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# ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION OF CAMDEN COUNTY, GEORGIA EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Prepared for* The Camden Partnership and the Camden County Public Service Authority  
*Prepared by* Georgia Tech's Office of Economic Development & Technology Ventures (EDTV)  
*In Partnership with* Georgia Tech's Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (COGRD)

Camden County's community vision centers on its aspiration "to be a desirable place to live, to manage growth and development, and to achieve economic prosperity." To help realize that vision, The Camden Partnership and the Camden County Public Service Authority undertook a study to investigate opportunities for economic diversification within Camden County that will enable the community to reduce its economic dependence upon the Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay. They contracted with a Georgia Tech team to review Camden County's suitability for economic diversification and issues affecting its potential for sustainable and quality development. The goal of this effort is to recommend priority actions for Camden County that are:

- **Compatible** with Camden County's vision and quality of life.
- **Feasible** given Camden County's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Implementable** given Camden County's resources and leadership.
- **Strategic** for enabling Camden County to move forward on the most promising opportunities.

This Executive Summary includes highlights and overall strategic goal recommendations, which are based on interviews of stakeholders and external economic development partners, and an independent assessment by the Georgia Tech team. Detailed recommendations are provided in the report, "Economic Diversification of Camden County, Georgia: Recommendations for a Strategic Plan," and more findings are provided in the companion reports, which are available from The Camden Partnership.



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Views concerning what constitutes "successful economic development" and "successful quality growth" were similar to the point of being almost synonymous, signaling the recognition of how the two pursuits are inextricably linked and the desire for "sustainable development."
- Developing a quality workforce was viewed by stakeholders as most important to the future prosperity of the community as it received the highest average rating (4.76) among the five strategies. This signals the desire for Camden County to play a role in a talent-driven economy.
- Topping the list of economic development strengths identified by stakeholders were those related to Camden County's accessibility and distribution channels. This was echoed by statewide and regional partners.
- Concerns relating to political infighting and not working together were the most frequently mentioned challenge by stakeholders for economic development in Camden County. Similarly, lack of unity among community leadership was the most frequently mentioned challenge by the partners.



- Northern Camden County is largely viewed by stakeholders as an area prime for development.
- Stakeholders do not desire environmentally damaging development; this includes paper mills.
- Water quality was viewed by stakeholders as most important to Camden's future livability, receiving the highest average rating of 4.81 of a possible 5.
- External partners considered Camden to be most marketable for attracting more tourists to the community.
- Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, St. Mary's, and Camden's coastal lifestyle were the most frequent mentioned things that first came to mind of statewide and regional partners.
- When reviewing Camden's performance metrics, it appears that the community's capacity for workforce development is a major community strength.
- Camden has a growing small business community; it appears that great potential exists for further entrepreneur development.
- Camden County has the key components and is well positioned to recruit and attract industries and businesses. Camden County's economic development efforts must transition from a program based system to a process based system. Each Economic Development Organization will need to be seamlessly integrated into a county-wide plan.
- In terms of economic diversification opportunities, Camden appears to have potential for exploring the following: distribution, warehouse, logistics; materials; marine-based; business services and trade; and knowledge-based businesses.
- There appears to be a disconnect between new development and Camden's community vision, resulting in the lack of ability to adequately manage for adequate water and wastewater infrastructure, compatible land use development, and balanced, sustainable growth.
- Since Camden County's coastal lifestyle is one of its leading assets for attracting future business, tourism, and residential investors, the goal of tourism promotion and development should be to expose more of Camden's ready made prospects—its I-95 travelers—to its charms.
- Camden has the potential to become THE gateway of Georgia's east coast from Florida, and, given its location between Savannah (GA) and Jacksonville (FL), it also has the potential to become a more attractive destination for "creative class" jobs and talent. These assets can provide the backbone for an innovative marketing strategy.

## SUMMARY OF ISSUES & RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC GOALS

The following strategic goals address the community's most urgent issues relating to the economic diversification and quality growth of the county and its cities of Kingsland, St. Marys, and Woodbine. Reaching these goals will require county-wide effort, involving multiple organizations. What is critical to recognize is that these goals are intertwined. They relate to economic development strategies that build upon each other; the success of reaching one goal will depend on the effectiveness of efforts to reach another. Therefore, it is very important to consider these initiatives as part of ongoing county-wide coordination and partnership.

	Key Issue	Recommended Strategic Goal
1	Camden County appears to have made great strides in collaboration among local economic development organizations and local government entities. However, many efforts do not appear to be well-coordinated.	→ Continue efforts to collaborate and work together to develop a cohesive focus. The effort to develop and implement the community's economic diversification plan should have ongoing county-wide participation.
2	Economic diversification is very critical for the long-term health of Camden County's economy. The community is heavily reliant on its military base, making the county very vulnerable to any adverse impact on the base's operations.	→ Focus on the development of key industries based upon Camden's assets, proximity to major markets, and community vision for higher quality industries, and market to those industries strategically and aggressively.
3	New development within the county has not reflected the vision, goals, and objectives of the community.	→ Ensure that development regulations, zoning changes, and permitting decisions are consistent with the community's vision and goals, and concurrent with plans for the infrastructure and educational facility provisions articulated in planning documents.
4	Recent development has not balanced residential expansion with economic development. If current trends continue, the County may need to expand services to meet the needs of its residents.	→ Evaluate the implications of development patterns on the tax base, environment, and ability to maintain a desirable quality of life, and diversify development efforts and land use planning strategies accordingly.
5	Water and wastewater infrastructure provision is following instead of directing development.	→ Develop a comprehensive master plan that phases the expansion of water and wastewater infrastructure to support economic development and redevelopment goals.
6	Natural, cultural, and historic resources are disconnected.	→ Develop a green infrastructure network that connects community amenities for environmental and social benefits.
7	The existing transportation system lacks connectivity and transportation options.	→ Create road placement and design standards that allow for multiple transportation modes and a transit system that supports significant originations and destinations, as well as special events.

	Key Issue		Recommended Strategic Goal
8	Key corridors and interchanges are underperforming.	➔	Enact corridor and interchange management plans that enhance community identity, provide mobility options, and encourage new development and redevelopment that is consistent with the community's vision.
9	Camden County's potential for economic development and diversification depends upon its ability to develop a knowledge-based workforce.	➔	Join forces to ensure that workforce development is demonstrably excellent at all levels, from early childhood through adulthood.
10	Although entrepreneurship represents a significant opportunity for economic diversification, several entrepreneur and small-business needs are not currently being met, and the community lacks a unified approach for addressing these needs and supporting future needs.	➔	Diversify and expand economic development efforts to foster, nurture, and support entrepreneurs, and significantly expand efforts to support existing business and industries.
11	Camden is not reaching its full potential for optimizing tourism opportunities.	➔	Strengthen tourism promotion and development efforts to enable Camden to further capitalize on its many historic, cultural, and ecological assets.
12	Camden County offers a key gateway to Georgia's coast from Florida, and its coastal lifestyle is one of its leading assets for attracting future business, tourism, and residential investors.	➔	Further leverage Camden County's coastal lifestyle and related ecological and historical attributes as key drivers for future marketing plans and efforts.

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