

## **Challenges of Managing a Rapidly Growing and Changing County**

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There are certainly many challenges in managing a growing and changing county. In this presentation I will try to identify and discuss some of the most challenging issues. First, in the following list, let me give you a feel for some of the changes we have experienced during the last decade.

Done to us:

- 1989 hurricane Hugo eliminated our number one industry, the timber industry, by destroying about 80% of our harvestable trees,
- 1993 the federal government decided to complete the job by closing the Charleston Naval Base. All together nearly 30,000 jobs were lost in our three county region,
- It was predicted by the experts that Berkeley County and the entire region's economy would be destroyed.

Under these conditions we did not expect to be concerned with managing a rapidly growing county. Many thought we would be struggling to keep our heads above water, Quite the opposite has happened.

Achievements:

- We have had \$3,605,000,000 (three billion six hundred and five million

- dollars) of good, clean industrial investment in Berkeley County alone,
- We have created 9,483 direct jobs and a total of over 23,000 total jobs including spin off jobs,
  - Our unemployment has gone from 6.2% to as low as 1.9% during the past year,
  - We have created significantly more revenue from industry, and we have used this new revenue to greatly improve services to our citizens,
  - We have reduced county property taxes in each of the past two years.

With all of these very positive things happening to us, we found ourselves challenged to manage a growing and changing county, Certainly our changes are more positive than we originally anticipated but no less challenging.

The first challenge was to create a diversified, strong economy while providing opportunity at all levels. In order to achieve this we took the following steps:

- We evaluated the benefits to us of industrial development,
- We then explored the reasons industry selects a location,
- County Council then approved a criteria for me to follow when working with a prospective company,
- We then created our Vision 2000, An Economic Development Vision for Berkeley County, which we revise annually.

We realized we could be more successful working together, as a three-county region, rather than one county alone. We created the Regional Development Alliance. We now market the entire region with little regard to county lines. We fund this alliance equally per capita, and we all benefit.

Another challenge is identifying and providing services desired and required by a growing population and changing population while holding the line on property taxes. We accomplished this by identifying each of these services and prioritizing them by the urgency of need.

We decided the number one service for improvement was E.M.S (emergency medical service). Response time in our county, in rural areas, could be as long as over one hour. Since then we have added five new ambulance locations reducing the response time countywide to less than eight minutes.

At this time we determined that we needed an extensive geographic information system (GIS). The system we needed would cost about five million dollars. As a county alone, we could not afford this kind of expenditure. We formed a GIS consortium of twelve members. Each member paid its share in creating the

system, and each member benefits from the product. We also sell information to help defray the cost of operation. GIS has been most helpful in improving our other services.

Next we decided we needed enhanced 911. Our citizens needed an easy way to remember to call for emergency services. We bought the equipment, hired the staff and implemented E-911. We accomplished this by bringing all of the emergency services in the county together to design and implement the program. They all feel an ownership and a responsibility to see it succeed. Working together, we have even built and we operate a full emergency training center. We now have much better trained paid and volunteer emergency service providers.

Our Sheriff's Department also needed to grow and have better equipment in order to better serve a growing county. We have well over doubled the size of the department, and we have replaced and updated all equipment. GIS tracks all crime by area and helps the sheriff better assign his forces where crime occurs.

Our roads and drainage networks needed to be addressed. We have expanded the department, replaced all equipment, and now have all equipment on a predetermined replacement schedule. GIS is now used to map all roads and drainage ways in the county. This allows us to better schedule maintenance.

Water is another major concern when trying to serve industry, business, and a growing population. We did not have sufficient capacity to provide the projected needs. We created a regional water system by partnering with Moncks Comer, Goose Creek, Summerville, and Santee Cooper. We now have all of the water that we can project needing in the foreseeable future. No one of us could have created this utility alone.

In Berkeley County we provided senior citizens services and public transportation as a county service. We determined that senior services would be better served by a nonprofit organization, and public transportation would be better served by with a regional effort. Both of these objectives have been achieved. We also eliminated one department and combined several others.

We have had great success in industrial development and job creation while protecting our environment and minimizing the use of land. In fact, we have used less than one and one half percent of our total land to actually build industry. We told more than five hundred million dollars of investment we were not interested because we were not comfortable that they would protect our environment.

Recycling was another need we saw in our county. We approached this by building recycling centers and implementing recycling efforts at the landfill. We also made it a priority to attract industry that produces a product by recycling. We have been very successful in this effort, one example of this is Nucor Steel. The steel they produce in Berkeley County is from recycled material. It's one thing to accumulate recycled materials but they also must be used. Our effort is to complete the process.

Zoning and conservation of land was another concern. Zoning had failed, by a significant margin, in a referendum in Berkeley County in 1988. However, if we were to protect our future quality of life zoning was a must. We identified the communities of interest in our county and arranged multiple meetings in each location. I asked the citizens to design each community as they would like to see it in the future. The end result was countywide zoning with a significant majority of the county citizens in full support. They felt an ownership of the plan.

As far as land conservation is concerned, we have encouraged industry to protect and conserve the land they own. One example is Nucor Steel. They are currently arranging to place 5,000 acres in a permanent conservation trust. Many of our other industries are working with us to protect our environment and help protect our future quality of life in Berkeley County.

We are encouraging industrial parks and corporate centers in order to cluster new development. We now have four such parks with two others under construction. This will allow us to continue creating opportunity while minimizing the use of land and protecting the historical uses of land such as farming. With all of industrial investment we have had in our county, we have used less than one and a half percent of our total land on which to actually build industry.

We must realize that it serves no one if we do everything to provide opportunity with a strong economy and destroy our environment. We can have it all by paying attention to the needs of our entire community.

We will continue to have challenges. Planning is urgently important if we are to meet these challenges with success. Regionalism and working together are a must if we are to provide the required services of the future. There are ten regional councils of government in our state. They are designed to serve regions and are the natural places to start this cooperative effort.

We cannot continue to have every government providing every service on every corner. We must assess our needs and evaluate our assets as a region. Then we must plan to provide as many services as possible as a region. Together, we can serve better at less cost. Everybody wins and our future is secure and positive.