

# Vinita, Oklahoma's ACTION PLAN FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Prepared By



# Introduction

## Economic Development Is A Team Sport!

To effectively author a report that provides achievable **Action Steps** and **Tactics**, it requires the gathering of honest and frank feedback from those in leadership positions in the community. To ensure that those recommendations are accepted and embraced by the those from the community who hold leadership positions in business, political office, or in community activities, requires the involvement of those leaders in this process. With that being said, we must pass along our gratitude to those in leadership for their enthusiastic participation in this important exercise.

This work product would also have been impossible without the cooperation and diligence of the **Coordinator of Economic and Community Development for the City of Vinita Misty Bingham and Brian Price, Vinita City Clerk**. The leadership skills and work ethic of this group of city officials are unmatched. Their assistance aided in the gathering of accurate and timely information that led to the completion of this report.

Additionally, we had interviews with the following and their input was valuable and essential to the preparation of this document and its recommendations:

Eddy Allensworth, President – Oklahoma State Bank  
Audrey Bowers, 66 Apparel  
Phil Carroll, Farmers & Ranchers Livestock  
Chris Carter, Shout & Sack Convenience Store  
Mike Clogston, Wal Mart - Vinita  
Cassandra Coats, Attorney – Lee & Coats  
Tony Corday, Training Coordinator – Northeast Tech  
Misty Deffenbaugh-Bingham, Economic & Community Development Coordinator  
Ben Elmore, Director of Operations, City of Vinita  
Allen Goforth, Street Commissioner, City of Vinita  
Michael Gordon, Manager – External Affairs, PSO  
Dr. Kelly Grimmett, Superintendent, Vinita Public Schools

Theodore Hilmes, CEO KAMO Power  
Joseph Hiseley, Hiseley Customs  
Hon. Chuck Hoskin, Mayor of Vinita  
Stephanie Hoskin, Vinita City Council  
Dr. Danny Lankford, Veterinarian & Vinita City Council  
Josh D. Lee, JD, MS, NREMT, Attorney – Lee & Coats  
Tami McKeon, Economic Development Director, Grand Gateway  
Andy McMillan, Director of Economic Development, Cherokee Nation Business  
Dennis Patrick, Clanton's  
Brian Price, Vinita City Clerk  
Dee Robison, President & CEO, First National Bank  
Pastor Robert Sanders, Alive Church  
Julie Shree, Holiday Inn Express  
Lisa Smith, Executive Director, NORA  
Brandi Tabor, Holiday Inn Express  
Angela Thomason, Reporter, Vinita Daily Journal  
Lowell Walker, Craig County Commissioner

We also conducted a Focus Group. The participants included:

Audrey Bowers, 66 Apparel  
Julie Shree, Holiday Inn Express  
Brandi Tabor, Holiday Inn Express  
Mike Clogston, Wal Mart – Vinita  
Dennis Patrick, Clanton's

## **Timeline & Metrics**

In a Strategic Plan for Economic Development we would recommend a timeline for each Action Item and Tactic. We would also place a timeline for completion of each of these items. This document is an "Action Plan", meaning that the intent is for these items to be accomplished quickly; as soon as possible and as soon as practical.

This Action Plan for Economic Development is designed to position Vinita for economic growth and to establish the economic development program of the community as a viable and sustainable vehicle for economic growth. Our highest recommendation is to aggressively pursue completion of these Action Items and Tactics.

# Demographics

Vinita, OK

## Comparisons

Indicators		Vinita, OK	United States	Percent difference Vinita, OK vs. United States
Demographics	Population Growth (% change, 2010*-2018*)	-5.5%	6.2%	
	Median Age (2018*)	41.9	37.9	
	Percent Population White Alone (2018*)	61.6%	72.7%	
	Percent Population Hispanic or Latino (2018*)	3.4%	17.8%	
	Percent Population American Indian or Alaska Native (2018*)	21.8%	0.8%	
	Percent of Population 'Baby Boomers' (2018*)	26.1%	24.6%	
Income	Median Household Income (2018*)	\$35,986	\$60,293	
	Per Capita Income (2018*)	\$19,904	\$32,621	
	Percent Individuals Below Poverty (2018*)	23.7%	14.1%	
	Percent Families Below Poverty (2018*)	17.1%	10.1%	
	Percent of Households with Retirement and Social Security Income (2018*)	68.2%	49.5%	
	Percent of Households with Public Assistance Income (2018*)	31.3%	20.1%	
Structure	Percent Population 25 Years or Older without High School Degree (2018*)	14.7%	12.3%	
	Percent Population 25 Years or Older with Bachelor's Degree or Higher (2018*)	13.8%	31.5%	
	Percent Population That Speak English Less Than 'Very Well' (2018*)	0.8%	8.5%	
	Percent of Houses that are Seasonal Homes (2018*)	0.6%	4.0%	
	Owner-Occupied Homes where > 30% of Household Income Spent on Mortgage (2018*)	31.3%	28.5%	
	Renter-Occupied Homes where > 30% of Household Income Spent on Rent (2018*)	46.2%	46.5%	

**High Reliability:** Data with coefficients of variation (CVs) < 12% are in black to indicate that the sampling error is relatively small.  
**Medium Reliability:** Data with CVs between 12 & 40% are in orange to indicate that the values should be interpreted with caution.  
**Low Reliability:** Data with CVs > 40% are displayed in red to indicate that the estimate is considered very unreliable.

\* ACS 5-year estimates used. 2018 represents average characteristics from 2014-2018; 2010 represents 2006-2010.  
 Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2019. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office, Washington, D.C.

Source: Headwaters Economics

# Vinita Action Plan for Economic Development

## Business Retention & Attraction

**Goal #1 – Covet and promote the existing primary employer base and work with them to provide a platform for continued growth and success.**



**Tactic – Subscribe to a database to survey local, primary employers and store pertinent employment and company information.**

Building and maintaining a database of information gleaned from regular interviews will identify job and capital investment growth opportunities and will identify a crisis long before it becomes a crisis.

**Tactic – Recruit, train, and use a volunteer force to survey and maintain data collected from local primary and mainstreet employers.**

Visit and survey these important employers on a regular schedule. Be their advocate. Know their struggles and celebrate their successes. Anticipate a crisis before it becomes a crisis and offer them assistance when and where possible. One person cannot perform this function, so it is imperative to recruit a volunteer group. The Chamber might be helpful in this endeavor.

**Goal #2 – Make Vinita the “hotspot” for retail development.**

**Tactic - Develop a “Fact Sheet” on all potential development sites and buildings. Include site ownership, status for marketing, traffic counts, location data, and any incentives.**

This colorful Fact Sheet should probably be designed in conjunction with a website update, so they appear to be representing the same community. The Fact Sheet should contain all information that would be of value to a developer and his/her investors.

In this “Fact Sheet”, talk about the traffic on the Turnpike, Highway 60, and Route 66. Show the Glass House, McDonald’s over the Turnpike. Talk about the connection from Tulsa, Joplin, Bartlesville, and other communities to Grand Lake.

This “Fact Sheet” should be positioned on the website and be downloadable.

**Tactic – Join the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). Become active in their local and regional events. Exhibit at the Red River Regional event in Fort Worth.**

Very few, if any, deals are made at the big ICSC Trade Show in Las Vegas in May of every year. This extravaganza is for the huge consultants to wine and dine the huge developers and strategize the huge deals in larger metro areas. The Red River ICSC event, usually held in Fort Worth attracts more of the size and level of developer who would have interest in a project in a community like Vinita.

Tulsa Chamber’s *Tulsa’s Future* program is being retooled for 2021 and may have a retail component in which Vinita can participate for a small fee.

Avoid the expensive consultants who will “take credit for anything that happens!”

**Tactic – Develop and print a list of those things that the City can provide to a retail development project.**

Organize a few local focus groups, talk to surrounding communities, consult the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, and determine some incentive items that the City of Vinita can offer a retail development. It may surprise you how some little, inexpensive things can make the difference on a project.

**Goal #3 – Prepare Vinita to attract new businesses and primary employers.**

**Tactic – Review the City’s website to ensure consistency and attractiveness to potential investors.**

Be sure to update terminology in the text and in demographic tables. (Example: Use the term “gender” instead of “sex” in the demographics.) Be sure to identify your source of information on each demographic portion.

The Vinita Chamber section should contain information for new residents moving into the community. (information on available housing, schools, daycare, churches, etc.)

Add a headshot and a welcome message from the Mayor!

Be sure to identify the “Point Person” for economic development along with their contact information (see the following Tactic!)

**Tactic – For prospect hosting and working with consultants, ODOC Project Managers, and developers, designate the City of Vinita Coordinator of Economic and Community Development as the “Economic Development Point Person” to work with business prospects.**

It is important that the community identify a “Point Person” who is recognized by site selection consultants, ODOC project managers, and real estate developers as the one and only “Point Person” for economic development. Many of those mentioned above have told me over the years that it is extremely frustrating to have to determine “who is in charge” when working on a project. Many times, they use this excuse to eliminate a community from consideration on a project.

**Tactic – Be sure the Coordinator of Economic and Community Development is involved and engaged in professional development activities.**

The Director of Economic and Community Development should join and be active in the International Economic Development Council (IEDC), the Oklahoma Professional Economic Development Council (OEDC), the Northeast Oklahoma Regional Association (NORA), and be active in their conferences and programs. This will ensure Vinita getting to and staying at the top of the profession.

Economic development is a “relationship business” and successful economic developers pursue and maintain close working relationships with others in the profession.



**Tactic - Rename the Don Yarger Industrial Park.**

Using the term “industrial” dates your park and your economic development program. Here are some examples for a new name: Don Yarger Business & Technology Park, Don Yarger Business Park, and others.

**Tactic – Rename the Vinita Industrial Development Authority  
(see the reasons stated for name change above)**

Modernize the name to something like Vinita Development Authority or Vinita Economic Development Authority. Review the VIDA Trust Indentures and see if there should be any revisions or updates. Consider expanding the document to include Craig County.

**Tactic – Pre-plan for property sales/leases in the Park.**

VIDA should pre-approve conditions of sales and/or lease of property and authorize the Director of Economic and Community Development to negotiate those agreements.

In today’s world, businesses and consultants are not going to wait on “clearing schedules” and “long, public meetings.”

**Tactic – Make the Park attractive and clean.**

Establish covenants and ordinances requiring tenants to maintain their buildings and properties in a manner that keeps the park attractive and visibly pleasing.

**Tactic - Get new, permanent signage up at both entrances to the Park.**

Include a directory of tenants and possibly a site map. If a local utility(s) has infrastructure in the park, there may be an opportunity to ask them to sponsor signage.

**Tactic - Host Fam Tours of Vinita and Craig County.**

Invite Oklahoma Department of Commerce project managers for an annual “Fam Tour.” Host economic development managers from local utility companies and from the Cherokee Nation.

# **Placemaking**

## **Goal #1 – Implement a Vibrant Downtown Development Program.**

### **Tactic - Develop a strategy for “moving” empty buildings on Route 66 (Wilson Avenue).**

To ensure activity on empty buildings, review City of Vinita ordinances regarding fire safety and appearance, then make sure buildings are conforming to the ordinances.

For those buildings that are on the market, be sure they are listed on your website with a link to the real estate listing agent and/or the owner.

### **Tactic - Host “Pop Up” Saturday(s) to demonstrate the potential for locating downtown.**

Allow startups and people with a retail idea set up “sidewalk” and “vacant building”, one-day businesses.

### **Tactic - Provide free Wi-Fi downtown.**

Placing some routers at proper places around downtown can provide public wi-fi which is available in most modern cities. Provide some signage to advertise the service.

### **Tactic – Update Downtown Signage.**

Develop an incentive for downtown property owners and businesses to adjust and update signage on buildings. Signs should be perpendicular to the street, not flat against the front of the building.

## **Goal #2 – Develop a Vinita Business Promotion Strategy.**

### **Tactic – Design and implement an ambassador program.**

Many of the recommendations in this report will require an organization of volunteers to ensure that these actions are taken. We recommend the formation of a volunteer group of community ambassadors to make up this volunteer group.

# Tourism

**Goal #1 – Increase the number of visitors (and their dollars!!) for Vinita.**

**Tactic – Design and install “Wayfinding Signage.”**

While Vinita enjoys beautiful “Welcome Sign”, there is a need to help visitors find City Hall, the Chamber office, downtown, the rodeo arena, the Craig County Courthouse, schools, and other important places. (Here is an example of Wayfinding Signage from Jenks.)



Attractive Wayfinding Signs with directional arrows will help get traffic off the highway, the Turnpike, and into downtown.

**Tactic – Continue to improve, promote, and support the Craig County Fair Facilities.**

Work with the Craig County Fair Board to identify improvements that can be made to the facilities at the Craig County Fair Grounds and Community Center.

Identify additional conferences and events that can be hosted in the facility.

Review and adjust facility rules and regulations to accommodate additional events.

Adjoining property provides great location for hotel development.

### **Tactic – Recruit more hotels to Vinita.**

Identify potential sites on close to the Turnpike gates and develop an incentive package to recruit a developer to construct a hotel (a major chain such as IHG, Hilton, Marriott, or other major chain) inside the city limits of Vinita.

### **Tactic – Develop a plan to promote the original “Route 66.”**

“Route 66” needs to be prevalent on all signage, website, ads, and promotional material. Work with the Chamber and the Friends of Route 66 to upgrade and promote the “Route 66” festival.

## **Ongoing Challenges**

### **Truck Traffic**

Truck traffic is historically and currently an issue in downtown Vinita, especially at the intersection of Wilson Street and Illinois Avenue (the McDonald’s corner on Route 66). CGS is reluctant to recommend any type of bypass route. There are many examples of bypass highways in other communities that have been disastrous for the businesses in those communities.

Prior to implementing a “bypass”, other remedies need to be explored. There also should be a careful analysis of the impact on businesses that will be left along the original route.

There needs to be some urgency in planning a traffic control of semi-trucks that could include a truck route through the city. Delaying or not pursuing a remedy could result in a highway project that could possibly bypass the entire community.

We recommend that the city immediately formulate a task force to expedite addressing this issue. Work with ODOT, Grand Gateway, and involve all stakeholders in this process.

## **Economic Development Funding**

Economic Development in Vinita is funded primarily via a fee collected on PSO (electric utility) franchise fee and a local lodging tax. We are recommending that a task force be appointed and charged with the development of permanent and adequate funding for economic development operations and incentives.

Several communities in Oklahoma have enjoyed success with a small (1/4 or 1/8 %) sales tax dedicated to economic development that sunsets every five (5) years compelling the economic development program to pursue and achieve success. Some of those Oklahoma communities include Bartlesville, Ponca City, Duncan, Enid, and others.

## **Additional Development**

Work should begin in identifying additional property for business and housing development. The City should be working on an aggressive annexation strategy that identifies areas that might qualify for inclusion into the city limits at some point.

While many of those interviewed suggested geographic areas that would be attractive to future development, this report will not identify any of those areas for obvious reasons.



# APPENDIX

## Credits

Demographics material used in this report was prepared by *Headwaters Economics*.

Some material used in the preparation of this report were from research on the websites and through interviews with the following organizations:

*US Bureau of Labor Statistics*

*Oklahoma Department of Commerce*

*Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO)*

*Tulsa Regional Chamber*

*Northeast Oklahoma Regional Association (NORA)*

*City of Vinita*

*Craig County*

## Interview Results

This contains assets, liabilities, and ideas gleaned from interviews with community, business, and political leaders as well as the focus group exercise we conducted.

### Community Assets

Location

Transportation

Abundant Water Supply

Public Education System

Route 66

“Small Town America”

### Community Liabilities

Housing

Truck Traffic

Population Decline

Young Professionals – nothing to do

School enrollment decline

Family Farm decline  
Resistance to Growth/Change

**Focus Group Ideas Presented**

Following discussion, the Focus Group was asked to present their individual ideas to enhance economic development in the area. Here are those suggestions:

- Establish an incentives program for targeted businesses.
- Revamp and redesign downtown, including parking.
- Invest in small businesses.
- Develop low/medium priced housing neighborhoods.

**This report was prepared by Community Growth Strategies, LLC and is the property of the City of Vinita, Oklahoma.**





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### **Our Firm**

**Community Growth Strategies (CGS)** is a dynamic association management consulting firm specializing in economic development and chamber of commerce management success. We are heavy in experience specializing in working with communities and organizations who have a desire to formulate an achievable strategy to accommodate and encourage economic growth. CGS fully understands the need for a plan of action even in those communities and organizations with limited resources, remote location, and other monumental challenges.

### **Our Consultant & Founder**

**CGS** brings the highly successful skills and experience of its founder, **Jim Fram**, a professional, 30+ year economic development/chamber executive who is a Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) as well as a Certified Chamber Executive (CCE). Fram has achieved success in new job creation by recruiting and creating thousands of new jobs and millions of dollars in new capital investment to communities. His work has resulted in dramatically increasing public revenues, reducing unemployment, and improving community pride in smaller communities such as Dewey, OK and Harrison, AR, and medium size cities such as Hot Springs, AR, Bartlesville, OK, and Killeen/Fort Hood, TX, then in the larger metropolitan areas of Lincoln, NE and Tulsa, OK.