Administrator: Pickens niche is small businesses

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

PICKENS — Pickens County Administrator Chap Hurst feels the county has found its economic development niche and that involves targeting small businesses.

"We've begun to look at those that employ between 50 and 350 workers," Hurst said. "That is something we feel is a better fit for Pickens County, and the reason is that the topography makes it hard to find a piece of land to fit a very large business structure."

Hurst said the county has installed new sewer lines along U.S. 123, upgraded all of its sewer plants to accommodate additional usage and increased recruiting efforts. Additional staff has been hired not only to recruit industry, but to work with existing plants.

"We've looked at our incentives and regulations and begun to expedite permits, and my office tracks each company through the permitting process to ensure it comes back in a very short period of time," Hurst said. "That's important because most businesses want to start immediately."

'We've begun to look at those that employ between 50 and 350 workers. That is something we feel is a better fit for Pickens County.'

Chap Hurst
Administrator, Pickens County

The county administrator said the Alliance Pickens board has worked to incorporate a strategic plan to address those issues while county council has also become more involved in the individual projects.

"Council is following those projects as they go through the process and providing incentives to encourage businesses to locate in Pickens County and make us very competitive," Hurst said. "They're helping us to keep taxes low, as evidenced by the fact that we haven't had a tax increase in six years, and have increased our ability to withstand difficult economic times by increasing our fund balance and demonstrating to businesses that they will not be taxed heavily in the future due to excessive government spending."

Hurst estimates that some 3,000 jobs have been created in recent years and more economic development announcements are expected in the future.

As further evidence of the county's commitment to attracting small businesses, Hurst said future plans call for a Class B park featuring metal buildings with a brick frontage across from the Rock Quarry on S.C. 93. He added that there is room for four company sites on the property.

In addition, the county has also upgraded the Pickens County Airport by constructing a new terminal and recently received a $136,000 grant facilitating development of a five-year plan. The plan necessitated the purchase of 75 additional acres of land to build new hangars and a couple of new industrial sites affiliated with the needs of the airport.

Hurst said the county is also planning to build spec buildings. "We have to have properties and that's one of the things we've been working on," he said.

The former proposed Tri-County Landfill site near Central is being certified as an industrial site.

"That means we've done all the testing, soil borings, accommodations for water, sewer, gas, cable and Internet," he said. "Then we will have a certified site to be listed on the (South Carolina) Department of Commerce's website.

"Once that is finished, sometime around November, we'll look at removing the trees on the site and doing some light grading work. That way, when a prospect comes in, they'll have a good idea what their factory or business will look like in that area."

greg@dailyjournal.com | (864) 973-6687