



## **Press Release**

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### **Wilkes EDC Selects Garner Economics to Assist in Development of Strategic Plan**

The Board of Directors of Wilkes Economic Development Corp. announced today the selection of Garner Economics of Atlanta to develop a strategic plan for economic development in Wilkes County. Garner Economics was selected from 4 finalist economic development and site location consulting firms from across the United States. Blake Lovette, Wilkes EDC Board Chair, stated that "While every one of the consultants we reviewed had impressive credentials, Garner Economics clearly stood out above the rest in the opinion of the Search Committee." The search committee included Wilkes EDC Board members Lovette, Bill Warden, Charlie Sink, Ginger Schaffer, and Lee Herring. "The expertise their team brings to this project, combined with their unique methodology and proven track record all combine to ensure that the end result of this study will be a plan which Wilkes EDC can readily implement."

In the process of developing a strategic plan, Garner Economics will conduct a targeted industry analysis. That analysis will identify types of companies whose location decision factors are compatible with the economic development assets Wilkes County offers. Once a set of target industries is identified, Garner Economics will then develop a marketing plan for attracting those industries to Wilkes County.

"The development of a strategic plan and a target industry analysis are vitally important to Wilkes EDC to structure a viable work plan for the next few years, equally as important is the valuable information we will obtain through the study itself." The process of identifying a set of targeted industries requires studying many aspects of Wilkes County. Garner Economics will be conducting a thorough Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis. Garner will evaluate physical assets such as Wilkes County's current inventory of available buildings and sites, and supporting

infrastructure such as highway, rail, and airport access; municipal water and sewer; three-phase electricity; and natural gas. Garner will also evaluate the size and educational/skill levels of Wilkes County's labor force, as well as a thorough evaluation of the business climate in Wilkes County and each of the three towns. During that evaluation the consulting firm will look at such factors as ordinances and available incentives. The study will include information already gathered through the recent feasibility study conducted by Convergent Solutions, along with information gathered through Wilkes Vision 20/20's community visioning process.

The information gained from the study will give us a very detailed analysis of where we stand in comparison to other regions in North Carolina and the Nation. Furthermore, the study will compare us with at least two other communities that are similar to Wilkes County and which demonstrate best practices in economic development activities.

Jay Garner, president of Garner Economics, will personally lead the study. He is the past chairman of the International Economic Development Council, the largest economic development professional trade organization in the world. In addition, Garner was director of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce. On his team, Tom Tveidt of Asheville will be the primary research economist for this project. Tveidt is nationally recognized as being a leader in data compilation and interpretation.

"We are pleased to be a part of the Wilkes EDC team," Garner said. "For such a small, rural organization to have achieved national recognition over the past few years as a leader in economic development best practices is truly amazing, and establishes WEDC as an example of effective development organizations. Our association with WEDC will be a great fit for our company".

### **About Garner Economics**

**Garner Economics, LLC** provides innovative economic development solutions in a competitive global market. Garner offer site selection, analytical research, industry targeting, strategic planning and organizational development with a wealth of expertise to companies, communities, and organizations globally. Garner Economics is based in Atlanta, GA and has representative offices in both Europe and Asia.

Since 2003, The Garner team has been headed by Jay Garner, a 30-year veteran of the management consulting, economic development and chamber of commerce professions and rounded out by talented experts with CEcD, CCE and CFRE designations. Garner has assisted numerous local, regional and statewide organizations in creating proactive business and community development strategies and implementation guidance with the ultimate goal of quality jobs creation and capital investment. Garner Economics also has a busy site selection consulting practice assisting corporate clients in their expansion and relocation needs, including such companies as Anchor Glass, Hatfield Quality Meats, Stork Food Systems, Academy Sports, Future Pipe Industries, and has indirectly worked for Lowe's Companies as a subcontractor.

## **About Wilkes Economic Development Corp.**

**Wilkes EDC** was formed in 1996, and is the official economic development organization representing Wilkes County and the Towns of Wilkesboro, Ronda, and N. Wilkesboro., Wilkes EDC's two-person staff works to assist in the long-term growth and economic sustainability of Wilkes County and its towns, focusing their efforts on business retention and expansion, entrepreneurial assistance, and business attraction. Wilkes EDC has been recognized by both CoreNet Global and Engage! in 2008 and 2009 as an example of best practices in economic development, and was inducted into Industrial Asset Management Council's Fellowship in 2009.