

2016-2020

STRATEGIC PLAN

CONWAY AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE • CONWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION





The basis for the long-range strategic plan for the Conway Area Chamber of Commerce and the Conway Development Corporation is partially based on the results of the Conway2025 visioning and planning process. Designed, organized, and executed by the Conway Area Chamber of Commerce, the yearlong process was completed in October 2010.

Modeled after several other successful community-based visioning and planning processes, Conway2025 was based on a survey tool that was available electronically. In addition, paper copies were available at specially designed kiosks placed in high-traffic locations, including coffee shops, fitness centers, and the county library. More than 1,400 people completed the survey, which asked respondents to prioritize 43 possible focus areas. An eight-person steering committee took those responses and prioritized them into 12 categories that were ranked as the most important issues facing the community.

More than 200 volunteers served on committees to develop action items for each category. After 50 meetings, the committees identified 132 individual goals. The final Conway2025 document was presented to the public for the first time at the Chamber's Business Expo Breakfast in October 2010. Steering committee members voted to place the responsibility for managing the implementation of the plan with the Chamber. Both the Chamber and CDC Boards of Directors adopted a number of the goals as their respective responsibilities in January 2011. Other entities (the City of Conway, Conway Public School District, and Conway Alliance for the Arts) are assuming responsibility for other sections of the plan.

The Boards identified other long-range goals in January 2011, which they review yearly.

In 2015, we reconvened our Conway2025 steering committee and facilitated Conway2025 2.0. Our January kickoff meeting had more than 100 participants. Each of the seven sectors (approximately 140 people) met at least three times to address any goals that had not been accomplished since 2010. Those goals were either affirmed, refined, or eliminated by their respective sector groups.

Arts

The City of Conway has a growing arts scene largely connected to the higher education community; however, it is driven largely by volunteers. There is no single, staffed organization responsible for supporting growth of the arts and growing an arts economy in the city.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Create and staff a full-time position dedicated to growing the arts community.

- Create a job description and goals and objectives
 - Timeline: 2016
- Find funding source
 - Timeline: 2016
- Hire position
 - Timeline: 2017 (start date)

Create a single, information clearinghouse for all arts-related events and activities and actively promote them via social media.

- Timeline: 2017

Program performances in downtown Conway and other areas of the city to benefit businesses and restaurants. Performances will be inclusive of minority and international groups.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Develop yearly economic impact report on the arts in Conway.

- Timeline: Annually

Work with local developers to identify potential live/work space available to artists in the downtown area or other identified neighborhoods.

- Timeline: 2019



Photos from left to right: Conway Symphony Orchestra. Conway Community Mural at Chestnut and Oak Streets.

Community Development

Any successful economic development program has a basis in community development. The Chamber, CDC, and Downtown Partnership will lead certain community development efforts in the city.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Implement master plan to redevelop the Interstate 40 corridor through Conway, including landscaping, unified decorative bridge design, and lighting while highlighting natural features, such as Lake Conway.

- Interchange landscaping master plan complete
 - Timeline: 2016
- Funding mechanism for construction and long-term maintenance
 - Timeline: 2016-2017
- Implementation of interchange landscaping
 - Timeline: 2017
- Lake Conway entrance feature developed
 - Timeline: 2018

Redevelop Oak Street into an attractive corridor between downtown and the Interstate 40 shopping corridor.

- Expand urban development standards east from Ingram Street to Central Landing Boulevard
 - Timeline: 2016
- Establish timeline/funding mechanism for model program along north side of Oak Street from Harkrider to Ingram, including power line burial or relocation, sidewalk expansion, street landscaping, and sign replacement
 - Timeline: 2016

- Implement model program
 - Timeline: As decided
- Establish timeline and probable funding sources for completion
 - Timeline: 2017

Establish a cohesive plan to connect institutions (University of Central Arkansas, Conway Regional Health System, Conway High School, Central Baptist College, and Hendrix College) through downtown Conway with dedicated, decorative sidewalks, promenades, and cycling lanes.

- Master plan
 - Timeline: 2016
- Potential funding sources identified
 - Timeline: 2017-2018
- Establish timeline and probable funding sources for completion
 - Timeline: 2019

Establish a new dedicated cycling and pedestrian greenway behind Conway Commons through Central Landing and incorporate connections along Bruce Street to the Donaghey District at UCA.

- Master Plan
 - Timeline: 2016
- Implementation
 - Timeline: 2017-2018



Photos from left to right: Construction at Central Landing. Prince Street.

Community Development cont.

Create downtown entrance feature/park utilizing Toad Store and adjacent parking lot, including public art interpreting the legend of Toad Suck.

- Create master plan
 - Timeline: 2016
- Secure funding sources
 - Timeline: 2017
- Construction
 - Timeline: 2018

Create master plan for Simon Park that includes an interactive water feature.

- Create master plan
 - Timeline: 2016
- Secure funding sources
 - Timeline: 2017
- Construction
 - Timeline: 2018

Assist the City of Conway in the redevelopment of the Markham Street corridor to encourage housing, retail, and public park space, and provide a solution for downtown flooding.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Assist the City of Conway and the University of Central Arkansas in the redevelopment of Donaghey Avenue and surrounding properties into an identifiable, mixed-use neighborhood.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Create 300 new or refurbished downtown, multi-family housing units, brownstones, townhouses, or single-family homes targeted to young professionals. Ideal developments to include other uses on ground-level floors.

- Identify best property options (existing buildings and land), establish availability, and option if necessary
 - Timeline: 2016
- Create marketing campaign to promote opportunities to local and regional developers, including market studies to encourage development
 - Timeline: 2016
- Developments open and occupied
 - Timeline: 2019



Photos from left to right: Toad Store. The Village at Hendrix. Centennial Valley Apartments.

Convention & Visitors Bureau

The partnership between the A&P Commission and the Chamber has grown dramatically and has established Conway as a destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment for much of north-central Arkansas, the Arkansas River Valley, and parts of the northern Little Rock Metro.

The partnership has also witnessed success in establishing Conway as a destination for youth sporting activities. The Chamber will continue its work to position Conway as a preferred destination for specific types of business travel and group sports, while working to grow the city's place as a regional center for shopping, dining, and entertainment.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Establish a comprehensive wayfinding signage program to ensure visitors and guests feel welcome and can easily identify shopping areas, hotels, meeting and performance venues, parks, and institutions.

- Complete wayfinding signage study
 - Timeline: 2016
- Identify funding strategy
 - Timeline: 2016
- Construction
 - Timeline: 2017

Continue promoting Conway through television, print, and other advertising in the region.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Create a plan for a downtown performing arts complex in downtown Conway.

- Identify sites
 - Timeline: 2016
- Identify stakeholders/partners
 - Timeline: 2016

- Develop conceptual plans
 - Timeline: 2017
- Identify funding mechanisms
 - Timeline: 2017

Develop an outdoor performance venue.

- Identify partners and location for venue
 - Timeline: 2016
- Create plan to fund and construct venue
 - Timeline: 2017

Develop a plan to construct a convention center.

- Identify potential sites and local partners
 - Timeline: 2016
- Conduct study to determine the viability and economic impact of a convention center
 - Timeline: 2017
- Select developer/hotel partner and establish funding mechanism
 - Timeline: 2018



Photos from left to right: Conway Station Park. Laurel Park. High School All-Star Week.

Economic Development

A successful economic development program is the cornerstone of the Conway Area Chamber of Commerce and Conway Development Corporation. The economic impact of, and our roles in, business recruitment and expansion should be well known and easily communicated by the entire staff. Connecting the program to membership in the organization should be paramount.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ESTABLISHED BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

A strong, established business-and-industry program is an important piece of an overall economic development program. Understanding the local economy through company leadership is a barometer for the overall health of a community and provides opportunities to assist in growing those companies.

Execute an annual, established business-and-industry visitation program for major employers.

- Timeline: Annually

Establish an Executive Forum (plant managers, facility managers, etc.) that meets at least twice a year.

- Timeline: Annually

PROPERTY OR PROJECT IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Much of the historic success of the CDC has been a large and diverse land inventory that the organization owned. Controlling property allows for quick decisions and aggressive incentive packages. The CDC should work to identify and control property for the city's

economic development needs for the next several decades. The CDC should also consider strategic projects that could promote job growth.

Formally partner with neighboring communities/counties to identify large, regionally significant sites for development, such as the Palarm Creek Plantation (Vilonia, Maumelle, Little Rock).

- Timeline: Ongoing

Lead the effort to redevelop the existing Conway Airport.

- Develop financing structure for remaining infrastructure needs for Central Landing development
 - Timeline: 2016
- Finalize ownership structure
 - Timeline: 2016
- Market any CDC-owned assets with a priority to develop dense, mixed-use spaces
 - Timeline: 2016-2018

Work with the City of Conway to replenish economic development fund with public money to use in assisting with property acquisition and development.

- Timeline: 2016



Photos from left to right: Minority Enterprise Development Awards. Tech Jobs Announcement. Economic Development Partnership with Morrilton Area Chamber of Commerce.

Economic Development cont.

MARKETING

Understanding the economic development environment and how to influence appropriate audiences is important with limited marketing resources. The Chamber and CDC will prioritize marketing resources and take advantage of partnership opportunities as they exist.

Continue participating in all cooperative, site-consultant, marketing events with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (Chicago, Dallas, and Atlanta).

- Timeline: Annually

Continue updating CDC website with relevant property and economic information to ensure it is a go-to site for economic development information in Conway.

- Timeline: Monthly

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The Conway business community has a long history of successful entrepreneurs. Several of the city's largest employers are homegrown. With three institutions of higher education, the city is perfectly situated for additional entrepreneurial opportunities. A key to growing the local economy is developing a talent base by recruiting talent from outside the market and growing local talent. The CDC and Chamber must establish a purposeful talent development program.

Develop a local "Guide to Doing Business" document available in print and online.

- Timeline: 2017

Hire a full-time, senior-level employee dedicated to developing a startup ecosystem and talent development program.

- Create job description
 - Timeline: 2016
- Establish funding mechanism
 - Timeline: 2016
- Hire position
 - Timeline: 2016

Develop a comprehensive talent development program.

- Create framework for a program
 - Timeline: 2016
- Identify funding mechanisms
 - Timeline: 2017
- Create plan for implementation
 - Timeline: 2017
- Develop vetting process for use of space
 - Timeline: 2017

SMALL, MINORITY-, AND WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS

The majority of Chamber members are small businesses and a growing number are minority- and women-owned. The Chamber should develop a strong small and minority business program to assist their growth and understand challenges facing them.

Develop a robust small and minority business program.

- Develop a small business/entrepreneur mentor program
 - Timeline: 2018
- Develop and implement a small-business survey tool regarding local business environment
 - Timeline: Annually
- Create diverse programming for small, minority-, and women-owned businesses
 - Timeline: 2018 (programming series begins)

Education

Higher education has been the cornerstone of the city's economy for more than 100 years. The Chamber has been involved in recruiting and supporting higher education opportunities since 1891. The Chamber will look for innovative ways to support the educational infrastructure of the community.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Develop an industry-led certification program for information technology workers to supplement four-year degrees in computer science.

- Develop curriculum and offer initial classes
 - Timeline: 2016
- Identify potential sites for permanent home in downtown Conway
 - Timeline: 2017

Facilities/Property

The Conway Area Chamber of Commerce is the front door for the community. Facilities should always reflect the progressive nature of the city and business community. With strategic partnerships increasing, the need for additional staff is increasing. Chamber leadership should have a master plan to accommodate growth.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Identify potential large donors to fund capital projects.

- Timeline: 2016

Identify potential large donors to fund capital projects.

- Timeline: 2016

Secure funding and/or financing plan for construction of the expansion area.

- Timeline: 2016-2017

Construct Chamber expansion area.

- Timeline: 2018



Photos from left to right: UCA College of Business. Conway Area Chamber of Commerce.

Government Affairs/Advocacy

The Chamber has worked to position itself as the voice of business to all levels of government. Chamber staff will develop and maintain relationships with elected officials and staff. The Chamber will develop a federal and state Program of Work and advocate for specific project completion. The Chamber will be a resource for small business interaction with local, state, and federal government.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

FAYETTEVILLE SHALE

The development of the Fayetteville Shale in north-central Arkansas has propelled Arkansas into a major energy-producing state. Conway and Faulkner County have been the recipients of hundreds of natural-gas related jobs, and the industry has helped the local economy grow during the last recession. Natural gas and energy issues at the state and federal levels have a direct impact on the economy of the area.

Establish the Chamber as the lead community-based organization that advocates for the protection and future development of the Fayetteville Shale and natural gas/petroleum industry in Arkansas.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Lead other Chambers in the state and region in opposing any legislation that is harmful to the oil/gas industry at the state or federal level.

- Timeline: Ongoing

TRANSPORTATION

The Chamber and Conway Development Corporation have been integral partners with the City of Conway in the development and funding of major transportation projects. From site acquisition of the new Conway Airport to the expedited funding of the southern Conway interchange during the 2009 legislative session, both entities have had a direct impact on future transportation projects.

Advocate for construction schedule/funding of Harkrider expansion between Oak and Bruce Streets.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Advocate for construction schedule/funding for Siebenmorgen bridge rebuild and road expansion.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Advocate for improving Highway 89 as a southern corridor for the Conway Airport.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Advocate for continued improvements for the Conway Airport.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Investigate innovative solutions for public transportation, including driverless cars.

- Create working committee to investigate solutions
- Timeline: 2017
- Recommendations to City Council
- Timeline: 2018

Execute yearly fly-in trip to Washington DC to promote unified local agenda to delegation.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Provide leadership and fundraising support for any city or school bond/sales tax initiative endorsed by Chamber and CDC boards. Initiatives would include those supporting police, fire, and parks and recreation development as identified in Conway 2025.

- Timeline: Ongoing



Photos from left to right: Sen. John Boozman, Conway Airport Grand Opening. Washington, DC Fly-In. Southwestern Energy CNG Station.

Long-Range Plan (Conway2025)

Conway has had no comprehensive long-range plan for the future. While the city has been very successful with strong leadership, Conway2025 provides the type of consolidated plan that allows the public to participate and requires accountability from city government and other organizations. Execution of the plan is imperative for the future growth and development of the city. Community leaders should also incorporate regular benchmarking visits to peer cities across the country to identify real world “best practices” for elements of the plan.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Lead citywide effort for the implementation of Conway 2025 initiatives, ensuring that goals have groups, organizations, or entities that are responsible for completion.

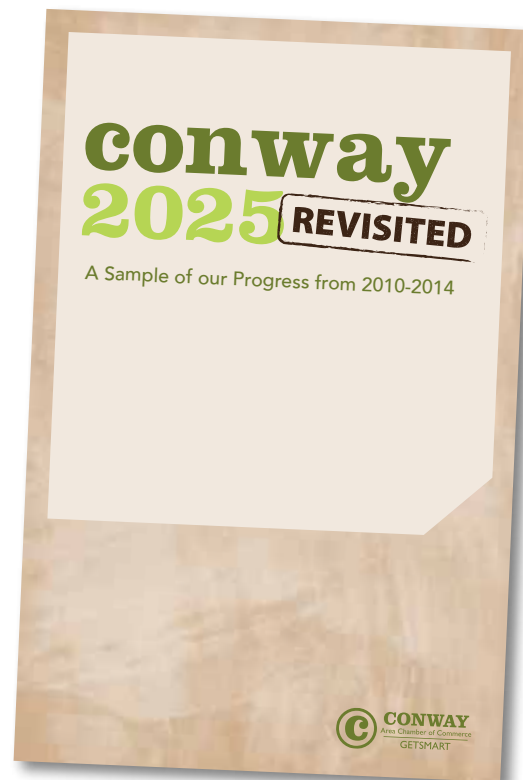
- Timeline: Ongoing

Communicate progress to the public via Chamber communications, social media outlets, and Conway 2025 website.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Lead the process of updating the plan.

- Timeline: Ongoing



Organizational Development

The Conway Area Chamber of Commerce and the Conway Development Corporation should be nationally competitive, nationally recognized organizations in their respective fields. Strong organizations have strong administrative controls, diverse revenue sources, relevant products and services, and inspired team members. With a rapidly growing community, both organizations must constantly examine their roles within the community to ensure future relevance.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

ADMINISTRATIVE

The Chamber and CDC should have strong administrative procedures in place. Employees should be equipped for success and work in an environment that sets clear expectations, allows creativity, and rewards success.

Review and update employee handbook yearly, benchmarking against peer Chambers and regional employers.

- Timeline: Annually

Examine organizational structure and realign priorities according to needs.

- Timeline: Annually

Develop yearly goals and objectives for each employee based on changing nature of organizational responsibilities.

- Timeline: Annually

Offer competitive salaries and benefits package for employees that are competitive with peer organizations and with the local market.

- Timeline: Annually

Complete U.S. Chamber's reaccreditation process.

- Timeline: 2016



Photos from left to right: Toad Suck Daze Festival. The Certified Chamber Executive (CCE) is the only national certification for chamber professionals and is the highest designation a chamber executive can earn.

Organizational Development cont.

EVENTS

Events continue to provide strong revenue streams for the Chamber. A successful event should project a positive image for the Chamber, relate to the mission, and be profitable.

Review strengths and weaknesses of each event yearly and recommend and implement changes when necessary.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Create new events as needed that are relevant to the market .

- Timeline: Ongoing

Examine ways to maximize profits at each event. Each event should have a profit margin of at least 50 percent.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Ensure continuity of events, regardless of staff turnover, through a thoroughly written execution guide for each event.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Examine Toad Suck Daze to ensure it is a nationally competitive festival and is relevant to the community.

- Committee structure, entertainment, and activities are representative of the community.
- Festival layout is adequate and changes as needed with continued downtown redevelopment.
- Committee looks for new ways to involve downtown business owners and restaurants.
- Operations and public safety measures are examined for viability.
- City employees and public safety officials are honored each year at the City Employee Appreciation Event.
- Timeline: 2017

FINANCE

The Chamber and CDC are financially stable organizations, but as both entities grow, the need for additional financial support is evident.

Monitor the need for additional finance staffing.

- Timeline: Annually

Establish a goal for reserves.

- Timeline: 2018

Work toward 200 face-to-face Blueprint visits with members in the fourth quarter to establish investment levels for the coming year.

- Timeline: 2016

Implement a plan to fund economic development operations without depending on any land sales.

- Timeline: 2017

MEMBERSHIP

The Conway Area Chamber of Commerce has experienced tremendous growth in membership. The Chamber should consistently rank in the top five largest in the state (both by number of members and revenue). Retention should be a priority, and all programming should add value to the membership experience. The membership division will benchmark regional best practices to evaluate current offerings.

Grow total membership revenue to \$425,000 in 2020.

- Timeline: 2015

Maintain an average retention rate of 80 percent.

- Timeline: Annually

Evaluate programming to ensure it is relevant to members through various mechanisms (surveys, personal visits).

- Timeline: Ongoing

Organizational Development cont.

PUBLICATIONS

Conway Publications, Inc. has become an integral part of the Chamber's overall suite of products to assist members in marketing themselves to potential customers in the city, county, and region. The addition of Pulse of Conway to the suite of products firmly establishes the Chamber and CDC as the primary source of economic information for Conway and Faulkner County. The MyAxiomPartner product has the potential to create a large new revenue source for Publications through direct sales to area businesses or residual revenue from other Chambers.

Establish a monthly "state of the economy" newsletter with Pulse of Conway data that becomes the trusted source of economic data for the business community.

- Timeline: 2016

Develop a regionally relevant community profile and resource guide that includes relocation information and a membership directory.

- Timeline: Annually

Incorporate MyAxiomPartner data sales into daily operations and grow revenue to \$250,000 annually.

- Timeline: 2016

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Chamber and CDC Boards encourage staff to participate in continuing education opportunities and training. Professional designations are an expectation for Chamber and CDC employees as they are applicable.

Develop an incentive plan for all senior-level employees to work toward CCE certifications where appropriate.

- Timeline: Ongoing

Complete IOM designation for at least six staff members.

- Timeline: 2020

Complete CCE designation for at least four staff members.

- Timeline: 2018



Conway Community Profile and Resource Guide.