

**Ocala/Marion County
Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation Merger
Frequently Asked Questions
September 9, 2011**

Why was a merger of the organizations considered?

There comes a time when there is a need to be proactive and explore new approaches to difficult challenges. Now is such a time. The anemic economic recovery in Marion County, coupled with continued double-digit unemployment, sparked business leaders to establish a joint task force from board members of the EDC and the Chamber to explore possible solutions. Brian O'Connor, as the incoming Chamber Chairman, and Doug Cone, as the incoming EDC Chairman, led the group of eight members/investors, some of whom serve on the boards of both organizations. The task force was formed in May and has been meeting since June 2011.

The mission of the taskforce was to explore the most effective way to implement the *Innovation and Economic Development Pillar* of the Florida Chamber Foundation's statewide initiative – Six Pillars of Florida's Future Economy – which was supported by the Boards of the Chamber of Commerce and EDC. Additionally, the task force sought to form a collaborative role to support the other five pillars that include: *Talent Supply & Education; Infrastructure & Growth Leadership; Business Climate & Competitiveness; Civic & Governance Systems; and Quality of Life & Quality Places.*

How did the Task Force Proceed?

Task force members approached the opportunity to explore ways to create jobs with open minds and a clean slate. There were no pre-conceived ideas of potential outcomes and all options were on the table for discussion. Members reviewed organizational structures from many other communities around the nation and Florida, including those surrounding Marion County. All were reviewed to identify with those that have achieved success in moving the needle in attracting employers, growing existing companies, and incubating innovative enterprises that will thrive and become profit centers during an economic recovery.

What were the findings?

The task force carefully studied the strategic plans, budgets, and organizational structures of the Chamber of Commerce and EDC. Opportunities were found to strengthen services available to the business sector and the community by unifying the vision and resources into a newly-formed organization. The task force saw potential for expanding the private sector investment base, and moving the economic development arm of the new organization away from dependence upon public sector funding for operations. Looking at national trends, members also saw a pattern in consolidation of EDC and Chamber efforts. For example, there have been other high profile chamber-EDC mergers in the past few years: the Birmingham Business Alliance (AL), the Quad Cities Chamber (IA) and Syracuse's CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity (NY), to name a few.

What were the recommendations?

- Expedite economic growth and job creation by creating a single organizational pipeline of all available resources.
- Improve the speed and effectiveness with which resources are focused on attraction, retention and growth, and building new businesses in our community.
- Rename the organization to best reflect its mission in the community.
- Operate under new, modified bylaws to incorporate its updated mission and structure.
- Combine the newly formed organization under one roof at the current Ocala/Marion County Chamber of Commerce building.
- With current organizations' key leadership, review existing job descriptions for employees of both organizations, determine the appropriate staff skill sets for the mission of the new organization and create new job descriptions. Fill the positions with the best possible talent to achieve job creation.

How will these recommendations be implemented?

The intent of the new organization is to build upon the successes and commitment of both the Chamber and EDC. The purpose of the new structure will be to have a near term impact on our economic recovery process through an aggressive, focused economic development strategy. Doug Cone will serve as Chairman, with Brian O'Connor as Co-Chairman of a core transition team. They will also engage a steering committee representative of aggressive and engaged business leaders to concentrate on the areas listed below.

- Review, enhance and strengthen programs to serve the business community – eliminating those that do not.
- Develop organizational structure (mission, vision and staffing).
- Ensure corporate governance and accountability.
- Secure resources.
- Report progress through strong communication channels.

How will my input be considered?

Transition team members will be visiting with investors and members to solicit input and address concerns. Ideas, thoughts and suggestions can also be forwarded to:

Doug Cone, Core Team Chairman
doug@ocalaedc.org
(352) 615-0645

Brian O'Connor, Core Team Co-Chairman
brian@ocalacc.com
(352) 687-5219

How will the new model affect change?

The goal of the new organization is to broaden the private sector investment base while narrowing the duplication of efforts and resources. A unified approach to business and economic development will strengthen our community's ability to market to potential employers and streamline efforts to serve existing businesses.

A revised delivery system is the basis of the new model that features the initiatives listed below.

- Support Innovation through Accelerate Ocala/Marion County, a business incubator for technology-based businesses.
- Ignite entrepreneurial spirit through development of The First Step Fund to provide access to capital for start-ups.
- Nurture business expansion through Economic Gardening by providing technical assistance and support to our second-stage companies.
- Strengthen collaboration with our university partners in technology transfer and commercialization.
- Expand Marion County's global trade by helping our local manufacturers increase sales to lucrative international markets.
- Attract new industries to our business parks through a comprehensive community branding and marketing strategy.
- Develop collaboration between City and County partners in business attraction and retention.

How will the business partners (Workforce Connection, College of Central Florida, and local governments) be impacted?

Workforce and CF are strong partners in the business recruitment, retention and training process. These relationships will be guarded and nurtured to grow with the new organization. The City and County governments have expressed their desire to remain aggressive in their commitment to partnering with the private sector to enable effective job creation programs.

What is the timeline for this merger?

The current plan is to have the new organization in place by January 2012. There will be a transition period where the Chamber's and EDC's operations will remain separate in order to ensure all legal and accounting obligations are met.