



SOMERSET COUNTY BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

A S M A R T G R O W T H O R G A N I Z A T I O N

Somerset County Business Partnership Business Retention Outreach Program

For

Hillsborough Township



Findings and Recommendations

February 27, 2007

Revised:

April 10, 2007

I. Background

This report represents a summary of findings from the recently conducted Hillsborough Township Business Retention Outreach Program. This Report has been compiled by the Somerset County Business Partnership (SCBP) and Gene Strupinsky, Hillsborough Township's Business Advocate, based on confidential interviews of business executives that were conducted between June and September 2006, by Township and Business Partnership economic development staff.

The SCBP and Hillsborough Township's Business Advocate conducted interviews with local business leaders using survey instruments, methodology, and interview record keeping based on the Synchronist® Business Retention Tool. Synchronist is web based proprietary software, the use of which, by sub-license agreement, was granted to the SCBP by JCP&L, a FirstEnergy Company.

In summary, Business Partnership and municipal economic development staff:

- Solicited interviews with **250** companies via a letter from then Mayor Suraci.
- Conducted **30** interviews with Hillsborough based company executives representing **433** employees.
- Documented the results of company executive interviews using Synchronist software.
- Reviewed and published various reports relative to the data and information collected from company executive interviews.

By using the Synchronist software and methodology, Business Partnership staff is able to generate reports on community strengths and community weaknesses, the business community's view of the quality of Township and regional services, and the value of a particular company to the area economy.

II. Community Strengths, Weaknesses, and Barriers to Growth

The following are community strengths, weaknesses and barriers to growth as identified by interviewees. The strengths, weaknesses and barriers to growth identified are terms/statements (in bold) provided in the Synchronist software so interview responses can be easily categorized and organized.

- **11** respondents identified Hillsborough's "**location**" as a community **strength**, more specifically its central location in a large market.
- **11** respondents identified Hillsborough's "**quality of life positive**" as a community **strength**, more specifically it being a very clean, attractive, and safe place to live, raise a family, and work.
- **10** respondents identified Hillsborough's "**community leadership negative**" as a community **weakness**, more specifically its permitting and approvals process; and regulations (i.e. Hillsborough Township's sign ordinance).

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II. Community Strengths, Weaknesses, and Barriers to Growth (cont.)

- **9** respondents identified Hillsborough’s “**customer, supplier accessibility**” as a community **strength**, specifically its favorable demographic trends, including population growth.
- **6** respondents identified Hillsborough’s “**transportation weaknesses**” as a community **weakness**, more specifically traffic congestion on Route 206.

The most common response regarding barriers to growth in Hillsborough Township, stated by 16 of the 30 respondents, is the Township’s permitting and approvals process, which impacts company decisions now. Overall company satisfaction with the community, expressed as a number (1 being low, 100 being high), ranged from 44-100 with an average ranking of 64. Company satisfaction with the community takes into account 16 interview responses and 70 data points within the survey instrument.

III. Workforce Evaluation

As workforce resources and challenges are critical economic development and business considerations, Synchronist provides extensive analysis of company workforce experience and demands. A review of interview responses indicate that employer workforce gaps exist at two extremes of the employee skill ranges, low skilled entry-level office employment as well as blue collar workers and high skilled technical workers. Of the companies interviewed, 23 of the 30 reported having recruitment problems, however only 20% of respondents said it was a Hillsborough problem, with 63% of respondents stating that their recruitment problems are industry wide issues. Below, is a numerical representation of employer rankings of workforce availability, quality, stability, and productivity:

1-low, 7-high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA	AVG
Availability	1	9	1	7		9	1	2	3.96
	3.33%	30.00%	3.33%	23.33%		30.00%	3.33%	6.67%	
Quality		2	2	5	2	13	5	1	5.76
		6.67%	6.67%	16.67%	6.67%	43.33%	16.67%	3.33%	
Stability		2	1	4	6	8	6	3	5.30
		6.67%	3.33%	13.33%	20.00%	26.67%	20.00%	10.00%	
Productivity			1	2	1	4	3	19	5.55
			3.33%	6.67%	3.33%	13.33%	10.00%	63.33%	

Total number of executives responding: 30

IV: Public Services Evaluation

The following chart quantifies interview responses with respect to the quality of local government and educational resources as well as local infrastructure. Specifically, the chart indicates the number of respondents ranking public services quality as low (1) through high (7) as well as the number of individual interviewees stating a particular level of satisfaction. The far right hand column is the average ranking of all respondents relative to a specific category.

1-low, 7-high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA	AVG
Police Protection				2	1	11	14	2	6.32
				6.67%	3.33%	36.67%	46.67%	6.67%	
Fire Protection				2		13	12	3	6.30
				6.67%		43.33%	40.00%	10.00%	
Ambulance/ Paramedic						4	8	18	6.67
						13.33%	26.67%	60.00%	
Health Care Services				1	3	5	3	18	5.83
				3.33%	10.00%	16.67%	10.00%	60.00%	
Child Care					3	1		26	5.25
					10.00%	3.33%		86.67%	
Schools (K-12)				1		6	5	18	6.25
				3.33%		20.00%	16.67%	60.00%	
Tech College			2	1				27	3.33
			6.67%	3.33%				90.00%	
Community College		1			2	2	1	24	5.17
		3.33%			6.67%	6.67%	3.33%	80.00%	
Colleges and Universities		1			2	1		26	4.50
		3.33%			6.67%	3.33%		86.67%	
Public Transportation	11	5		3		1		10	1.95
	36.67%	16.67%		10.00%		3.33%		33.33%	
Traffic Control	5	8	3	2	1	8	1	2	3.50
	16.67%	26.67%	10.00%	6.67%	3.33%	26.67%	3.33%	6.67%	

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IV. Public Services Evaluation (Cont.)

1-low, 7-high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA	AVG
Streets and Roads			1	4	4	8		13	5.12
			3.33%	13.33%	13.33%	26.67%		43.33%	
Highways		1	1	3	4	5		16	4.79
		3.33%	3.33%	10.00%	13.33%	16.67%		53.33%	
Airline passenger service				1	2	3		24	5.33
				3.33%	6.67%	10.00%		80.00%	
Air Cargo Services					3	4	1	22	5.75
					10.00%	13.33%	3.33%	73.33%	
Trucking			2		5	5	1	17	5.23
			6.67%		16.67%	16.67%	3.33%	56.67%	
Property Tax assessment	1	5	2	11	1	1		9	3.43
	3.33%	16.67%	6.67%	36.67%	3.33%	3.33%		30.00%	
Zoning changes				1	8	11	2	8	5.64
				3.33%	26.67%	36.67%	6.67%	26.67%	
Regulatory Enforcement		1	2	7	3	10	1	6	4.92
		3.33%	6.67%	23.33%	10.00%	33.33%	3.33%	20.00%	
Community Planning	4	2	2	5	1	8	1	7	4.09
	13.33%	6.67%	6.67%	16.67%	3.33%	26.67%	3.33%	23.33%	
Community Services			2	4	2	4		18	4.67
			6.67%	13.33%	6.67%	13.33%		60.00%	
County Services				3	6	8		13	5.29
				10.00%	20.00%	26.67%		43.33%	
Business Association		1	1	1	2	1	1	23	4.57
		3.33%	3.33%	3.33%	6.67%	3.33%	3.33%	76.67%	
Economic Development				1	1	3	6	19	6.27
				3.33%	3.33%	10.00%	20.00%	63.33%	

Total number of executives responding: 30

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V: Recommendations and Benefits

Based on the results of the business interviews, the Somerset County Business Partnership believes that the following recommended action items will help to improve Hillsborough Township's desirability as a location for business.

- 1) Establish the EBDC as the recognized leader in policy setting for Hillsborough economic development issues and as the bridge between Hillsborough Township's Business Advocate and the Township Committee.
- 2) Enhance the role of the Business Advocate
 - a. Expand the Business Advocate position to fulltime. This is in response to **16** interviewees who identified having a negative experience with the permitting, inspection, and approvals department. The Business Advocate should be the coordinator of all major economic development projects in the Township.
 - b. Partner the Business Advocate's office with Hillsborough High School to create an intern program to provide administrative support for both the Business Advocate and the EBDC.

Benefit: Creates better communication between the Township and business community.

- 3) Increase the efficiency, communication and customer service skills of the permitting departments and personnel.
 - a. Utilize Raritan Valley Community College's customized training program to conduct customer service training at Hillsborough Township's municipal building for all employees in the permitting, inspections and approvals departments, focusing on improved communication with respect to process, timelines and roles of other agencies/departments.
 - b. The EBDC, through use of their website, should provide on-line guidance in preparing applicants for the permitting process including having the necessary documentation to apply for specific permit types.

Benefit: Demonstrates the Township is a partner to the business community rather than an adversary.

- 4) Improve transportation infrastructure.
 - a. Create a Transportation Committee, of Township officials, to represent the Township's interests when interfacing with federal, state and county agencies, other municipalities and private businesses/organizations on transportation related matters such as:

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V: Recommendations and Benefits (Cont.)

- i. Route 206 By-Pass and widening
 - ii. State and county roads and bridges – congestion, maintenance, safety, signage, and signals
 - iii. Central Jersey Regional Airport
 - iv. Warehouses; inter-modal freight; trucking; railroads including both short-lines (New Jersey and Northern Railway) and freight lines (Norfolk Southern and CSX)
 - v. West Trenton Line passenger train station
 - vi. Local public and private transportation needs – buses, jitneys, taxis, other
- b. Lead an effort among county, state, and local officials, including the Police Department, to improve traffic controls on Route 206 between Dukes Parkway East and Township Line Road.

Benefit: Improves overall quality of life for residents and businesses.

- 5) Provide a forum through the EBDC for Somerset County Vocational and Technical School to market it students and institution to Hillsborough businesses having difficulty in recruiting skilled technical workers.

Benefit: Creates an employee pool that will both retain and attract business to the Township.

The following is recommendation from the Business Advocate based on their review of the Synchronist results:

- 6) Seek guidance from the EBDC and support from the business community on establishing private business membership organization(s) either by shopping/business center, type of business, and/or a Township wide association.