

## 3.7 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

### Background

In recent years, our community has enjoyed a strong economy which can be attributed to its many competitive advantages—an excellent geographic location, higher education entities, proactive economic development projects, regional healthcare providers and a relatively low cost of building and living.

The County has an exceptional location along the I-65 corridor with easy access to the Nashville and Louisville metropolitan areas (approximately one hour and two hours by car, respectively). Proximity to the larger city amenities and those markets has been appealing to entities seeking to locate businesses or corporate headquarters in Bowling Green and Warren County.

Western Kentucky University (WKU) functions as an integral component to the economic health of the region. WKU not only employs over 2,000 full- and part-time faculty and staff, it also contributes premier educational opportunities, attracts talented students and faculty and participates in or leads a number of important economic development initiatives, including the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Innovation and Commercialization Center (ICC) and Small Business Accelerator (SBA).



*Western Kentucky University: a vital component of both the local and regional economies.*

### Quick Facts 2009:

- Location: about 45 minutes from Nashville TN and 2 hours from Louisville KY.
- Average Work Commute: 16 minutes.
- Major Industries: Education, health and social services; manufacturing; retail trade.
- Major Employers: Commonwealth Health Corporation, Western Kentucky University, Warren County Board of Education, General Motors Corvette Plant, Fruit of the Loom, International Paper, Trace Die Cast, Bowling Green Metalforming and Houchens Industries, Inc.
- Industrial Parks: Transpark (900 acres), South Central Industrial Park (186 acres).
- Post-Secondary Institutions: Bowling Green Technical College, Bowling Green Community College, Draughtons Junior College, and Western Kentucky University.
- Average Salary (BG): \$26,425.
- Median Household Income (BG): \$29,047.
- Existing or Planned Visitor Attractions: Lost River Cave and Valley, Bowling Green Ballpark, Kentucky Museum and Library, National Corvette Museum, Historic Rail Park and Rail Museum, Beech Bend Park, WKU Library and Museum, Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center (SKyPAC), Barren River whitewater course, Heritage Trail, etc.

The educational opportunities fostered by WKU, as well as the fact that many of the University's graduates remain in the community after completing college, contributes to the County having one of the highest levels of educational attainment in Kentucky: 28.4% of Warren County residents have obtained at least a bachelor's degree, compared to only 19.7% in Kentucky and 27% in the nation.

Combined with the State's goal of aggressively increasing the number of post-secondary degree holders in Kentucky, the presence of WKU and other institutions that provide educational opportunities

in the County helps to bolster secondary school completion and transition to college rates: 85.4% of Warren Countians 25 years and older had completed at least a high school education in 2007, compared with 79.3% in Kentucky and 84% in the United States. About 89% of high school students in Warren County graduated in 2007, versus 84% in Kentucky as a whole. Some 94% experienced a successful transition after high school.

The attainment of high education levels provide a clear advantage to Warren County and Bowling Green in terms of economic development, as companies increasingly seek out a more skilled workforce.



*Various post-secondary education opportunities and a high level of educational attainment give our community an economic development edge.*

The physical beauty of the University campus and the institution's myriad of formal and informal cultural events also significantly enhance the community's attractiveness to potential business investors.

Our community has also benefitted greatly from the foresight and boldness of its leadership, who undertook such substantial economic development initiatives as the Kentucky Transpark and the South Central Kentucky Industrial Park. The presence of these facilities has helped maintain a healthy industrial base, while many other areas of the United States have suffered severe industrial decline. According to the American Community Survey (ACS) Census 2005-2007, manufacturing accounted for 18.1% of employment of Warren County residents, compared to 14.9% for Kentucky and 11.5% for the United States. In early 2008,

*Site Selection* magazine recognized Bowling Green with sixth place on its annual list of the number of industry location and expansion projects in metros with a population between 50,000 and 200,000.



*Transpark and the South Central Kentucky Industrial Park, among other initiatives, provide the foundation for a balanced, sustainable economic base.*

These quality of life factors also contribute to the City of Bowling Green's status as the region's economic center, which in turn attracts new businesses and employers and major institutions (medical, cultural and governmental) to locate here. Healthcare will remain an economic driver for job creation, while serving as a desirable component for prospective businesses and industry.

Warren County accounts for about 36% of the workforce employed in its labor market area. However, while the Manufacturing sector has remained a strong component of the area's economy, between 1990 and 2006, the Services, Wholesale and Retail Trade and Financial sectors have grown more rapidly than Manufacturing.



This is an indication that Warren County may be moving towards a service- and knowledge-based economy. Accordingly, the County's educational, technological and hard infrastructure will have to accommodate the pursuit of kinds of employment generators and industry sectors that are compatible with the 2030 Vision.

In recent years, quality of life has been increasingly recognized as an important factor in economic performance. As regions compete to attract a skilled workforce and offer an appealing lifestyle to the decision makers regarding company site selection, Warren County must continue to fare well as a locale option. Evidence of successfully performing in this arena is Bowling Green having achieved the Milken Institute ranking of 33rd on their list of 124 small cities in its Best Performing Cities 2008 index. A strong workforce, lower cost of doing business and growth opportunities also landed Bowling Green on the 12<sup>th</sup> spot of the Forbes Magazine list of Best Small Places for Business and Careers. The community has taken important steps in recent years to improve quality of life through new cultural and entertainment venues, such as the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center (SkyPAC) and a new minor league baseball stadium.

Other marketable assets include the caliber of local schools, a "small town" sense of place, community facilities, park and open spaces, scenic natural resources and affordable housing—all of which provide the foundation for an exceptionally livable and sustainable community. Precautions must be taken to protect the relatively low cost of living enjoyed by residents, which may be the most vulnerable economic advantage to maintain.

The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce is engaged in actively promoting the economic development of the community. Its SouthCentralKY.com website is an important source of information for those considering relocating their business to Warren County, expanding an existing business or starting a business, and includes information about available sites and buildings for prospective business operations.



*Our quality of life is one of the key community assets, and has led to consistent high ranking of Bowling Green as a great place to live, do business, and play.*

As mentioned elsewhere, there is a possibility that the regional airport in Bowling Green may be relocated in the coming years. If this happens, the potential for redevelopment of the large, well-located land that houses the existing airport constitutes a very significant economic opportunity. This element outlines policies that should become the foundation of a proactive economic development strategy.



*Support the continued recruitment of new businesses to the County's two industrial/business parks.*



*Promote Warren County as an upscale retirement destination. .*

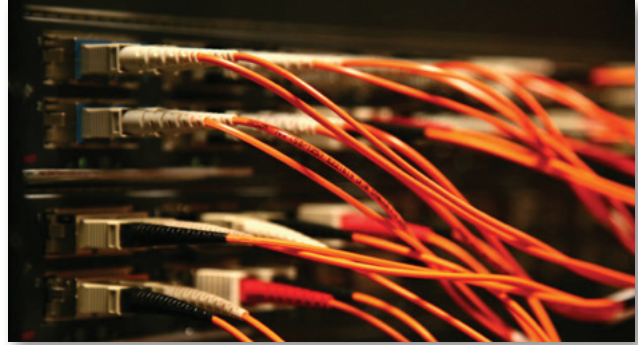
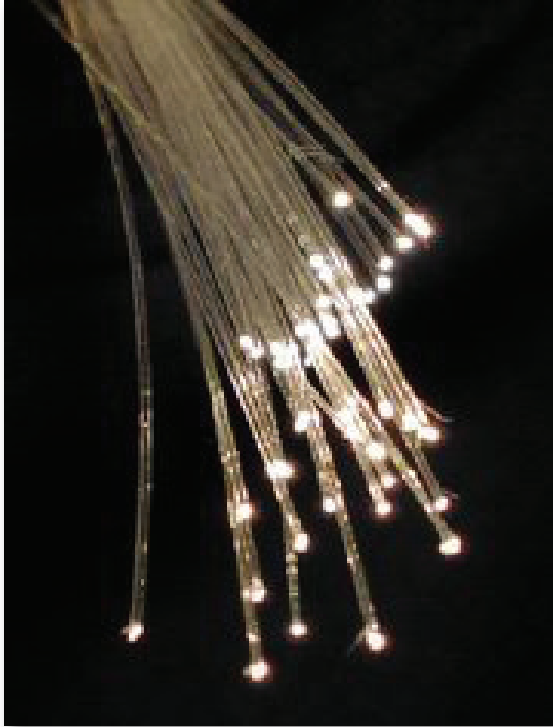


## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOAL

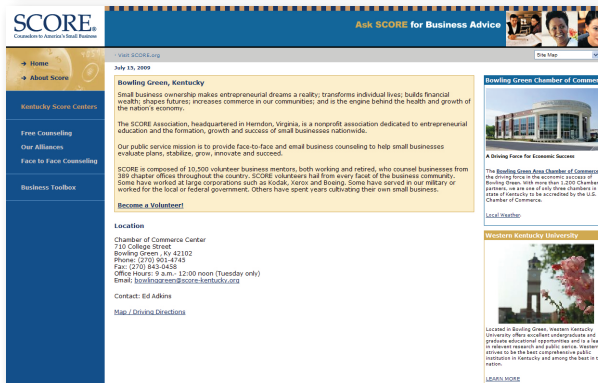
***Maintain a strong local economy that provides opportunities and resources to everyone in Warren County.***

### OBJECTIVES / ACTIONS

<b><i>Objective ED-1</i></b>	<b><i>Pursue actions to strengthen core industries, retain existing businesses and industries in the community and attract new businesses and industries, particularly those that will help to diversify the local economy.</i></b>
Action ED-1.1	Supplement current efforts—such as southcentralky.com—to provide local data to those considering relocating a business, with active promotion of Warren County as a prime business location.
Action ED-1.2	Promote recruitment of businesses and industries that provide high-wage employment and those that will help in diversifying Warren County’s economy to minimize the effects of cyclical shifts affecting specific industries.
Action ED-1.3	Support the continued recruitment of new businesses to locate in the Kentucky Trimodal Transpark and the South Central Kentucky Industrial Park. Constraints to growth and functioning of these employment centers should be monitored and expeditiously addressed.
Action ED-1.4	Continue to disseminate information regarding the availability of vacant property and business space via the southcentralky.com website, and ensure that the information remains up-to-date.
Action ED-1.5	Support the location of State and Federal facilities in Warren County.
Action ED-1.6	Periodically review the Zoning Map to ensure that it allows sufficient area for industrial, commercial and office development to accommodate projected job growth and the location/expansion needs of existing and potential businesses.
Action ED-1.7	Promote Warren County as a potential upscale retirement community.
Action ED-1.8	Encourage the development and expansion of healthcare facilities and support facilities for those of retirement age.



*Plan for the development and improvement of technology and traditional infrastructure to support the development of new business parks in Warren County.*



*Support local small businesses, entrepreneurial endeavors and industries.*

**Sidebar: Policy ED-2.** Some examples of existing local, regional and state resources for small business entrepreneurship:

- Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce
- SCORE-Bowling Green
- WKU's SBDC/ICC/SBA
- Bluegrass State Skills Corporation (BSSC)
- Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development

These and other organizations, such as the Downtown Redevelopment Authority and the Bowling Green Area Convention and Tourism Bureau, are potential partners in facilitating the establishment and retention of small local businesses.

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**Objective ED-2**      ***Pursue the development of corporate business parks to attract leading technology-based industries.***

- Action ED-2.1      Identify and assist in marketing potential sites for business parks that generate high-paying jobs and focus on clean industries.
  - Action ED-2.2      Assist in the pursuit and marketing to companies in the field of business applications and product development.
  - Action ED-2.3      Plan for the development and improvement of technology infrastructure (e.g., connectivity, bandwidth, dual access, etc.), as well as traditional infrastructure improvements, to support new business parks.
  - Action ED-2.4      Review and, as necessary, revise zoning and land development standards to provide flexibility in facility design and layout for corporate business parks.
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**Objective ED-3**      ***Support local small businesses, entrepreneurial endeavors and industries.***

- Action ED-3.1      Facilitate the establishment of new small and/or home-based businesses by such activities as reviewing the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that it does not unduly restrict the operation of home-based businesses, particularly in rural areas.
- Action ED-3.2      Coordinate with private sector partners to identify and promote specialty shopping niches (i.e. antique corridors, furniture rows, arts districts, etc.)
- Action ED-3.3      Continuously improve the availability of information on the Internet.
- Action ED-3.4      Continue to support Western Kentucky University's Small Business Development Center, Innovation and Commercialization Center (ICC) and Small Business Accelerator. Such economic development initiatives provide business incubator programs, small business training and reference information and programs to foster transference of academic discoveries to commercially marketable products.
- Action ED-3.5      Encourage and participate in promotional events that benefit local businesses.





*Support promotional community events that benefit local businesses, such as the Noon Concert in the Park series.*



*Support the continuation of the WKU Farm as an educational setting in support of a strong agricultural sector.*



- Action ED-3.6      Review the Zoning Ordinance to ensure it allows work-live units in appropriate locations to reduce costs for certain types of businesses.

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**Objective ED-4**      ***Support the continuation and strengthening of a high value local agricultural sector and related economic opportunities.***

- Action ED-4.1      Explore the increasing demand for alternative management systems as a potential growth area for the agriculture sector in the County.
- Action ED-4.2      Assist farmers in reducing barriers to selling Warren County farm products.
- Action ED-4.3      Support and enhance agricultural infrastructure.
- Action ED-4.4      Support the continuance and expansion of Western Kentucky University's agri-related activities at the university Farm.

**Context:**

*The WKU Farm was purchased in 1934. The property is used as an invaluable tool to facilitate education and hands-on experience for those pursuing careers in every aspect of agriculture, including Agribusiness, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Mechanics, and related fields such as Agronomy, Plant Science, Horticulture and Turf Management, Veterinary Science, Animal Science and Soil Science. The Farm produces a wide variety of crops and also accommodates livestock operations. It is also used for USDA research and faculty trials.*

- Action ED-4.5      Allow and encourage agri-tourism, farmers' markets, local Co-ops and community supported agriculture (CSAs), farmstands, accessory farm businesses, agricultural festivals, equestrian events and other activities that help to support a viable agriculture economy.

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**Objective ED-5**      ***Endeavor to advance the academic achievement, skills enhancement and competency of the workforce.***

- Action ED-5.1      Work with local public and private schools, WKU, Bowling Green Technical College, the Chamber of Commerce and other appropriate organizations to ensure that learning tools and workforce training



*Ensure that learning tools and workforce training programs are aligned with business recruitment efforts and changing marketplace conditions.*



*Continue to implement the Greenbelt System Master Plan, leveraging the resulting greenway network as a quality of life asset.*



programs are aligned with business recruitment efforts and the changing global marketplace.

- Action ED-5.2      Establish partnerships between local schools and employers to provide high school students the opportunity for paid or unpaid internships to gain work experience and skills.

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**Objective ED-6**      ***Take practical steps to maintain and improve the quality of life in Warren County in support of economic development objectives.***

- Action ED-6.1      Endeavor to maintain a reasonable cost of living in Warren County, including addressing the cost of housing and transportation issues as important economic development issues. Consider the impact of land use, transportation and related decisions on the cost of living.
- Action ED-6.2      Continue to implement the Greenbelt (Greenways) System Master Plan in order to improve multimodality, connectivity and recreational opportunities.
- Action ED-6.3      Continue to support the provision of cultural, sports and other entertainment venues and facilities to make the community more attractive to visitors and residents, as well as more self-reliant.

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**Objective ED-7**      ***Make the most efficient use of infrastructure and public resources.***

- Action ED-7.1      Expand the availability of high-speed internet and wi-fi technology. Ensure that existing regulations do not unduly prevent the widest possible access to wi-fi technology (cross-ref. CF-1.9A).
- Action ED-7.2      Periodically evaluate whether infrastructure constraints, such as traffic congestion or lack of adequate utilities in strategic locations, are inhibiting economic development and employment growth opportunities; take steps to address any deficiencies.
- Action ED-7.3      Plan for the future redevelopment of the existing airport property in a manner that best supports the sound growth and economic strengthening of Warren County and Bowling Green and is consistent



*Support new cultural and entertainment attractions in Warren County.*



*Carefully plan the redevelopment of the existing airport property, to ensure it supports economic development objectives.*



*Utilize targeted financial assistance, incentives and technical support to encourage reinvestment in older commercial properties.*

**Sidebar: Action; ED-8.1 and 8.2.** Potential tools to promote reinvestment:

- Grant resources: CDBG, Section 108 Loan Guarantees, Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI), Public Works and Economic Development Initiative, Small Business Guaranteed Loans, Certified Development Company Guaranteed Loan Program, Rural Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program, etc.
- Incentives: public/private partnerships (e.g., infrastructure support), tax incentives, adjusted land development regulations (e.g., parking ratios, etc.), Floor Area Ratio (FAR) bonuses, expedited permitting, etc.
- Other tools: Community Redevelopment Areas, Main Street Program, code enforcement, etc.



with the Future Land Use Map and Comprehensive Plan.

Action ED-7.4 All governments in Warren County should coordinate to collectively increase the community's influence at the State and Federal government levels.

Action ED-7.5 Coordinate infrastructure investment policies between Warren County and its municipalities.

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**Objective ED-8**      ***Support expansion of economic opportunities to disadvantaged persons and to geographic areas that have historically underperformed economically.***

Action ED-8.1 Continue to actively pursue State and Federal grants to improve the business climate in disadvantaged parts of the community.

Action ED-8.2 Utilize targeted financial assistance, incentives and technical support to encourage reinvestment in older commercial properties.

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**Objective ED-9**      ***Strengthen the position of Downtown Bowling Green as a community focus of economic activity.***

Action ED-9.1 Support new cultural and entertainment venues, such as the development of a whitewater course on the Barren River, and completion of the Heritage Trail (a walking path from Fountain Square to the Riverfront), in Downtown Bowling Green, that complement current establishments such as the minor league baseball stadium, the Southern Kentucky Performing Arts Center and the Historic Railpark and Train Museum.

Action ED-9.2 Improve the availability of information on the Internet regarding the tourist attractions available in Warren County, particularly in Downtown.

Action ED-9.3 Consider the need for tourist support facilities (hotels, restaurants, etc.) when making land use and zoning decisions.

Action ED-9.4 To encourage the provision of additional residential, retail and office facilities in Downtown Bowling Green, review the Zoning Ordinance to remove impediments to and provide incentives for the development of mixed-use projects that include upper floor residential, live/work



*Remove impediments to and provide incentives for the development of mixed-use projects that include upper floor residential, live/work units and other innovative types of development.*



*Establish formal communication channels among area entities involved in economic development to better coordinate economic development activities.*



units and other innovative types of development suited in a vibrant downtown environment.

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**Objective ED-10**      ***Coordinate the efforts and share informational resources among the various entities involved in economic development.***

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| Action ED-10.1 | The governments of Warren County should establish partnerships with private and non-profit organizations to gather and maintain economic data that can be used to improve decision making in the future.   |
| Action ED-10.2 | Establish formal communication channels with local businesses, the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce, Western Kentucky University's (WKU) Small Business Development Center and Innovation and Commercialization Center, County Agricultural Extension, the local governments in Warren County and other entities involved in economic development; coordinate the activities of these various organizations toward achieving a common vision of Warren County's economic future. |
| Action ED-10.3 | Coordinate with local business groups to make information on existing resources and/or financing programs to business retention or expansion readily available.  |
| Action ED-10.4 | Continue to develop and maintain the community's on-line Geographic Information System (GIS) as a means to provide the most up-to-date data for the citizens of Warren County and encourage national on-line mapping system providers to utilize local resources for their mapping needs.  |