



MITCHELL COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

2023 Economic Development Report for Mitchell County, NC

Economic development is vast and complex because it has different meanings for various purposes and concerns in a community. Often the main topic is about increasing and retaining jobs with good paying wages and benefits, creating specialized workforce training, strengthening local educational attainment, enhancing the community through development, mitigating poverty, and supporting infrastructure needs such as roads, water, sewer, and broadband. However, each community is different because we each have our own strengths and weaknesses thus why it is important for us to work with everyone to understand the current challenges and trends.

Our county's economic development vision statement reads as follows: "Mitchell County's economic development strategy allows its existing and new businesses to thrive, fosters regional collaboration, and maximizes its core strengths and connections to be a community where its well-equipped workforce has access to quality local jobs, tourists contribute to the economy, and young people succeed."

In the next few years Mitchell County redevelopment in both our public community development and private investments is nearing \$1 billion which will be largest capital spending in our county's history. This is a great time for both residents, newcomers, and businesses to invest in our community. To break down all the various game changing projects and the investments see the following:

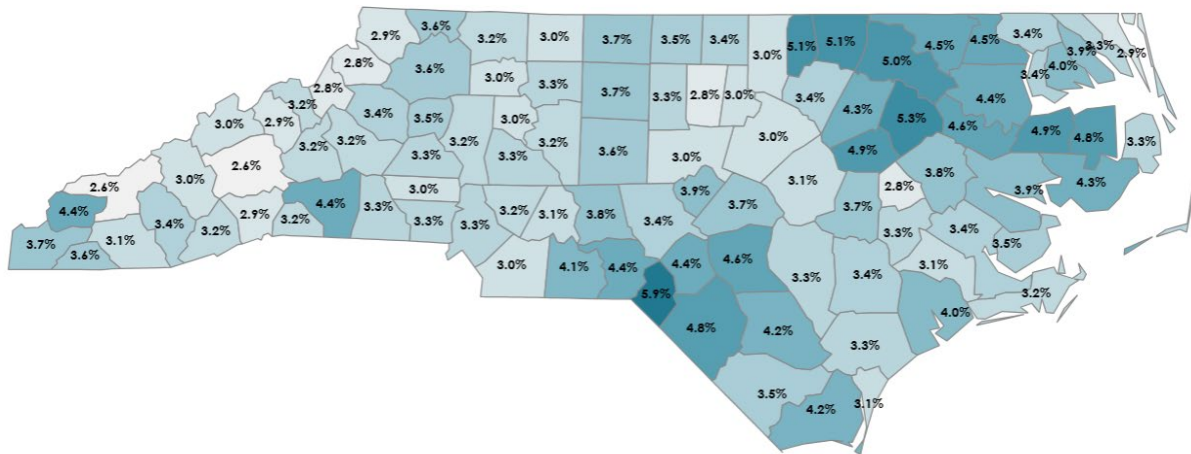
\$48 million Mitchell Miners middle school, \$14.5 million Mitchell athletic facility,



\$5.7 million Mitchell Recreation Center, \$5 million Mitchell County Law Enforcement Center, \$15 million YMCA, \$3.2 million Blue Ridge Regional Hospital MRI, \$16 million MCHP facility in Grassy Creek, \$2 million Bakersville water/sewer improvements, \$2.5 million Spruce Pine water line improvements with additional funds in place and some applied for, \$700 million Sibelco expansion over the next five years, \$70 million The Quartz Corp expansion, \$2 million Mitchell/Avery Animal Shelter, \$3 million Blue Ridge Resource and Development Council and as we roll into 2024 there will be millions of dollars in various future grant requests submitted.

Workforce, Population, and Infrastructure:

All of 2023 has been good for NC and Mitchell County as we are seeing some of lowest unemployment rates recorded since the 1960’s and consumer spending has not slowed down. During the Visit NC Conference, a keynote speaker from North Carolina Restaurant & Lodging Association (NCRLA) noted that our states’ total number of jobs in the hospitality, restaurant and lodging industry gained 8,000 jobs last year. This gain contributes to 531,000 jobs which is equivalent to 11 percent of the state’s workforce and is starting to bring the deficit back to pre-pandemic levels. Nationwide the food and drink industry is expected to grow 1.3 million jobs from 2021-2030. Overall, we are continuing to recover the jobs we lost during the pandemic, and it will take time. Mitchell County has finished the year with an excellent unemployment rate of 3.2%. Our current unemployment rate is lower than the 4.0% in December 2022 and lower than the 3.5% state unemployment rate. Going into 2024 Mitchell County employment numbers are looking strong with 6,216 employed and we are ranked in the top thirty percent of the state for our unemployment rate. [1]



Our 2024 average private sector salary is now at an all-time high of \$46,822 and our median household income is at \$49,086. In other good news this past year the county population increased, and we are back over 15,000, with the United States Census Bureau estimating 15,094 total population.



The NC Department of Commerce produces tier ranking for each county. For 2024 Mitchell County is ranked as Tier 1 and has consistently held this status. Right now, we are ranked 40 out of 100 most economically distressed counties which means we are bordering on the Tier 2 status. Compared to 2023 we moved up 5 from 35 to 40th ranking in overall economic status. [2] Our taxable sales and purchase increased from the July 2022 to July 2023 for a total increase of \$3,129,186 and a gross total of \$20,679,489. [3]

Based on the latest NC State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) US19E widen to multi-lanes is only funded for preliminary engineering. At this time, an additional \$14,700,000 is needed to purchase right-of-way, \$4,000,000 for utilities, \$50,801,000 for construction leaving a total funding cost need of \$69,501,000. [4]

As the beforementioned investments indicate Mitchell County has taken a big step towards growth in public health, safety, and wellness of citizens. Thanks to our local and state leaders as well as influential stakeholders for investing capital and time that will impact our way of life in the future. In the next few years when 4 major projects will be preparing for grand openings we will proudly be known as the county who made quality of life a number one priority.

Our brand-new county middle school is walking distance to the county high school. These centralized educational facilities will further encourage community connections and partnerships. When Mitchell High School formed in 1978, one central education facility for the entire county was formed and now this new middle school will do the same by educating our future generations and reinforce the importance of knowledge and community learning under one roof. The new law enforcement center will help combat crime in a professional and efficient manner as we move into the future. A new county recreation center, Bakersville creek walk expansion, new river park in Spruce Pine, new “Mineral City Mile” trail in Brad Ragan Park, plus a downtown YMCA will all be places of reprieve and self-improvement for our youth and senior population as well as excellent recruitment tool for businesses and newcomers.

Goals:

There are nine goals within Mitchell County’s economic development strategic plan, *Mitchell Works*, all of which are centered around workforce, physical infrastructure, industry, small business, tourism, agriculture, and land development. *Mitchell Works* was adopted in April 2016 and the same goals are relevant today. [Mitchell Works](#)

EDC comprehensive goals for Mitchell County economic development are as follows: Our first goal, “Increase the availability of business and industrial land”. The first goal will allow prospective companies to locate here and provide new workforce opportunities. We have actively been advertising the available buildings and land suited for business and industrial growth. The second goal, “Increase development activity to increase tax base.” It is important to balance existing and new development so that we can sustain our current tax base to deliberately meet the needs of future generations. The third goal, “Better leverage and market the tourism, arts, and



cultural assets; recapture Penland visitors.” The idea of this goal is pushing Mitchell County’s image beyond our county lines so that we continue to build up our annual visitor spending. The fourth goal, “Intensely focus on building the County’s strong small business environment.” This goal is a reality because all our businesses and industries have under 500 employees. The fifth goal, “Prioritize and fill gaps in critical infrastructure, such as broadband and cell phone coverage.” Currently, we are working with North Carolina Department of Information Technology, High Country Council of Government and French Broad Electric Membership Corporation to utilize Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology grant money towards fulfilling broadband and fiber service in French Broad Electric’s territory. The sixth goal, “Invest in improving appearance and development in Bakersville and Spruce Pine.” Our downtown and community redevelopment continues to be a priority for Spruce Pine Main Street who has been adding mosaic murals around the downtown and keep our streets, sidewalks and medians nicely maintained and decorated throughout the year. Bakersville Area Merchants Association (BAMA) opened the first Bakersville and northern Mitchell County welcome center and continues to work on community impactive projects to make Bakersville attractive. The seventh goal, “Break out of this isolation mentality and aggressively invest in marketing, travel and making connections.” Recently, Mitchell County Tourism Development Authority (MCTDA) hired a part time director to help guide expenditures towards promoting longer overnight stays in Mitchell County. Also, our county has been given the opportunity through recent legislation to levy and vote on an additional 3% for occupancy tax which gives us the ability to advertise and promote our area in a bigger way. The eighth goal, “Continually work to improve the quality of workforce.” Our Mitchell High School Career and Technical Education (CTE) program as well as Mayland Community College programs provide direct paths to earning credits towards a Bachelor of Science degrees at other higher education institutions. Furthermore, there has been discussion about starting community-based learning programs that would involve mountain culture, resiliency skills, and arts. The ninth goal, “Coordinate efforts to create a single economic development port of entry organization”. In downtown Spruce Pine, the Three Peaks Enrichment Center is becoming reality as more phases of this facility are under construction. This centralized center will be Mitchell County’s and the Toe River Valley region’s point of entry on many levels. This space will be the first resource for an existing or new entrepreneur. Next door at the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel a visitor may spend their first night in Mitchell County. Currently, the YMCA under construction may the first place where our youth learn to swim. Furthermore, Three Peaks Enrichment Center will be Toe River Valley’s central location for concerts, festivals, sporting events and regional seminars.

We believe that economic development comes from a community driven approach that is intertwined with new private investment, job creation and visitor spending to create a high standard of living for our residents.



Local Business, Industry and Non-Profits:

This past year EDC awarded small grants to several county businesses and money is allocated again this year to do the same. As usual our small businesses make up the core of our jobs and livelihoods. County business and industry growth continues, since summer of 2022, there have 22 new businesses and 9 rebranded or new ownership of businesses.

Mitchell County saw growth in employment numbers from December 2022 to December 2023. Throughout the year our healthcare and mining industries have worked on building new facilities and bring in new hires. From June 2022 to June 2023, we saw our employment increase by 8.5%. Our total labor force pool includes 6,216 individuals. [5] Based on the most recent data released Mitchell County gross domestic product (GDP) decreased 7.3% from 2022 to 2021 but with new manufacturing onboarding this year I believe that number will look better this time next year. [6]

Buckstove and L&L partnership started this year and proves to be beneficial for both. A long-standing hand-crafted wood and gas stove manufacturer known throughout the world builds stoves and outdoor furniture in Mitchell County, NC. This past year they began offering some exciting new items that can be found at local retailers like L&L Furniture in downtown Spruce Pine, NC and online. Some of the new items include modern stove designs in different styles and colors, premium outdoor furniture, a heating/ cook stove combo. Additional items available at Buckstove include a wide variety of stoves, mantels, fire pits, metal artwork and mini split systems. Check out their website <https://buckstove.com/>

Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, a member of Mission Health, an operating division of HCA Healthcare, is a community hospital serving Mitchell, Yancey, lower Avery, and upper McDowell counties. Located in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital is a 2023 CMS five-star rated Critical Access Hospital operating 25 beds. Blue Ridge Regional Hospital offers medical specialties including emergency services, wound clinic, cardiac stress testing, cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation programs, nuclear medicine, 3D mammography, endoscopy services, critical care, rehabilitation services and fitness center, cancer services, orthopedics, general surgical services, pediatrics and family medicine, and walk-in, non-emergency care at Mission My Care Now Spruce Pine. Due to the new MRI and specialized scanning equipment, they are known to have the most sophisticated equipment in the HCA territory. Furthermore, Mauzy Phillips Building offers prenatal and postnatal obstetrical care. For more information, please visit missionhealth.org/blueridge.

Sibelco North America was proud to add 123 employees in 2023. They increased Quintus Quartz production by 50% from 2021 to 2023. They began an expansion project in 2023 for some of our facilities, including building more office spaces for our increase in employees. In 2023, the expansion project alone (not including typical operations) had a fiscal impact of approximately \$500,000 and an economic impact of approximately \$45,000,000 on the local community. Additionally, we provided over \$200,000 in donations to community organizations and local



schools this past year. They are looking forward to having even more community engagement projects in 2024! www.sibelco.com

The Quartz Corp rolled out a new website this year. Active developments are underway worth \$70 Million. Their employment numbers are up and no slowdown in sight. Their company and employees are heavily involved in our community volunteer projects. From their paid volunteer hours, employee driven projects and well-paying jobs they have a positive impact throughout our county. www.thequartzcorp.com

TRACTOR Food and Farms [TRACTOR Food & Farms \(tractorfoodandfarms.com\)](http://tractorfoodandfarms.com) has made it back home to Mitchell County. They will continue their mission at 10994 NC 226- Spruce Pine, NC and just closed on their building and property back in the fall. Their agricultural goods and building presence promote and supports prospective farms and businesses as well as provides jobs. They employ 6 full time staff with additional part time staff during the growing season because of their record-breaking sales growth. Agriculture is pivotal in NC and our local regional economy. Consider their new location for your fresh produce the retail store is on the left-hand side of building. Also, there are incentives for your business to be a designated pick up for location for fresh produce.

Mountain Community Health Partnership (MCHP) <https://www.mchp.care/about-us> will be announcing a project that is geared towards their continued investment in our region's healthcare.

BRP (Bombardier Recreational Products) signed a tooling contract with a large automotive company to produce 164K annual units. Start of production is planned for August of 2024 with a community announcement planned for some time in 2024. www.brp.com

PRC Industries Inc, (Product Remanufacturing Industries) currently employs 160 individuals and their largest account, Amazon, continues to grow and requires a significant amount of labor to service. With another awarded Amazon contract, they anticipate their hiring needs within the next 2 years could exceed an additional 100 – 150 employees. <https://prcind.com/>

In the first year TREATS <https://www.treatsstudios.org/> a local artist incubator building in downtown Spruce Pine at the corner of Oak Ave and Crystal St has grown to house 18 tenants who are doing incredible art works. These artists have a large following across the globe. This is a creative class of studios in our downtown that brings a lot of community artist under the same roof. Because this concept has been so successful there is need for additional studio space in our downtown as this is a way to occupy vacant buildings and provide working studio and retail space.

Penland School of Crafts is known throughout the world. Penland does not only provide fame for our county, but they significantly contribute to our local economy and provide well paid jobs. This past year \$4,169,873 worth of value which includes tuition, room & board, gallery, retail



and coffee house sales and fundraising auction sales we recorded. They contribute to our county's annual visitors as 10,702 passed through their doors last year. Because of their success there has been 14 new jobs added. Year round they employ 56 full time staff, 9 part time year-round, 13 full time temporary, 1 part time temporary, 6 full time seasonal, 1 part time seasonal as well as 8 Interns. Over this past year 14 new positions were created.

All before mentioned businesses, industries as well as artists face similar challenges related to available housing and workspace to support their livelihoods which is resulting in some of our workers living outside of Mitchell County are commuting here for work. To sustain our workforce and buildup our community we must look at all housing options to fit the needs of every citizen.

Tourism Impact:

For the year 2023 North Carolina has once again been chosen as best state to do business. Also, a total of \$2.5 billion visitor spending made a huge impact on North Carolina's economy. That amount of spending supported 230,000 jobs, \$2 billion in state and local tax revenues.

More than 51% of that spending (\$1.3 billion) went toward lodging, followed by restaurants (16.74% or \$415 million), retail (8.37% or \$208 million) and gas (8.19% or \$203 million).

North Carolina ranked No. 2 in the nation for spending, only behind California, which had \$2.7 billion in spending. Surrounding states like Tennessee and Virginia respectively came in fourth with \$1.4 billion in spending, followed by Virginia in fifth place with \$1.2 billion. [\[7\]](#)

Mitchell County did not miss out on those dollars our visitor spending has increased over \$10 million in the last few years. Occupancy and sales tax continue to have strong numbers. We are striving to tap more into our outdoor recreational opportunities and how that can bring more visitor spending and perhaps land outdoor gear manufacturers to locate here. Made X Mtns (Made by Mountains) in Boone, NC finished the assessment of our outdoor communities on April 28, 2023. This was a 7-month process that started in September 2022. Part of the process was a survey conducted by Appalachian State University. A survey directed to 1,000 willing participants touched on their experience in Western North Carolina and the attractions, counties, towns they visited. We are anxiously awaiting those results. The App State team said they received great feedback from the WNC Recreation Demand & Spending survey and are currently analyzing the data. Here is a look back at our timeline. The 7-Month Cohort Work Period schedule was as follows:

1. September 2022 - Month 1 - Getting Organized
2. October 2022 - Month 2 - Infrastructure
3. November 2022 - Month 3 - Economy
4. December 2022 - Month 4 - Activation
5. February 2023 - Month 5 - Workforce & Education
6. March 2023 - Month 6 - Brand



7. April 2023 - Month 7 - Tourism

It is important that we understand our base and discover ways to protect our resources while at the same time leveraging those resources to help grow our economy. Here is a completed document [Mitchell County Outdoor Community and Economic Development Implementation Strategy](#) that will help guide short-term and long-term goals to build up our outdoor recreational infrastructure.

Made X Mtns provided a \$5,000 grant towards developing an outdoor recreation map for our area. My hopes are our community can develop one common theme or slogan to better brand our county as the center of Western North Carolina with a lot of natural beauty and outdoor activities to take in and enjoy. We must be intentional and continue to retain and build up our outdoor recreational infrastructure through local business and non-profit collaborations.

Visitor spending has increased over \$10 million in the past few years and there is no downturn in sight. On October 5, 2024, Spruce Pine, NC will be the starting point for the Cycle NC mountains to coast bike ride. This bike ride was created through the partnership of NCDOT, VisitNC Capital Broadcasting Company, Inc., and NC Amateur Sports. This year will be Spruce Pine's first time to host the event. The ride will begin in Spruce Pine and end in Ocean Isle Beach. It is predicted that this event will bring upwards of 1,000 people to our area, and it will be a perfect opportunity for us to make a lasting impression. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLfKXBzQIw8>



VISITOR SPENDING

Year	Visitor Expenditures (in millions)	Change from Previous Year
2022	\$44.28	10.92%
2021	\$39.92	36.01%
2020	\$29.35	-2.23%
2019	\$30.02	1.28%
2018	\$29.64	1.89%
2017	\$29.09	4.45%
2016	\$27.85	25.90%
2015	\$22.12	0.68%
2014	\$21.97	4.32%
2013	\$21.06	0.48%
2012	\$20.96	N/A
Source: The 2012-2022 Yearly Economic Impact of Travel on North Carolina Counties based on Visit NC Data.		

Conclusion:

A stable economy means good paying jobs that will allow our workers to live, work, and play here. Bottom line the more people we have in our county the more dollars that stay here. Based on NC general statutes local government can only spend money on affordable housing. I



am seeking a housing assessment study to determine if in fact we need more affordable or workforce housing. Whatever the case I will continue to work with our local industries, non-profits, and local government on how to find those partnerships and capital to create a variety of safe housing options. I am determined to help bring more rooftops to Mitchell County because with that brings more money and businesses. Due to real estate market changes everyone is spending much more money on housing which is resulting in less money circulated in the rest of the economy. We have numerous buildings with thousands of vacant square footages and EDC continues to market those spaces. Every square foot is an opportunity to be developed into something. Yes, it is hard to fill these spaces because competition is low here but with more people that increases those opportunities. If we want to compete and have an opportunity to retain our current workforce and gain new talent, then more people will have to reside here. What the county is doing by building up our quality of life provides us the best chance in history to recruit new talent and keep our current talent engaged with our community. We are investing in ourselves and our future generations. Ultimately, we live in a beautiful area filled with great outdoor amenities that big cities wished they had therefore we can use this to our advantage to attract new residents since more people in a community means a stable workforce and more spending power. Keep this in mind the more talent and skilled individuals living here will help attract companies who are looking for a labor force.

Mitchell County Economic Development Commission would like to thank every Mitchell County citizen, Mitchell County Commissioners, County and Town Managers, Finance Departments, Chamber of Commerce, Bakersville and Spruce Pine Town Councils, Spruce Pine Main Street, BAMA, Mitchell County Schools, Mayland Community College and all our businesses, industries, and nonprofit organizations for making Mitchell County great.

- [1] [NC Unemployment Rate NC Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division Local Area open \(nc.gov\)](#)
- [2] [2024 North Carolina Development Tier Designations Annual Report, NC Department of Commerce. https://www.commerce.nc.gov/report-county-tiers-ranking-memo-current-year/open](https://www.commerce.nc.gov/report-county-tiers-ranking-memo-current-year/open)
- [3] [2023 NC gross sales and use tax per county. https://www.ncdor.gov/documents/reports/monthly-sales-9-23/open](https://www.ncdor.gov/documents/reports/monthly-sales-9-23/open)
- [4] [NCDOT Draft 2024-2033 STIP Development NCDOT: State Transportation Improvement Program](#)
- [5] [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Civil Labor Workforce in Mitchell County, NC https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NCMITC1LFN](https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/NCMITC1LFN)
- [6] [Mitchell County Gross Domestic, 2022 https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/REALGDPALL37121#0](https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/REALGDPALL37121#0)
- [7] [Visitor Spending NC tourism spending increased 15% to \\$33 billion in 2022 - Business North Carolina \(businessnc.com\)](#)

