreation amenities. The region’s urban core is a key differentiator that makes Asheville-Buncombe County an attractive place for people and businesses, and there are several more areas outside of the region’s downtown that significantly add to the region’s strong quality of place and also serve as major employment centers.

3. ARTS & CULTURE

THE THRIVING ARTS & CULTURE SECTOR (WHICH INCLUDES ARTISTS, GALLERIES, MUSIC, THEATER, CRAFTS, AND OTHER CULTURAL ASSETS) IN ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE COUNTY.

The connection of tourism and arts in Asheville is clear. Arts and culture is a recognized element of the region’s unique sense of place and a positive driver of economic growth, talent attraction and building community. While the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce and other local leaders serve small business including small arts businesses, the EDC’s strategy serves to attract high wage jobs that enhance the local market of art patrons and create the potential for corporate support. The EDC’s critical business intelligence may also help measure the impact of arts as an economic sector, making important business connections in the local economy and raising the arts and culture profile.



The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design

4. EDUCATION

COMMUNITY/TECHNICAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN ASHEVILLE-BUNCOMBE COUNTY AND SURROUNDING REGION AS WELL AS PARTNERSHIPS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OUTSIDE THE REGION.

The link between higher education and economic development is well-established. Prevalent examples (Stanford University in Silicon Valley, Harvard and MIT in Boston, and the University of Texas in Austin) exist, but communities across the U.S. can trace their economic development success to the role of higher education. Strong programs exist in Buncombe County that are leading the way. Strengthening partnerships with education and economic development will elevate community assets and connect talent development for current and future business needs.



UNCA engineering student at Linamar

5. TOURISM

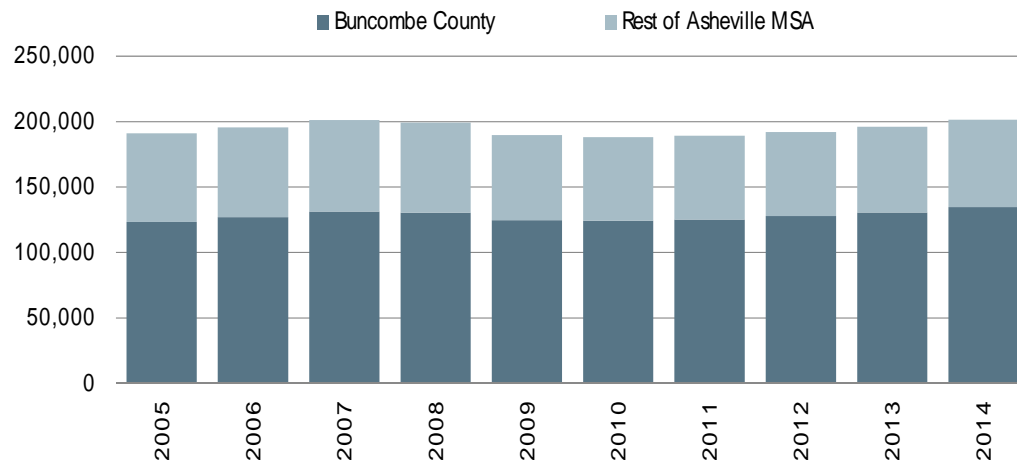
TOURISM IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMY, RESPONSIBLE FOR A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF RECENT ECONOMIC GROWTH, SECOND ONLY TO HEALTH CARE.

The greater Asheville area has emerged as a premier tourist destination, and Asheville-Buncombe County is fortunate to have a strong, diverse tourism sector that draws thousands of visitors on a weekly basis into the community. These visitors represent a large captive audience that include business executives, corporate decision makers, investors, entrepreneurs, and other talented professionals visiting the region for leisure. Connecting tourism to economic development initiatives can strengthen the local economy and help maintain Asheville's uniqueness, as well as provide a future talent pipeline that can fuel the region's workforce.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS, BUNCOMBE COUNTY AND REST OF ASHEVILLE MSA

Buncombe County's economy has added jobs in each of the last 5 years

In 2014, total employment surpassed its pre-recession peak.



Source: EMSI, 2014.4 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed.

**AVL 5X5 IS FUNDED BY:
CITY OF ASHEVILLE, BUNCOMBE COUNTY
AND OVER 70 PRIVATE & CORPORATE INVESTORS**

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