



# Economic Development Strategic Plan



SPONSORED BY ELECTRICITIES OF N.C., INC.

CREATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONSULTING  
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# Executive Summary

Smithfield has many building blocks for terrific economic progress including an enviable location in North Carolina's Triangle Region, excellent transportation assets including I-95 access, and projected steady growth of both population and commercial development. As Smithfield navigates the transition from small rural town to growing suburban location, the town will need to execute on a shared vision for growth that preserves the elements of the community treasured by current residents while working to attract future residents and business.



This economic development strategic planning process was sponsored by ElectriCities of N.C., Inc., as a service to its member communities. ElectriCities knows that companies and people invest in communities that invest in themselves. This strategic plan can guide Smithfield to make strategic investments that will result in a stronger, more sustainable economy. ElectriCities can be a partner in these investments with a variety of economic development programs to support members' economic development priorities.

The strategic planning process included community engagement by way of interviews, community meetings and online surveys, SWOT Analysis, and economic and demographic research. An asset-based approach to strategic planning was used, building goals, strategies, and action steps around the town's assets and future opportunities. An implementation plan is included to suggest priorities and sequencing for the many strategies and tactics developed here.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan outlines strategies for attracting and growing jobs in Smithfield, leveraging and improving amenities and appearance of the town to strengthen the community and brand, building the community and quality of life through placemaking, and developing and investing in infrastructure to support continued growth of population and businesses. The economic development goals, strategies, and action steps are summarized on the next page; however, we encourage a full read of this report to understand the context of the strategic plan.

The key to success is developing a small group of leaders and citizens who are passionate about revitalizing the community and share a vision for the future. Through this planning process and other town efforts, Smithfield has rallied community champions around a vision and is ready for implementation.

# Economic Development Strategic Plan Summary

The Smithfield community ranked growing jobs, investing in downtown, and long-range planning as the top economic development strategies. Citizens want to see these strategies result in local job creation, continued activity and improvement in downtown, more amenities for residents, and clear plans for the growth that is slated to come to Smithfield. Throughout engagement, citizens talked about the need to balance rapid residential growth with commercial development so retail sales are not leaked to neighboring communities. There is also the need for employment centers, so people do not have to out-commute for work.

The strategic plan includes three broad goals to meet the vision for Smithfield. The first goal relates to job creation and includes a wide range of business development, attraction, and retention to reach that goal. This includes additional resources and capacity for execution, creating strategies for assuring there are appropriate sites and buildings available for business expansion. and that land use patterns are planned and vetted in advance. The second goal supports connecting and strengthening the Smithfield community while improving its image and appearance for residents and visitors. The third goal addresses the need to plan for infrastructure to support the desired growth patterns. These three goals together form an effective approach to building on the foundations for growth already established in Smithfield, while anticipating future needs and making sure opportunities are not missed.

- ◎ **Grow jobs for Smithfield** through attraction, business expansion, small business development and startup support
  - Strategies include investing in an economic development program, sites and buildings, relationships with employers and allies, and supporting small businesses and startups.
- ◎ **Build Smithfield's sense of community and quality of life** with amenities, placemaking and beautification
  - Strategies include external and internal communications, developing amenities, promoting downtown, fostering community champions, and improving the town's appearance.
- ◎ **Plan for and develop the infrastructure necessary** for quality of life and continued growth in Smithfield
  - Strategies include developing small area plans and investing in utility capacity and long-range planning.

# SWOT Analysis – Overall Summary Page

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis is foundational to an asset-based approach to economic development planning. We used input from the Steering Committee, citizen input sessions, business and community survey, and interviews with community leaders to compile the SWOT analysis. This wide range of input helped us understand the assets and challenges, as well as emerging opportunities for Smithfield and the region.

Smithfield is flush with assets and opportunities for moving forward, including its enviable position adjacent to Wake County, location in fast-growing Johnston County, and access to Interstate 95. Investing in these assets and opportunities will generate economic growth. There are issues that need attention on the weaknesses side as well. Many outdated images and impressions of Smithfield remain, and a lack of unified planning may dampen opportunities for growth and capital investment.

## Strengths

- Location
- Johnston County Airport
- Vibrant downtown
- Small town charm
- River
- Affordability
- Parks & greenway
- Major highways
- Smithfield Recreation & Aquatic Center
- Johnston County Community College

## Weaknesses

- Appearance
- Unwilling landowners
- Water & sewer Infrastructure
- Lack of shared vision for growth
- Lack of available industrial property
- Inconsistent code enforcement
- Negative historic perceptions

## Opportunities

- Expand & Improve Wayfinding
- Strengthen town economic development
- Improve communications
- Leverage I-95 location
- Plan for new residential and industrial sites
- Improve code enforcement
- Develop small area plans for shared vision

## Threats

- Lack of water & sewer capacity
- Empty buildings; deteriorating sites
- Lack of town unity/identity
- Deteriorating commercial sites
- Lack of new jobs coming to Smithfield
- Limited properties ready and available
- Perception of safety

# SWOT Analysis Details: Strengths

The foundation and first step in a SWOT Analysis is to compile and consider the strengths the community has at present. Strengths are the reasons people and businesses locate and stay in a community. Smithfield has plenty of current strengths to attract investment, residents, and visitors. Many are related to Smithfield's excellent location and the vibrant Research Triangle region. Transportation, including access to I-95, means access to labor and markets that companies prize. A strong town government and programs provides a foundation for further activities and investments to support economic growth.

- ⊙ Location in North Carolina and Southeastern United States
- ⊙ Proximity to Wake County
- ⊙ Johnston County Airport
- ⊙ Interstate 95 access
- ⊙ Population growth
- ⊙ Vibrant downtown
- ⊙ Small-town charm
- ⊙ Neuse River
- ⊙ County seat
- ⊙ Good town services
- ⊙ Growing parks and recreation programs
- ⊙ Well-established business community
- ⊙ Johnston County Community College
- ⊙ Rail service
- ⊙ Affordability
- ⊙ Climate
- ⊙ School choice
- ⊙ Restaurant variety
- ⊙ Buffalo Creek Greenway
- ⊙ Room to grow
- ⊙ Major highways (I-95, I-40)
- ⊙ Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center
- ⊙ Research Triangle location

# SWOT Analysis Details: Weaknesses

Many of the challenges and weaknesses cited for Smithfield are things that the town can directly address and influence. The appearance of important gateways and throughfares, as well as prime locations like downtown, are an important part of the image of the town. New investments or re-direction of resources can make a big impact on the “presentation” the town makes to residents and visitors. Along with its physical appearance, a strong communications program can convey shared vision and improve image and perception. While the list of weaknesses may be long, most of these items can be strongly influenced by direct actions by the town.

- ⊙ Appearance
- ⊙ Absent and indifferent landowners
- ⊙ Lack of strong, shared vision
- ⊙ Water and sewer infrastructure
- ⊙ Clear vision for growth
- ⊙ Public school performance and perception of public schools
- ⊙ Lack of available industrial property
- ⊙ Lack of quality rental housing and higher-end housing
- ⊙ Lack of city-wide walkability
- ⊙ Lack of resources for code enforcement
- ⊙ Less favorable comparison to neighboring towns by outside investors
- ⊙ Negative historic perceptions remain strong
- ⊙ Lack of centralized media/communications
- ⊙ Not enough young people moving here
- ⊙ Cellular access/signal
- ⊙ Not very welcoming
- ⊙ Lack of image or vision
- ⊙ Low quality retail

# SWOT Analysis Details: Opportunities

A good portion of the opportunities noted by citizens in Smithfield address the appearance and image of the town. People are interested in promoting their community and want it to “show” well. They know that people and businesses will invest in communities that invest in themselves. Ideas around communication and connecting residents to the town and to each other were also prominent. Creating and communicating shared vision is another potential way to increase communications when paired with a planning process. Overall, there are many opportunities for Smithfield to advance its economic position by leveraging assets and investing in opportunities.

- ⊙ Expand wayfinding to include parking kiosks for downtown
- ⊙ Strengthen town economic development program
- ⊙ Improve gateways into town
- ⊙ Improve communications about events and amenities
- ⊙ Support and improve multiple business districts outside of downtown
- ⊙ Attract new residents and young people
- ⊙ Attract new retail to vacant buildings
- ⊙ Leverage I-95 location and traffic for economic gain
- ⊙ Promote good outcomes of local schools
- ⊙ Attention to West Smithfield and South Smithfield to even out growth and access
- ⊙ New residential construction
- ⊙ Increase communications; newsletter for residents
- ⊙ Improve code enforcement
- ⊙ “Community Cleanup” beautification programs
- ⊙ Use social media to connect Smithfield and create positive messages
- ⊙ Develop small area plans to guide shared visions for growth



# SWOT Analysis Details: Threats

Threats are the potential impediments to success that the town must consider in its plans. Many threats are beyond the control of the local community, but can greatly influence the resources available or timing of economic development goals. The community has to be aware of these threats and include them in the discussions when evaluating potential actions. Some of the threats identified are demographic and related to the population trends of residents. Other threats are related to local employers and real estate. While it will not be possible to completely eliminate these threats, planning and communications can make a big difference in how the threats are perceived and in their potential impact.

- ⊙ Declining incomes and housing values
- ⊙ Empty buildings and deteriorating sites
- ⊙ Lack of town unity/identity to keep people here
- ⊙ Lack of new jobs coming to Smithfield
- ⊙ Higher-end retail is out of town
- ⊙ Low-wage jobs
- ⊙ Declining tree canopy
- ⊙ Growth not managed/directed
- ⊙ Limited properties available and ready for development
- ⊙ Poor land use planning
- ⊙ Track homes dominating housing development
- ⊙ Low water and sewer capacity
- ⊙ Continued belief in past negative messages
- ⊙ Not supporting local schools
- ⊙ Lack of office space
- ⊙ Lack of workforce
- ⊙ Deteriorating outlet mall
- ⊙ Nearby towns with better real estate options
- ⊙ Perception of safety
- ⊙ Other nearby towns encroaching on potential growth areas

# WHAT IS ONE THING SMITHFIELD DOES BETTER THAN OTHER CITIES?



# Economic Development Strategic Plan

## Goal: Grow jobs for Smithfield through attraction, business expansion, small business development, and startup support.

Growing jobs and recruiting new companies was a top priority from community surveys and leadership interviews. To compete for new jobs and capital investment, Smithfield must plan for and invest in appropriate real estate opportunities for these businesses. While the private sector has been active in Smithfield's development, the town will have to plan for utilities and land use support in the areas targeted for industrial or commercial users. Job growth is also a result of small business formation and growth as well as the success and expansion of existing employers. To make a sustained impact through these strategies, additional resources will be required. Smithfield has a role in supporting job growth across all sectors and business sizes.

## Strategy: Leverage opportunities to grow Smithfield's economy and increase the resources directed at economic development for the town.

### *Action Steps*

- ⦿ Consider a new full-time position to manage the town's economic development strategies.
  - Look at nearby towns with economic development managers. For example, Louisburg and Clayton.
- ⦿ If a full-time position is not feasible, look for potential partners that could share a position in an allied role. Organizations that are downtown-focused, a chamber of commerce or tourism agency may be potential partners.
- ⦿ Develop a clear action plan for the position or partnership based on this strategic plan, town priorities, and sensible sequencing. The success of the position and the program of work depends on clear guidance and success factors.
- ⦿ Establish an Economic Development Program Advisory Committee to assist staff with prioritizing and sequencing economic development programming and serve as advocates for the town's economic development strategies.
- ⦿ In addition to funding a position or partnership, allocate resources for strategic plan implementation to ensure a robust program of work.

## Strategy: In order to attract new firms and accommodate expanding ones, ensure Smithfield has competitive sites and buildings available or in the pipeline.

### *Action Steps*

- ⦿ Identify and promote priority sites for occupancy, development, and redevelopment.
  - Use the town website to market priority development and redevelopment areas for Smithfield, including specific sites and buildings.

- Consider new tools and technologies to illustrate and communicate desired, planned, and existing developments and development patterns. Clayton, NC, uses “Development Map” to orient potential developers and investors to Clayton.
- Consider the ElectriCities Site Assist program to identify and prioritize potential new industrial sites. A follow-on program, Smart Sites, certifies industrial sites through a series of due diligence steps.
- Ensure that priority sites and buildings are included in available properties listings for Johnston County Economic Development and the Economic Development Partnership for NC (EDPNC).
- ◎ Focus on the 301 corridor and I-95 industrial and commercial areas, perhaps with a short-term task force to recommend desired outcomes for smaller areas to the town council. Or consider a more comprehensive “small area plan” that includes input from many stakeholders.
- ◎ Consider zoning or regulatory changes that will promote “high traffic” uses in downtown, while moving lower-traffic offices and other activities off the main downtown corridors.
- ◎ The town should develop an approach to industrial and commercial development and share this with allies such as Johnston County Economic Development, so that they may accurately communicate with potential private industrial businesses who may be interested in Smithfield. In developing this approach, Smithfield should consider potential shared or reduced costs for development, geographic targets, and utility availability. Catawba County has a successful public-private partnership for speculative building development that is a model program.

## Strategy: Build strong relationships with large employers and utility customers.

### *Action Steps:*

- ◎ Identify “key accounts” – significant employers or customers that can be targeted for communications and feedback. Set goals for the types and frequency of the communications that can be maintained over one year. These can include in-person visits, invitations to town briefings like “Coffee with the Manager” or “Coffee with the Mayor,” surveys by email, and telephone and virtual meetings. When appropriate, include economic development staff from ElectriCities or Johnston County Economic Development to provide a team approach.
- ◎ Perhaps in partnership with another business support organization, conduct surveys, at a minimum annually, of Smithfield businesses to identify trends and determine the immediate needs of existing companies.
- ◎ Use feedback from key accounts to troubleshoot emerging issues before they result in serious issues for the companies.
- ◎ Provide resources and connections to existing employers needing assistance with transportation, utility, or real estate issues.
- ◎ Build connection and community among Smithfield employers with a “Business Roundtable” of 15-25 companies representing different parts of Smithfield, different industry sectors, and different sizes. This group can meet 1-3 times a year to hear updates from the town and share feedback.
- ◎ Since the Carolina Premium Outlets is a significant destination for Smithfield, in addition to an employment center and economic generator, strengthen relationships with the management and ownership of this property to look for ways the town can support the enterprise as well as to influence capital improvements there. It is possible that joint efforts will benefit both parties.

## Strategy: Show support for small businesses and start-up businesses; be known as business-friendly.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⊙ In all town operations continue to support and promote small businesses and programs supporting them by creating a culture of “no wrong door,” which means that any contact a business makes will lead to an answer/solution.
- ⊙ In partnership with other agencies, provide a “Start a Business in Smithfield” toolkit, making it available on the town website. The toolkit can include:
  - Regulatory steps for start-up businesses
  - Local, regional, and state resources for small businesses including business planning, market analysis, financing, marketing, etc.
  - Small businesses programming and events in Smithfield and Johnston County
- ⊙ Consider new or expanded resources for small businesses with town funds including a revolving loan fund for targeted businesses (e.g., restaurants or other desired small businesses), assistance with site preparations and vacant building renovations, and fee waivers or incentives for priority sites, buildings, or business types.
- ⊙ Explore the potential for a co-working space or even a small business incubator. In the future, it may be feasible to re-purpose some town-owned real estate, or to encourage this use in a new building or renovation.

## Strategy: Build and maintain strong relationships with economic development allies, ensuring they know Smithfield’s priorities and assets for economic development.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⊙ Through funding relationships and board appointments, make sure Smithfield’s priorities are aligned with allied organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Johnston County Economic Development, and the downtown development organization.
- ⊙ Communicate economic development priorities to the Economic Development Partnership of NC, Research Triangle Regional Partnership, and Johnston County Economic Development, and discuss the town’s potential support and investment for targeted projects and soliciting feedback on specifications for needed industrial and commercial sites.
- ⊙ Leverage resources and technical assistance from ElectriCities to further retail, commercial, and industrial attraction and development. Programs for industrial site development include Site Assist and Smart Sites. There are also programs for retail and commercial development, external marketing, grants for downtown and wayfinding improvements, and graphic and communications support.

# Goal: Build Smithfield's sense of community with amenities, placemaking, beautification, and stronger communications.

Located along Interstate 95 in fast-growing Johnston County, Smithfield is well-positioned to leverage the growth in the Triangle for tax base expansion and residential and employment growth. Since there are many communities in the Triangle from which to choose, Smithfield will need to be intentional about its attractiveness to newcomers – as well as existing residents – in order to make the most of these location advantages. An image of a small town with modern amenities and a family focus can be attractive to a range of potential residents. Smithfield should prioritize investments in assets and programs that improve the appearance of the town and project an image of a friendly, family-focused, growing small town.

## Strategy: Tell Smithfield's story. Use multiple media channels to create and distribute positive messages and keep residents informed.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ Reinstate an electronic newsletter to residents and businesses. In a survey of Smithfield businesses, 92% said that the preferred way to receive information from the town is via electronic communications.
- ⦿ Use utility bills to highlight developments, events, or even the goals or strategies of this plan and how it is advancing Smithfield. People want to know how the community is moving forward. This information can be shared on social media as well. Residents want to be informed about priorities and may be more likely to become involved when they are informed. Share positive trends, stories, and accomplishments.
- ⦿ Building on the town's Public Information Officer, identify additional influencers who can re-share messages and provide feedback, especially on social media.
- ⦿ Use social media for consistent posts that advance the town's message. Make sure the town has visibility on Facebook and Instagram at a minimum. A communications firm may be contracted to develop a messaging document and a social media plan, and to help acquire photography to ensure ongoing and successful posts. Consider a local hashtag to create community, for example #LoveSmithfield, #ThinkSmithfield, or #SmithfieldIsHome.
- ⦿ Use Instagram to post photos of the town. Photos are important to tourists and potential residents.
- ⦿ Use the goals of the Strategic Plan as topics for communications with residents. Consider addressing an interesting or new activity or tactic resulting from the plan at each council meeting.
- ⦿ Issue periodic press releases to print and electronic media highlighting activities and accomplishments toward the strategic plan. Invite key media contacts for a "behind the scenes tour" of an event or town facility.
- ⦿ Develop a pool of spokespersons who can be available for print or electronic media to provide the town's perspective on a topic of interest. These people should be well versed in the town's strengths and strategies.
- ⦿ Develop a standard presentation for town staff and elected leaders to give at civic clubs.
- ⦿ Develop and share talking points with partners about town projects, such as an infrastructure project, to ensure a clear message.
- ⦿ Consider a weekly automated phone call to inform citizens of events.
- ⦿ Welcome new businesses to Smithfield through social media. Have the mayor and town manager congratulate them with a quote or photo.

- ⦿ Use the town website to communicate the brand and key messages including goals of the strategic plan.

## Strategy: Use wayfinding, collaterals, and signage to improve the appearance of Smithfield, creating a sense of place.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ Evaluate and extend wayfinding signage in Smithfield, including gateways to town limits, downtown, and directing to town amenities.
- ⦿ Look for opportunities to engage local artists or install public art such as murals or themed statues. For example, Belhaven, NC, has statues of crabs, while Lexington, NC, uses pigs as “photo-opportunities” and brand-extending placemaking.
- ⦿ Some towns engage school groups to help improve appearance – painting fire hydrants, painting communicates boxes, trash pickup, etc.

## Strategy: Continue to focus on amenities for residents and families to capture JoCo growth.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ Many respondents to the citizens’ survey mentioned walkability as a desired trait for Smithfield. This means sidewalks in residential and commercial areas as well as trails that connect town assets and communities. Consider walkability when evaluating new developments or plans for future public investment.
- ⦿ Build on the popularity of the Smithfield Recreation and Aquatics Center and adjoining Riverwalk to expand amenities and recreation opportunities for children, teens, and families.
- ⦿ Explore the potential for some sort of “highway entertainment” off I-95. Destinations such as Celebration Station, Great Wolf Lodge, or Top Golf can capitalize on the traffic counts on I-95 and also provide entertainment for residents and visitors. A destination such as this not only draws traffic off the highway but can also direct visitors to downtown as part of their Smithfield visit.
- ⦿ Continue to use the new amphitheater to provide family-oriented programming such as an outdoor movie night, or a themed teen night. Survey respondents frequently mentioned wanting more activities for families and teens in Smithfield. Food truck events can respond to the desire for new and varied restaurant options.

## Strategy: Support and promote downtown as a center of Smithfield activities.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ Continue to support downtown development with funding, strategy, and cooperative programming. Work with the Downtown Smithfield Development Corporation to assure a current downtown development plan and provide funding and leadership toward its implementation.
- ⦿ Explore cooperative services or programming to maintain the historic charm of downtown e.g. litter control, landscaping, public space maintenance, and appearance.

- ⦿ Ensure town ordinances and policies support a vibrant downtown. Examples include ordinances for vacant storefront and making it easy to host events and pop-ups.

## Strategy: Identify and cultivate community champions and leaders.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ With hundreds of new housing permits in the pipeline, a welcoming environment will build community and sustain growth. Hold a “Newcomers’ Reception” at least once a year, led by the mayor. Provide information there about how to become involved in Smithfield and how to stay on top of communications. Encourage civic clubs, volunteer organizations, and advisory boards to reach out to newcomers for leadership roles.
- ⦿ Provide information and encouragement for Smithfield residents to serve on county-wide boards and commissions, taking Smithfield’s priorities and strategies to the county level.
- ⦿ Consider a “Citizen’s Academy,” a program to expose residents to local government. Some town academies meet monthly for 6-8 months for programs on recreation, public safety, public meetings, boards and commissions, history, utilities, etc.
- ⦿ Town staff and elected leaders should participate in regional and state leadership development programs such as the Rural Center’s “Homegrown Leaders,” Golden LEAF’s “Local Government Training Initiative,” or UNC School of Government’s Public Executive Leadership Academy to network with peer communities and learn of promising practices and workable solutions to common issues.
- ⦿ Explore an “Intra-City Visit,” perhaps in partnership with another civic organization, to take leaders and emerging leaders from Smithfield to a peer town to study specific topics for application in Smithfield. Potential topics include code enforcement, beautification efforts, small area planning, and parks and recreation amenities.

## Strategy: Focus on beautification and improved appearance.

### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ Consider re-activating the vacant building registry ordinance, as Columbia, SC, has done. Buildings vacant for 60 days must be registered. If dilapidated, a plan to upgrade must be submitted. Buildings that remain vacant must re-certify each year of vacancy. The purpose is to discourage long-term vacancies.
- ⦿ Explore a vacant building revitalization grant based on net new taxable investment. This incentive costs nothing upfront as the grant is paid after the business pays its property taxes. It works similarly to an industrial incentive grant, which is typically a percentage of net new investment.
- ⦿ Increase code enforcement activities in an equitable way, giving plenty of notice and rationale while consistently eliminating non-conforming situations and improving the appearance and expectations of residents and businesses.
- ⦿ Evaluate and continue to invest in gateways into Smithfield. Consider if current placement is appropriate; evaluate landscaping, and lighting to showcase Smithfield. There are multiple entry points, and each needs a prominent gateway.



- ⦿ Use city maintenance staff to lead teams of volunteers from local organizations in more frequent clean-up projects. This could be in conjunction with Earth Day, changing seasons, the Town’s anniversary, etc. Clean up initiatives could include downtown streets, prominent intersections, parks, and public spaces.

## Goal: Plan for and develop the infrastructure necessary for quality of life and continued growth in Smithfield.

As part of the fast-growing Research Triangle Region, Smithfield is assured of growth in population and development. The town is in a position to prepare for and direct that growth. Using multiple approaches such as community input, small area planning, and specialized studies, Smithfield needs to articulate to its residents and potential investors and developers its preferences for growth. Planning for and investing in infrastructure, advocating for broadband and other utility capacity expansion, and planning for residential growth will position Smithfield to achieve a vision shared by the leadership as well as the residents and business community.

### Strategy: Develop Small Area Plans in key areas.

#### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ In order to plan for new industrial developments, upgraded commercial corridors, and appropriate residential areas, consider addressing “small areas” with specific planning and strategies. These can be led by the town council or by appointed task forces which focus on a small area’s potential for growth and desired outcomes. This allows the community to discuss and consider various land uses without the urgency of a client or developer driving the conversation. If successful, use small area planning to address another part of Smithfield when the first one is completed.

### Strategy: Ensure utility and broadband capacity exists to facilitate continued industrial, commercial, and residential growth.

#### *Action Steps:*

- ⦿ Partner with Johnston County Economic Development and Town staff to ensure adequate wastewater capacity for future development.
- ⦿ Ensure economic development needs are clear in utility and broadband capacity and expansion conversations. Hold meetings with utility and broadband representatives to share town priorities and understand service levels and future plans for each.
- ⦿ Enhance marketing of electric system capacity and reliability to the development community.

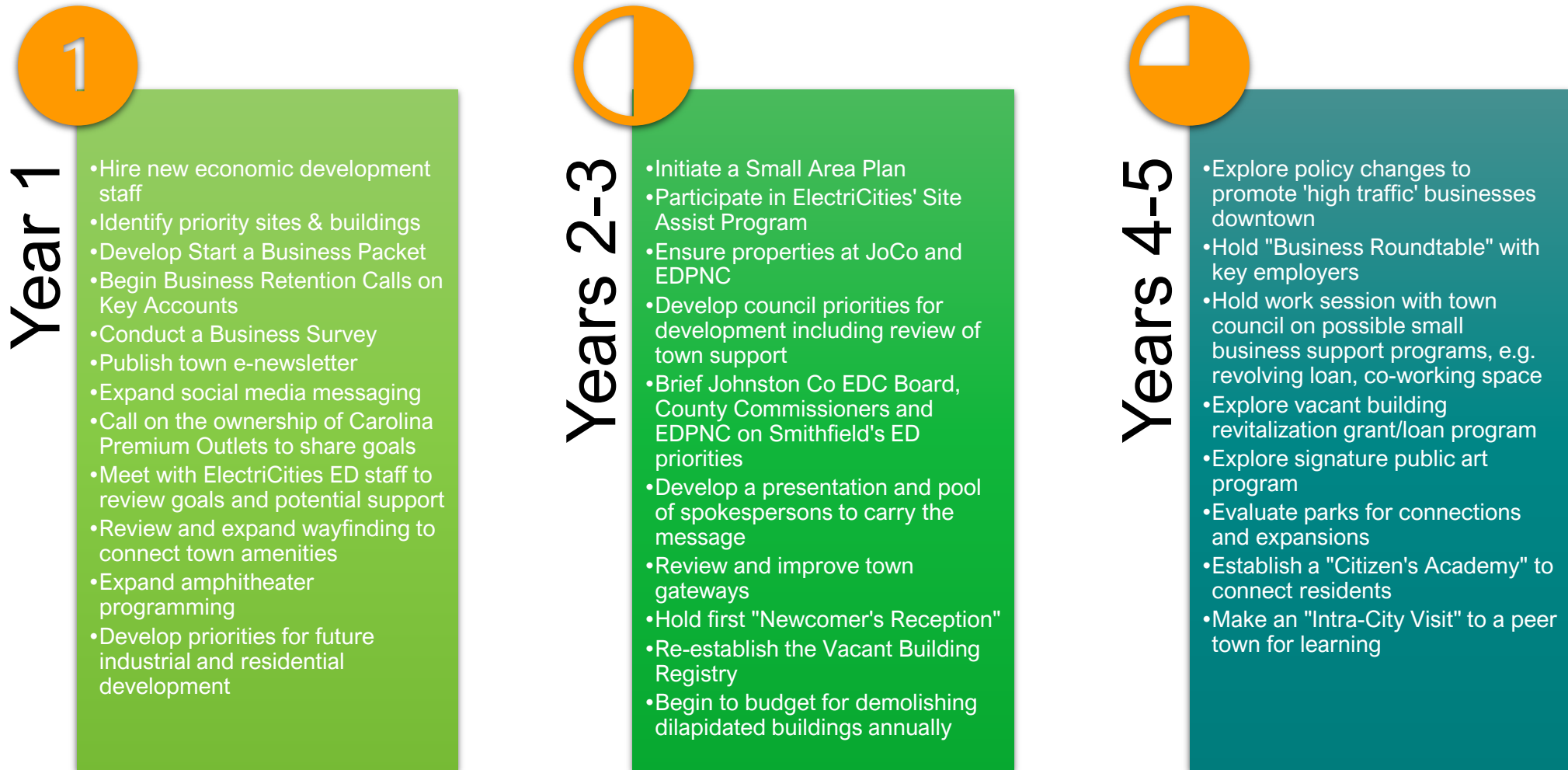
## Strategy: Plan for long range residential development patterns in and around Smithfield.

### *Action Steps:*

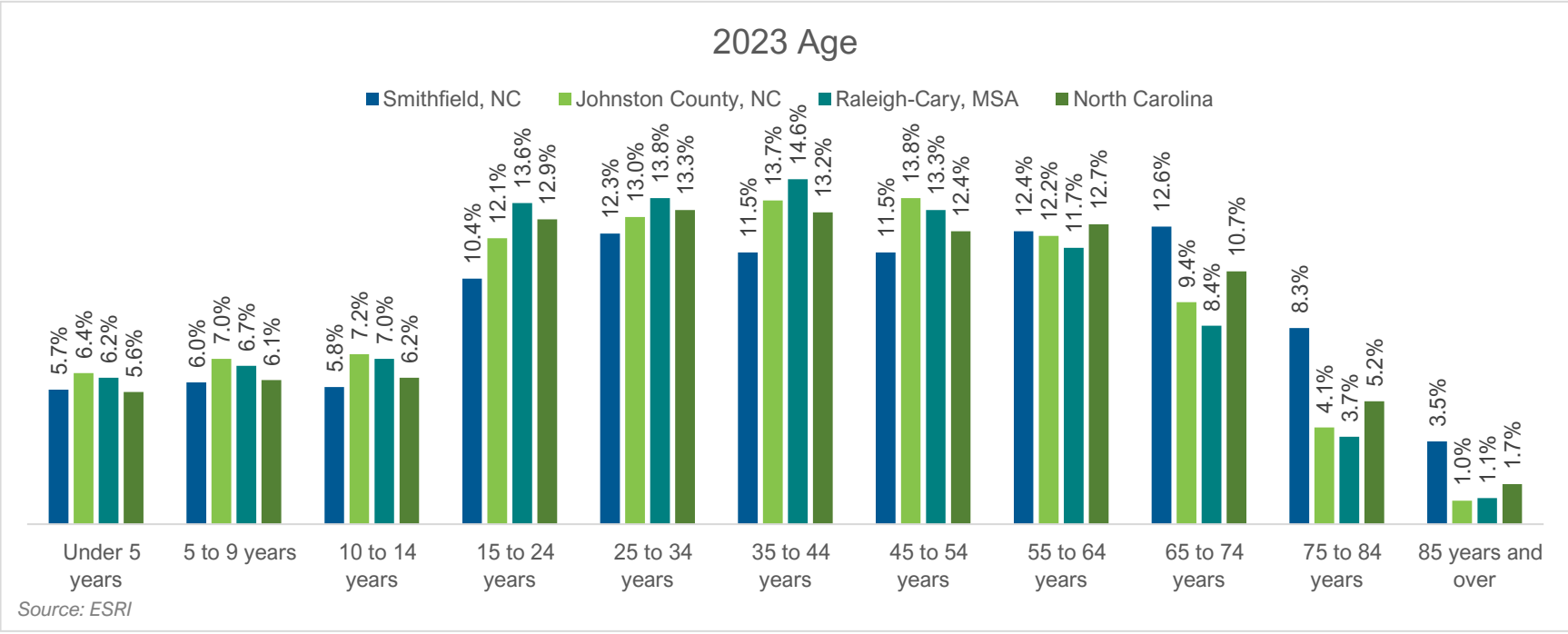
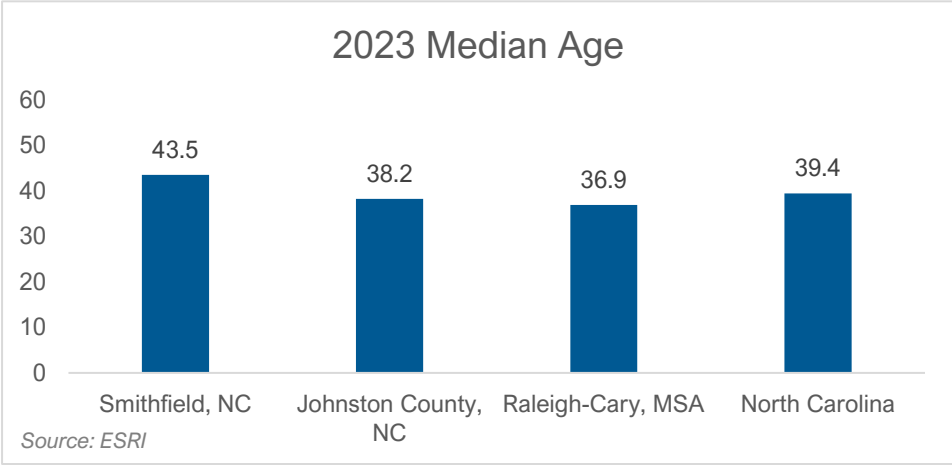
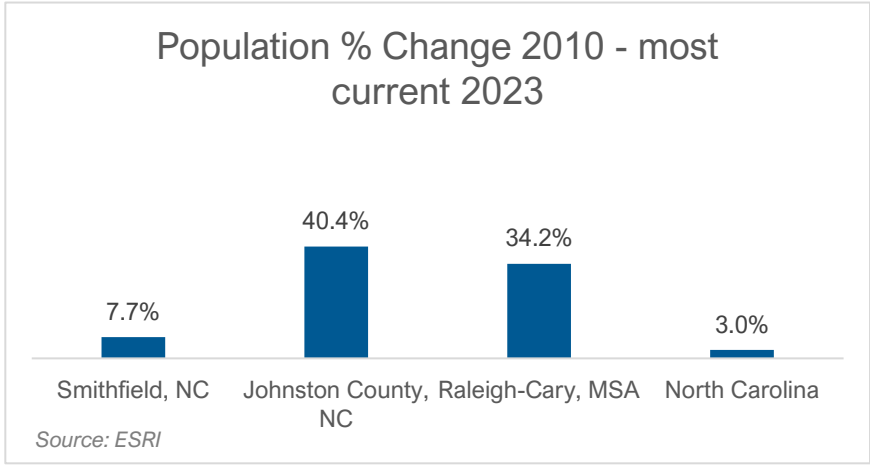
- ⦿ Use the results of the forthcoming regional Housing Gap Analysis to understand Smithfield's relative position in housing, especially for availability of modern housing styles, availability of affordable housing, and quality of housing stock.
- ⦿ Advocate for transportation improvements that will enhance Smithfield's livability in the fastest growing county in North Carolina.

# Implementation Plan

The strategic plan is designed to be implemented over several years. In the figure below, near-term priorities are listed in Year 1; mid-term priorities are listed in Years 2-3 and longer-term priorities are listed in Years 4-5. As resources, opportunities, and challenges change over time, these categories may be adjusted. We recommend staff integrating the strategic plan into an annual program of work and budget planning with input from town council and stakeholders.

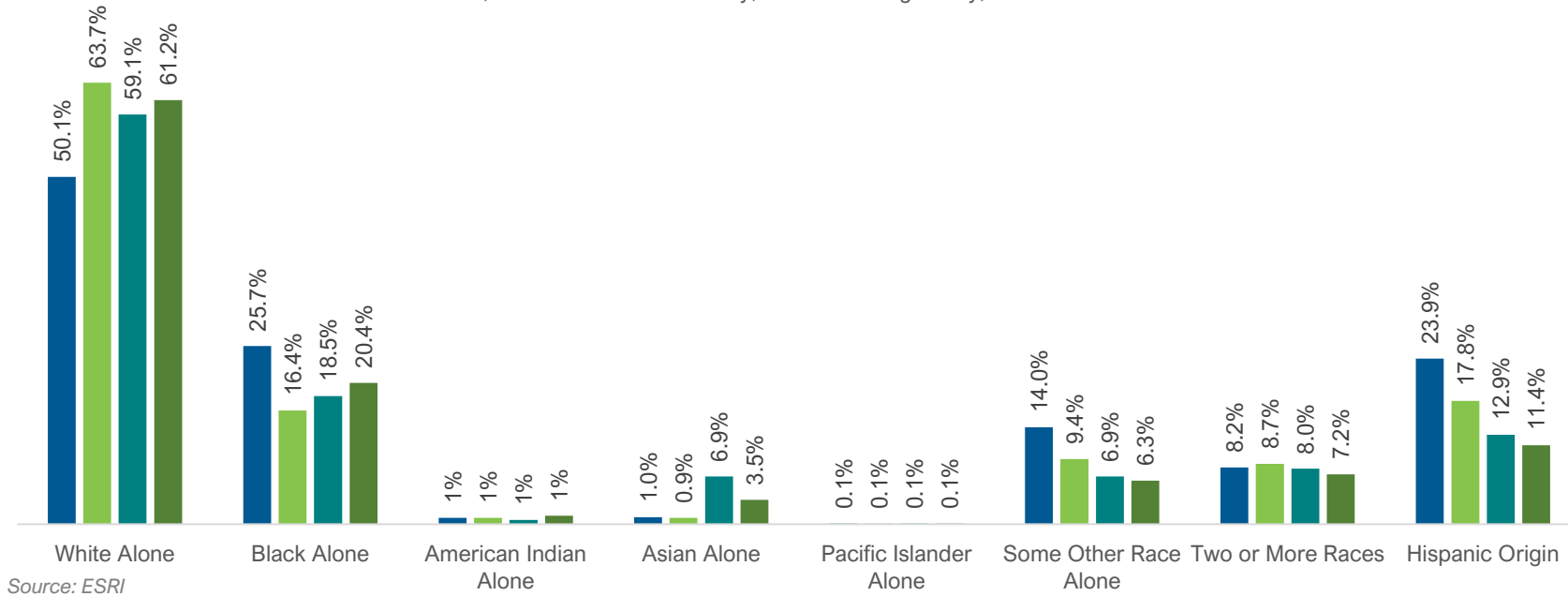


# Appendix A: Economic and Demographic Profile



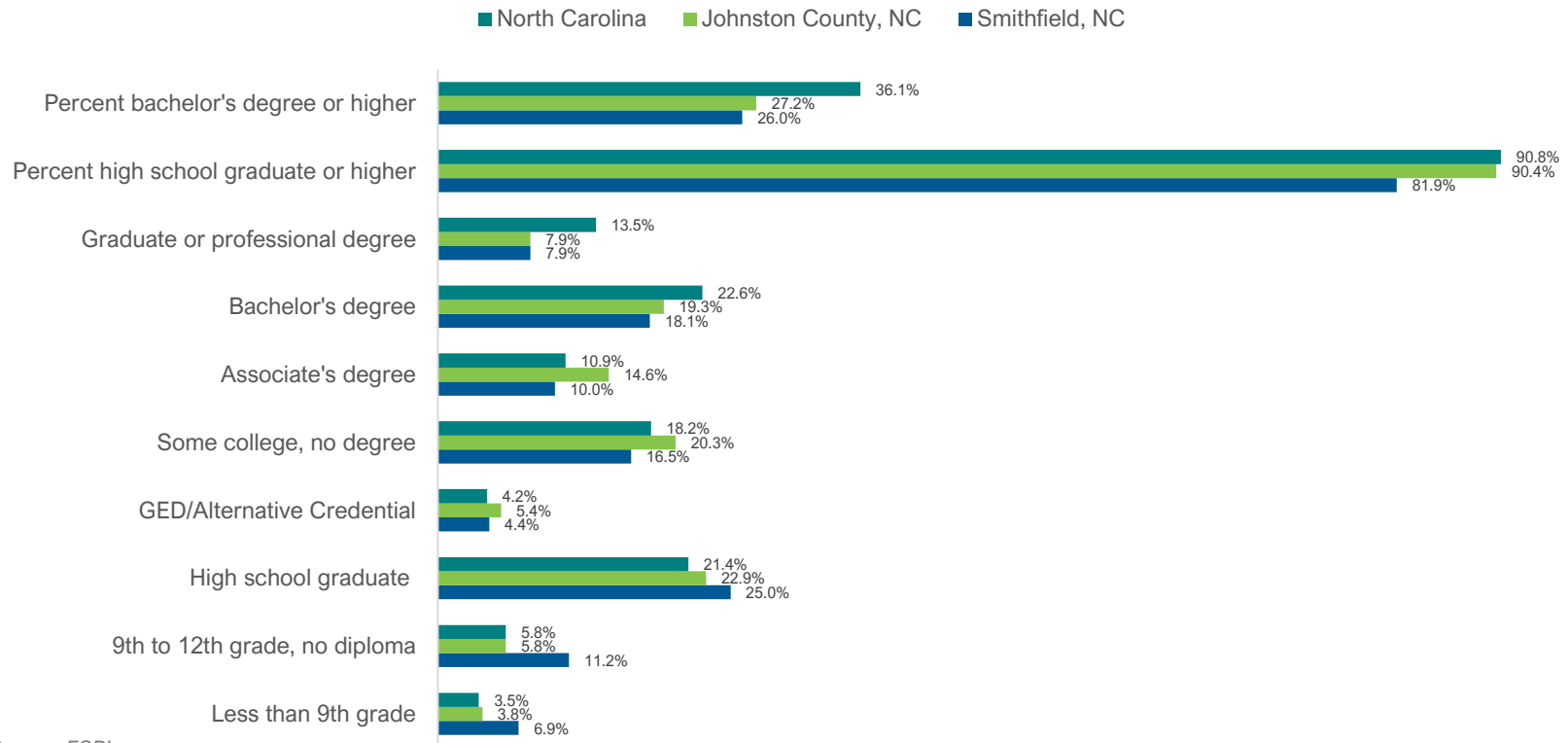
## 2023 Race

■ Smithfield, NC   ■ Johnston County, NC   ■ Raleigh-Cary, MSA   ■ North Carolina



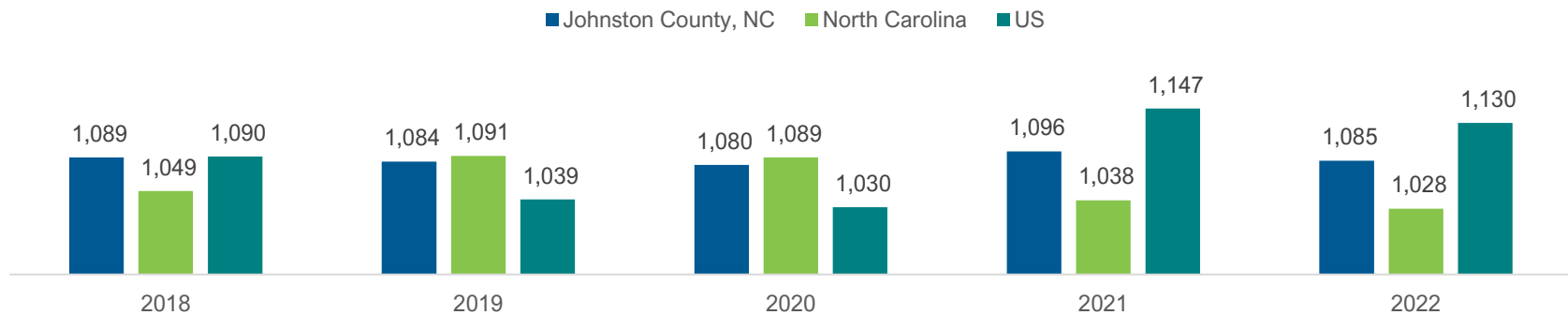
Source: ESRI

## 2023 Educational Attainment

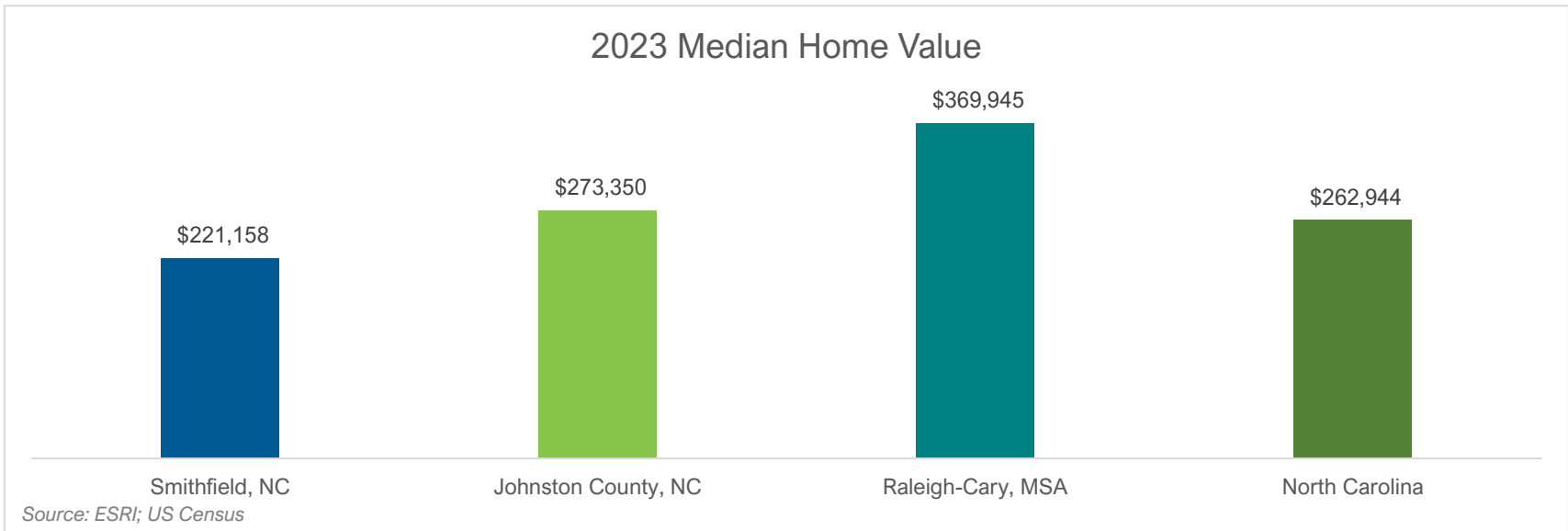
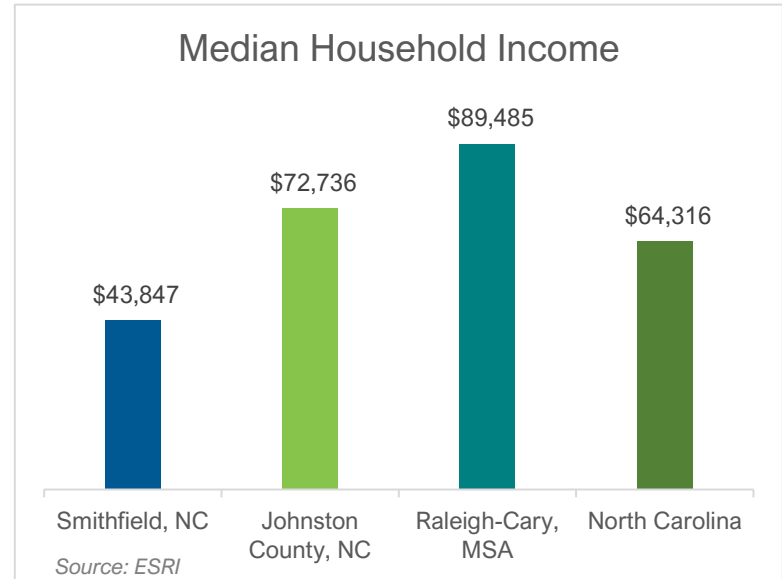
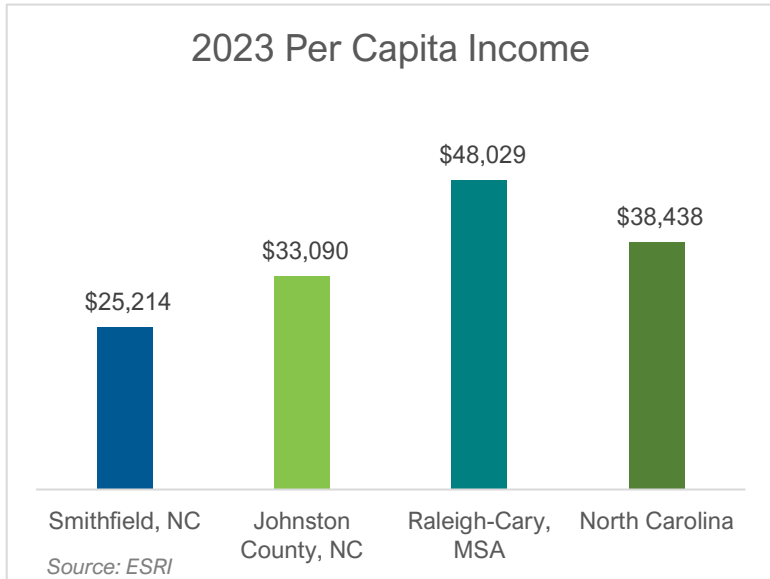


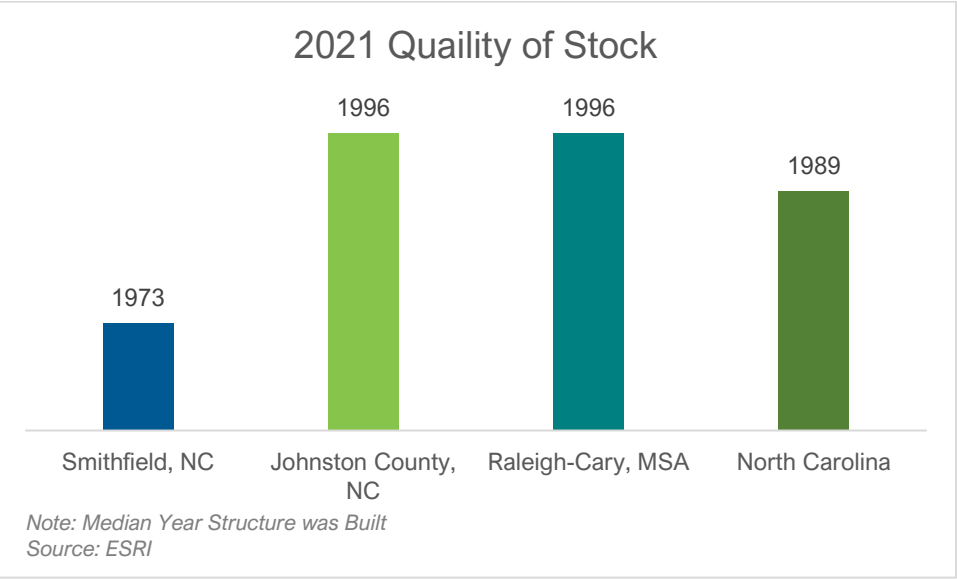
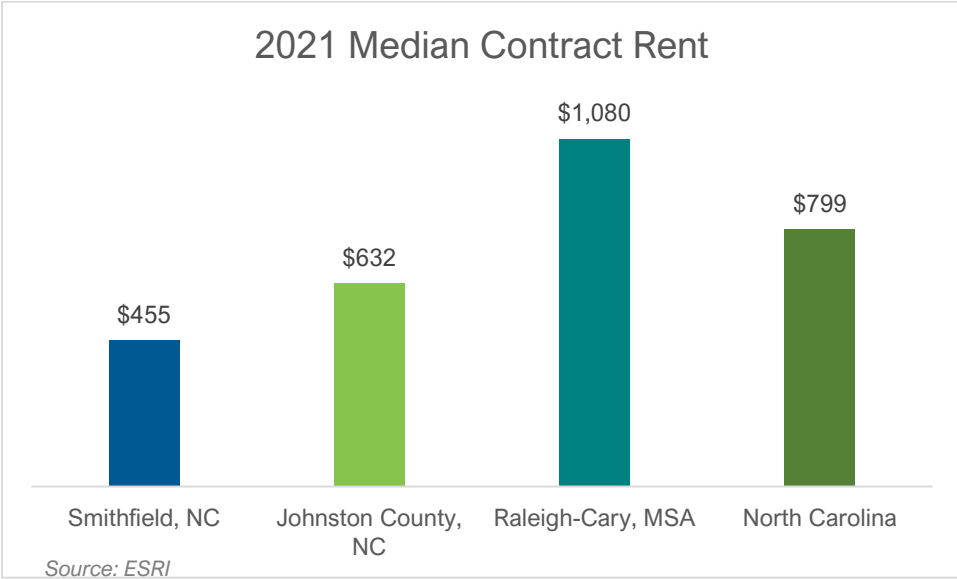
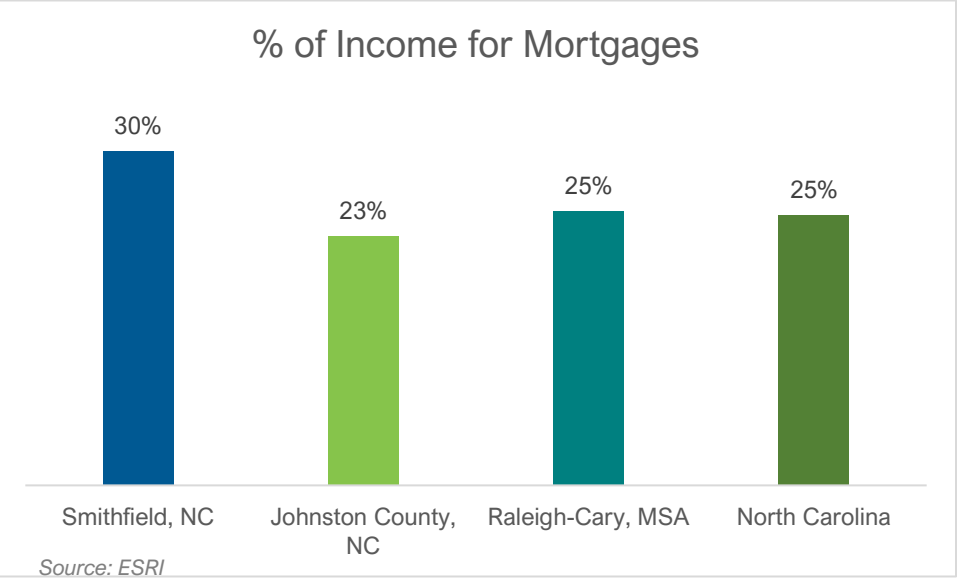
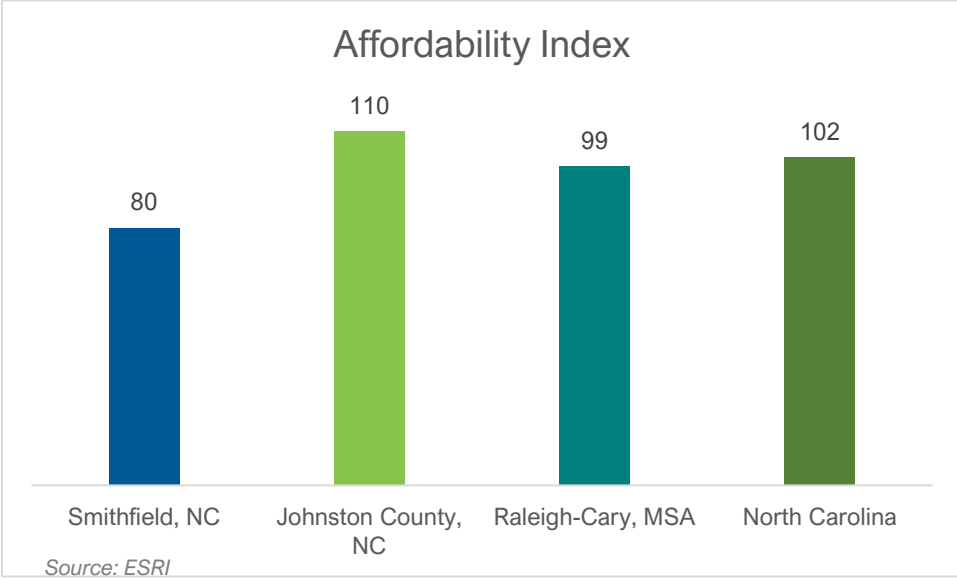
Source: ESRI

## SAT Scores



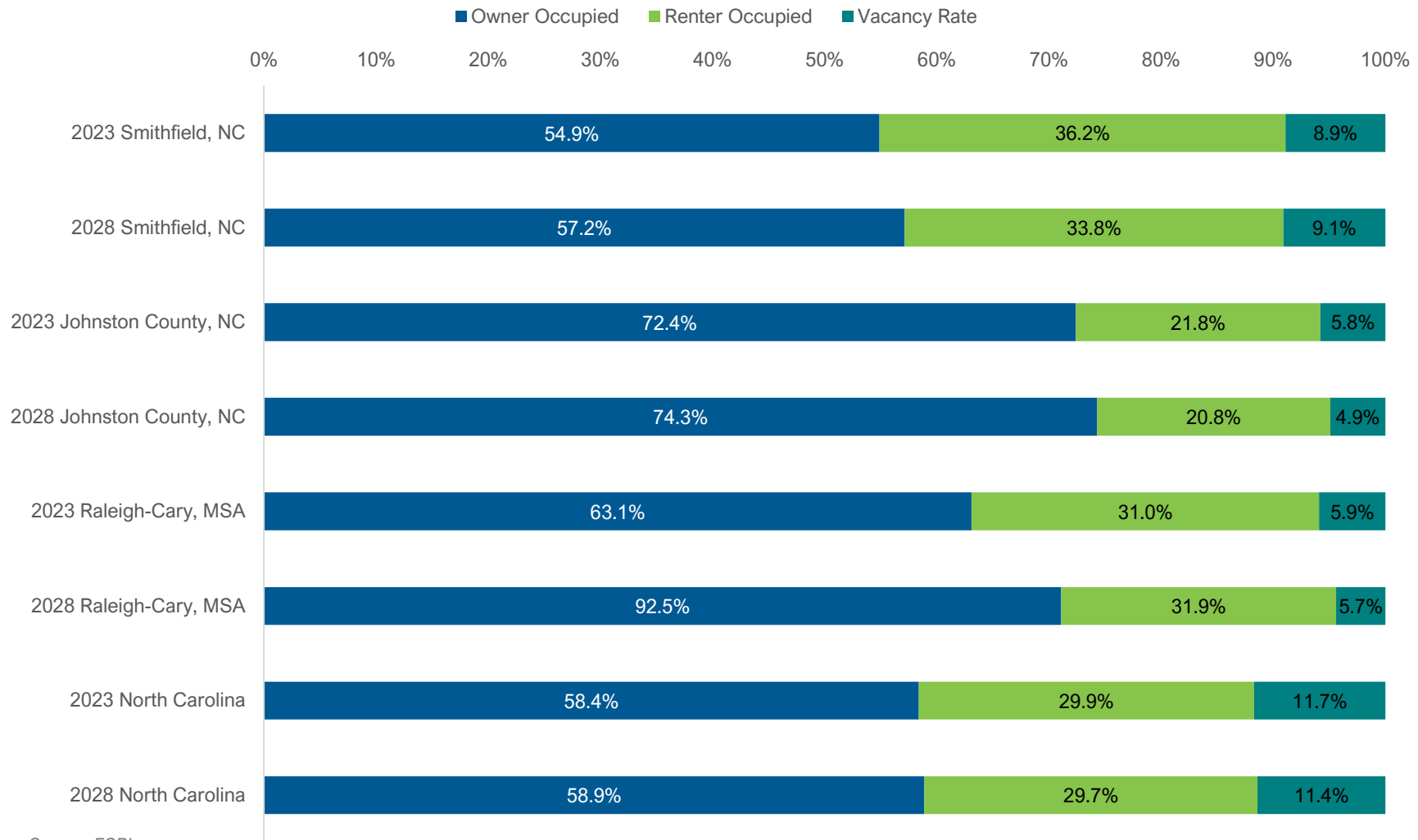
Source: NC Depart. of Public Instruction



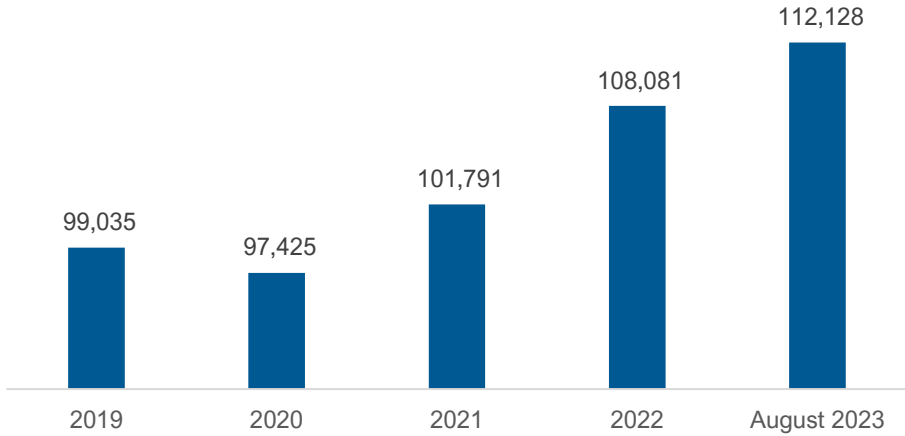




## Housing Availability Projections 2023-2028

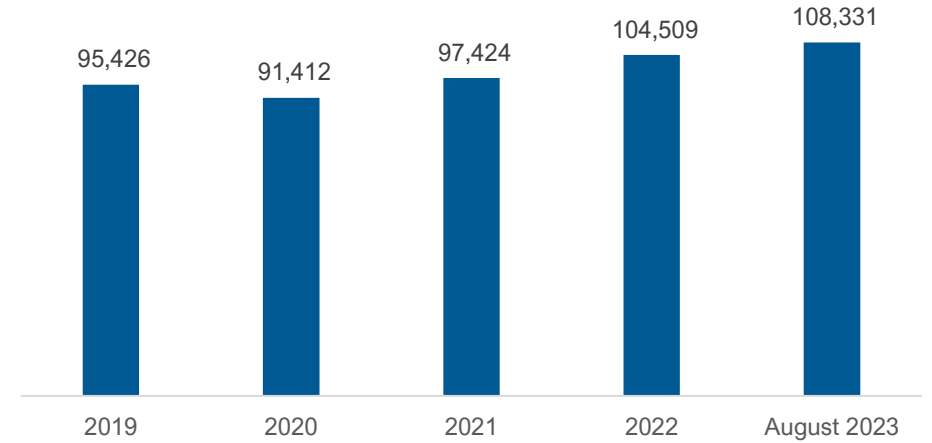


### Labor Force Johnston County, NC



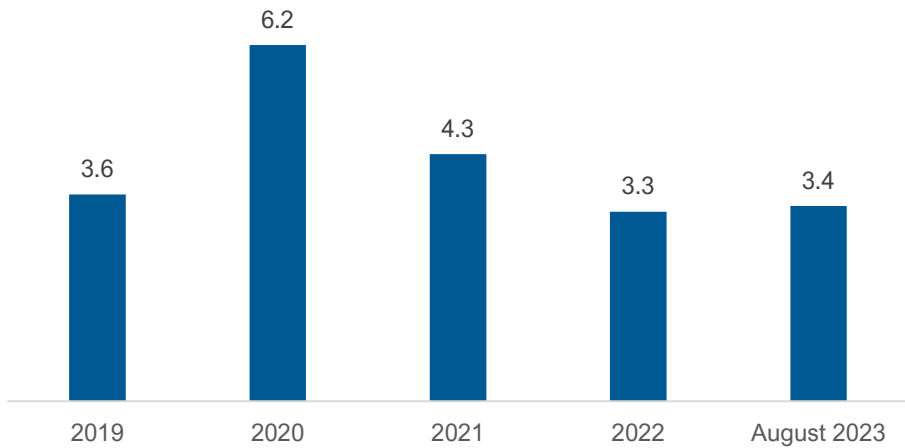
Source: NC Depart. of Commerce

### Employment Johnston County, NC



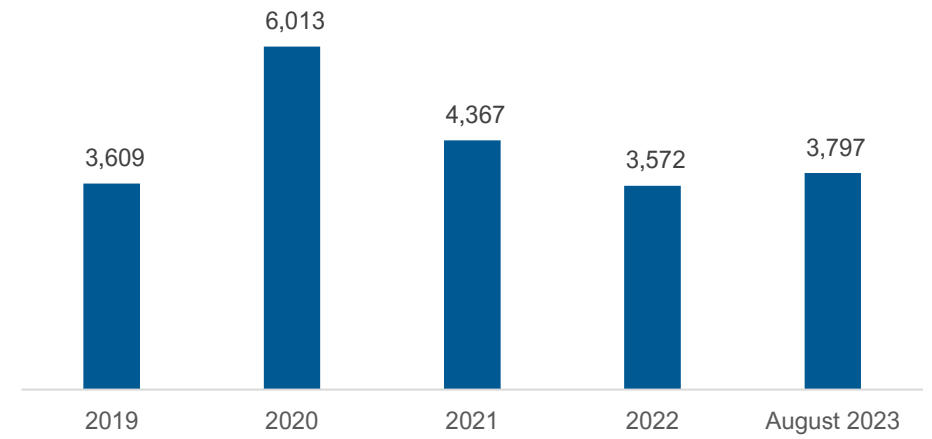
Source: NC Depart. of Commerce

### Unemployment Rate Johnston County, NC



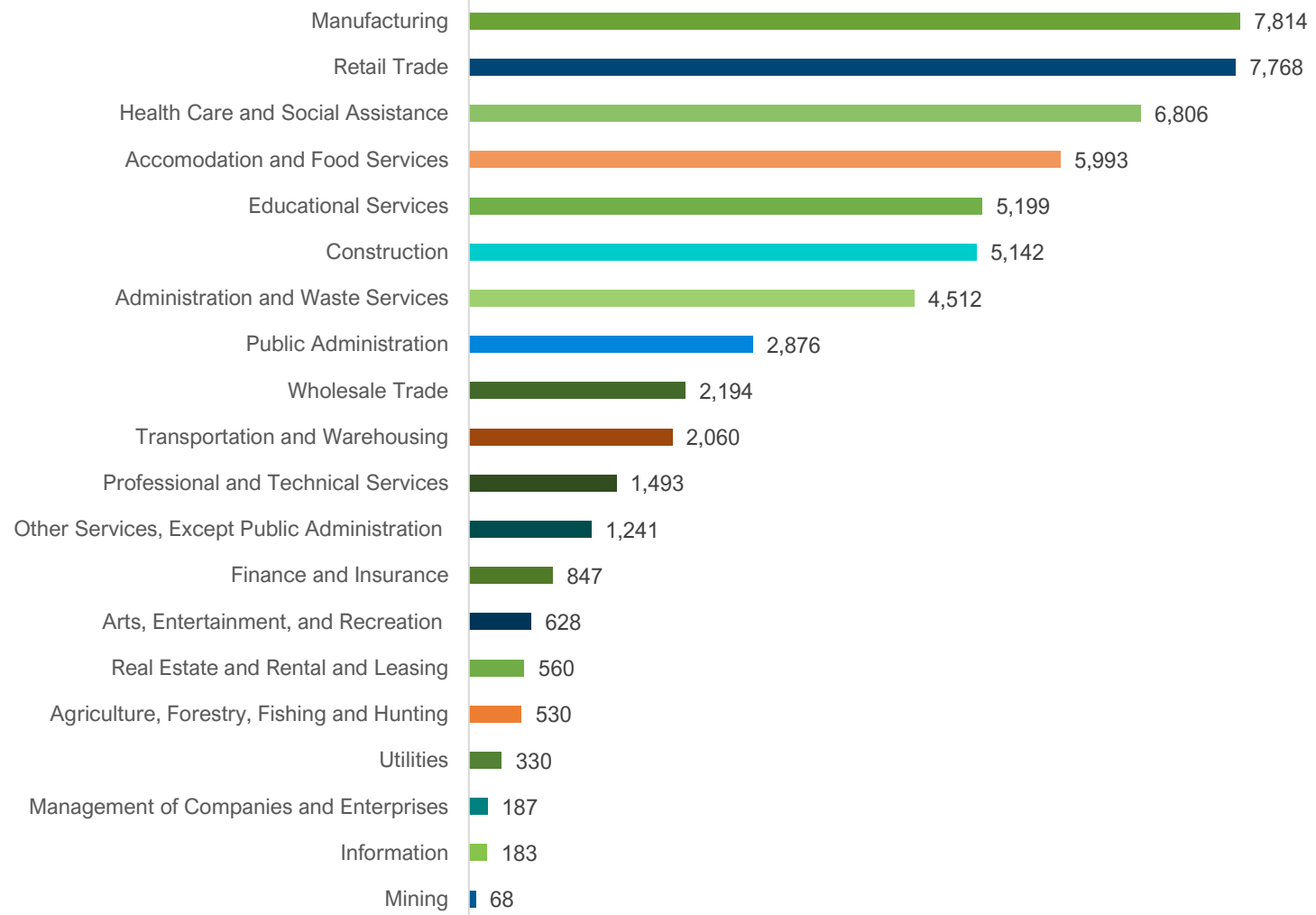
Source: NC Depart. of Commerce

### Number Unemployed Johnston County, NC



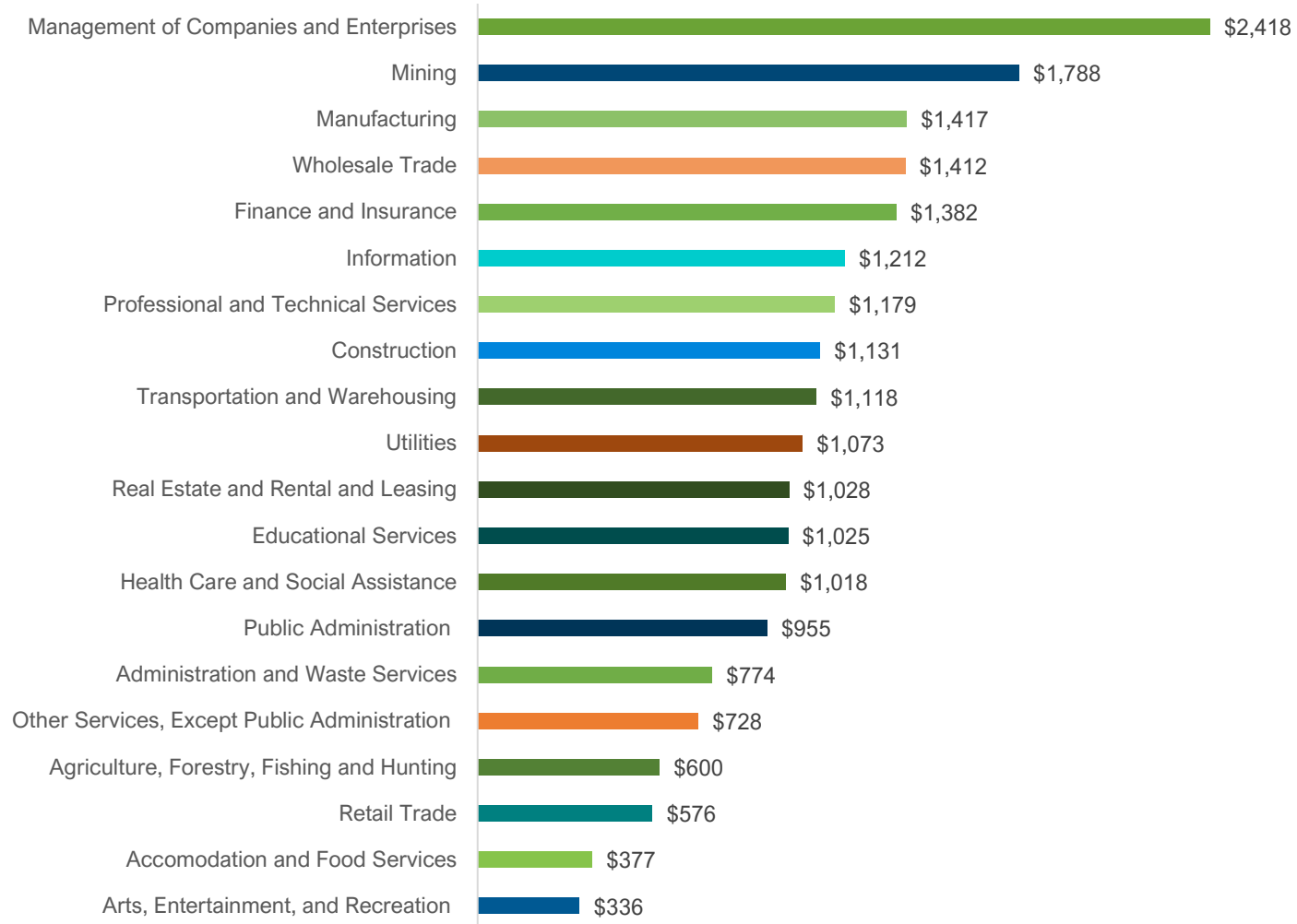
Source: NC Depart. of Commerce

## 2022 Johnston County, NC Employment Industry Sectors



Source: NC Dept. of Commerce

## 2022 Johnston County, NC Wages by Industry Sector



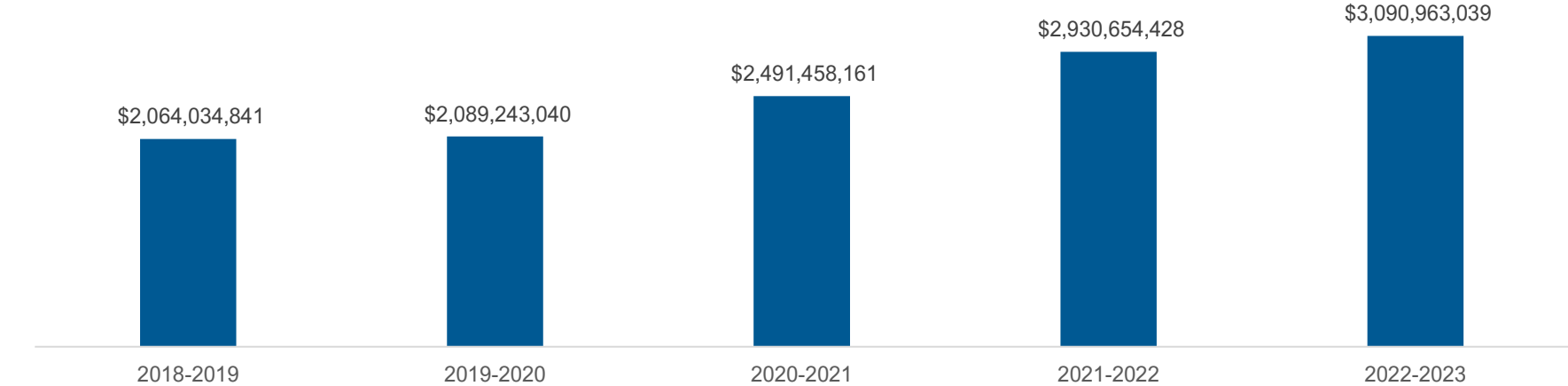
Source: NC Depart. of Commerce

## Johnston County, NC Major Employers 2023

Rank	Company Name	Industry	Employment Range
1	Johnston County Public Schools	Educational Services	1000+
2	Johnston Health	Health Care and Social Assistance	1000+
3	Industries LP	Manufacturing	1000+
4	County Of Johnston	Public Administration	1000+
5	Grifols Therapeutics Inc	Manufacturing	1000+
6	Asplundh Tree Expert LLC	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1000+
7	Food Lion	Retail Trade	1000+
8	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	Retail Trade	500-999
9	Caterpillar Inc	Manufacturing	500-999
10	Fastmed Urgent Care Pc	Health Care and Social Assistance	500-999
11	Johnston Technical Institute	Educational Services	500-999
12	McDonald's	Accommodation and Food Services	250-499
13	Precisionaire	Manufacturing	250-499
14	Coca Cola Bottling Company	Transportation and Warehousing	250-499
15	Sysco Raleigh LLC	Wholesale Trade	250-499
16	Executive Personnel Group LLC	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	250-499
17	OPW Fueling Components LLC	Manufacturing	250-499
18	Lowe's Home Centers Inc	Retail Trade	250-499
19	Airflow Products Company Inc	Manufacturing	250-499
20	Town Of Clayton	Public Administration	250-499
21	Express Employment Professionals	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	250-499
22	Carolina Comfort Air Inc	Construction	250-499
23	3c Packaging Inc	Manufacturing	250-499
24	Bojangles	Accommodation and Food Services	250-499
25	Nike Retail Service	Retail Trade	250-499
Source: NC Department of Commerce, D4			

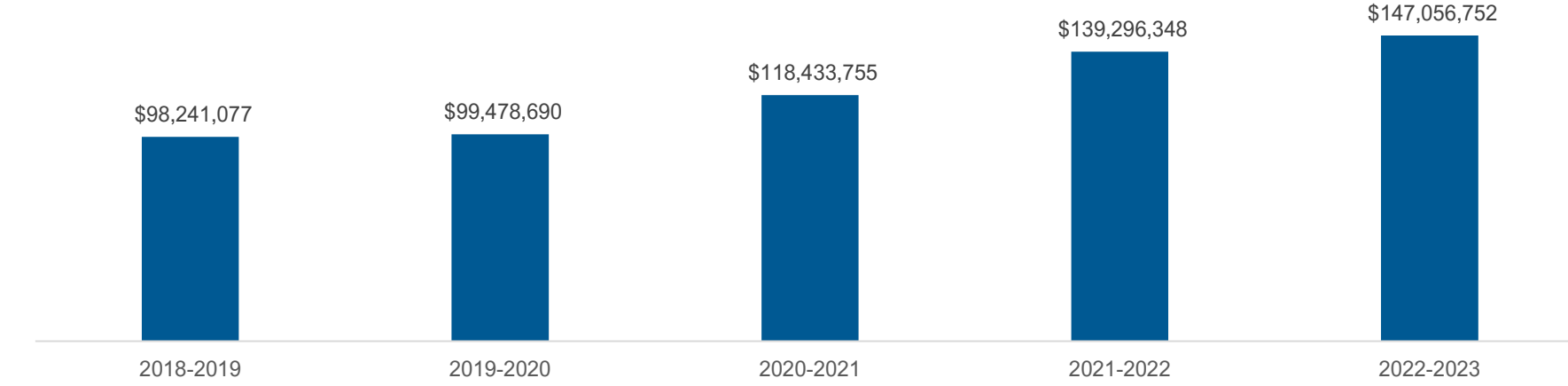
Note: This listing was downloaded in 4<sup>th</sup> Q 2023. As of spring 2024, Amazon is a major employer in Smithfield.

### Taxable Sales - Johnston County



Source: NC Depart. of Revenue

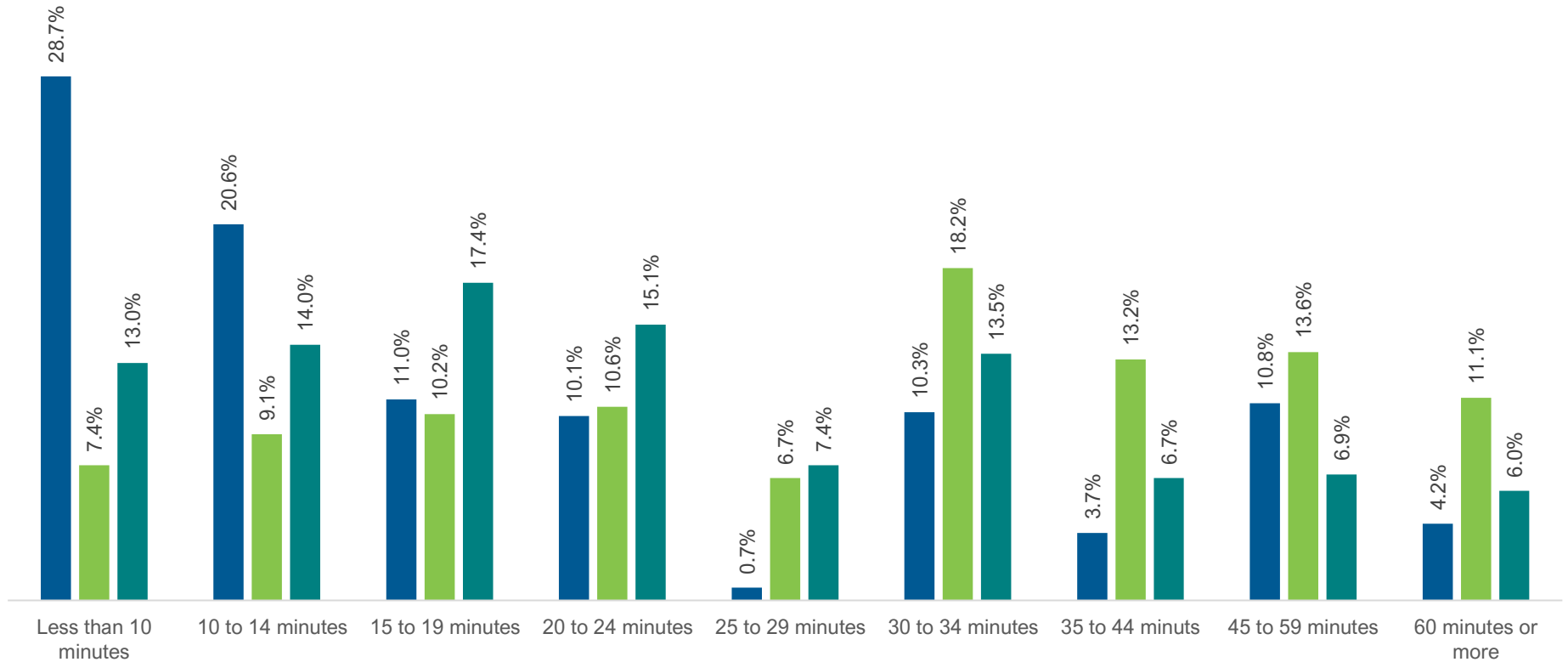
### Gross Collections - Johnston County



Source: NC Depart. of Revenue

## 2021 Average Commute Time

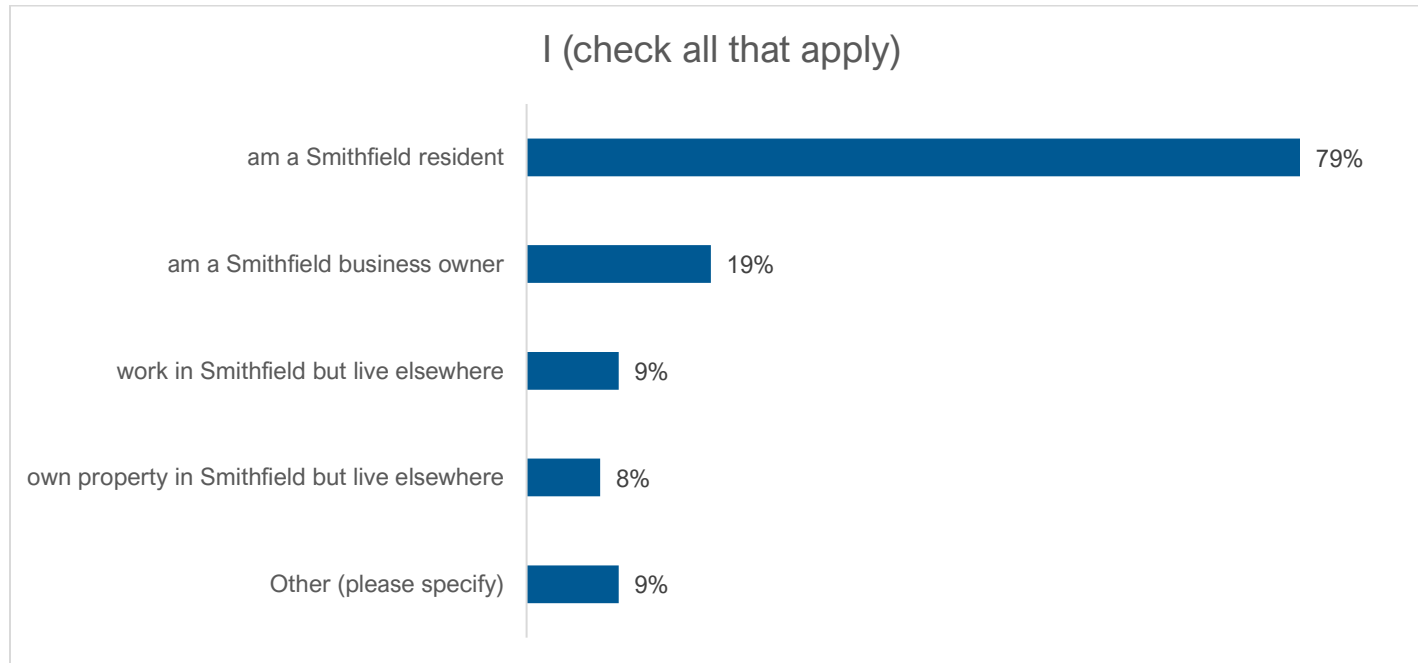
■ Smithfield, NC   ■ Johnston County, NC   ■ North Carolina



Source: US Census

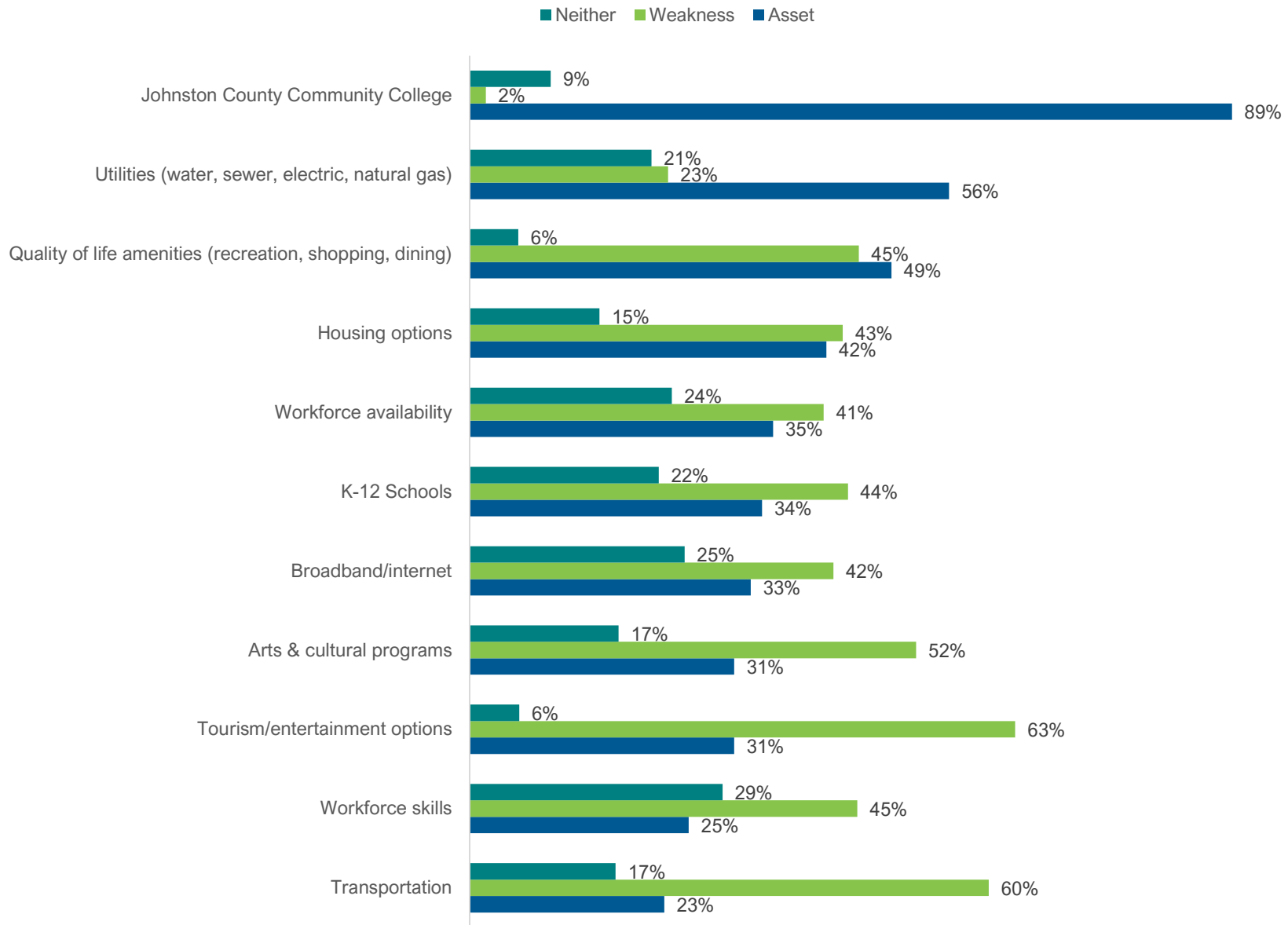
Commute Times are collected by the US Census Bureau and measure a worker's travel time from home to work.

# Appendix B: Community Survey Results

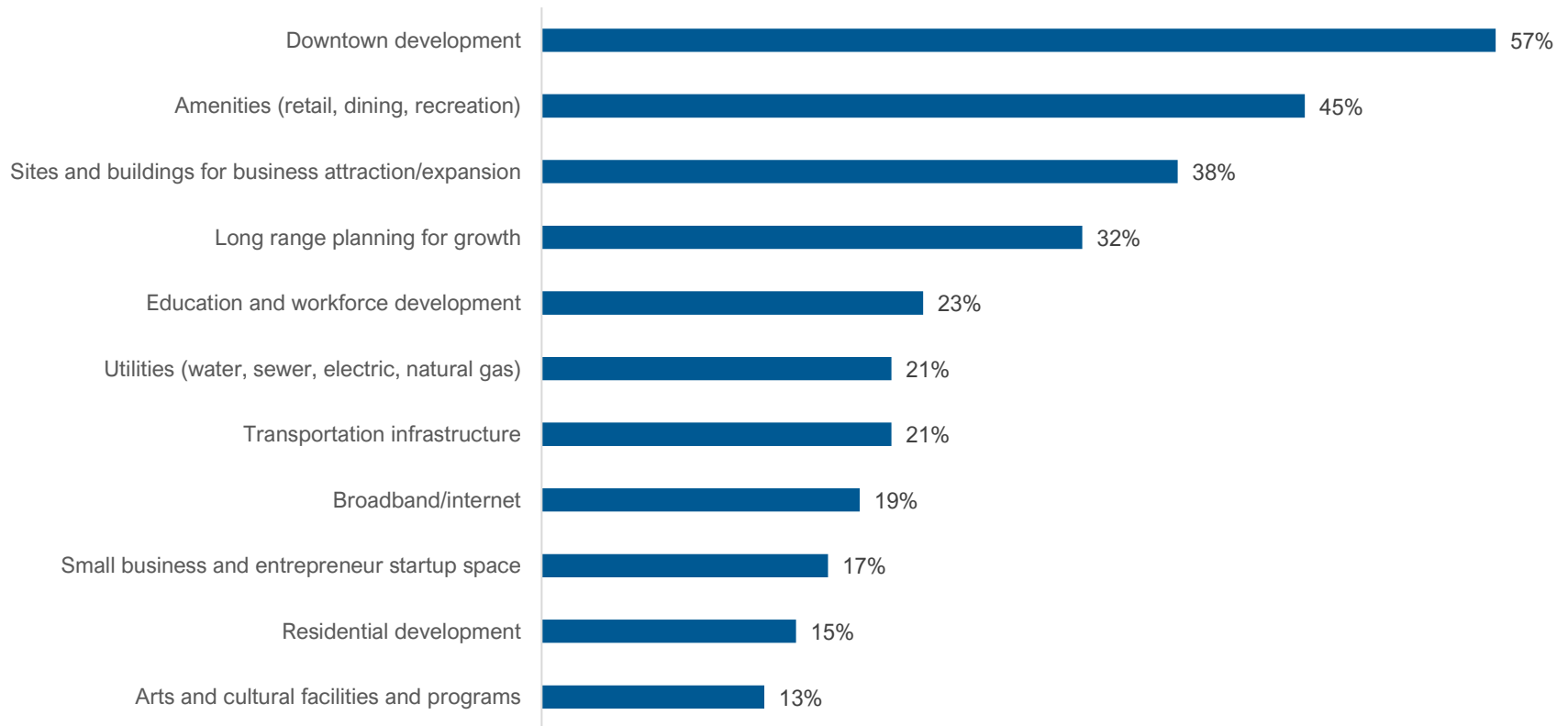




Please rate the following items as either an asset supporting economic development or a weakness hindering economic growth or neither.



What is the most important investment Smithfield could make to ensure long-term, sustainable economic growth? CHOOSE THREE.



**What is a model city for Smithfield - a place Smithfield can learn from? *Duplicates removed.***

I do not have one, I am basically happy with Smithfield.

Cooperstown, NY, Greenville SC, Portland, Me., Freeport ME,

Holly Springs

Athens, Ohio. Lots of events, great walkable space, cohesive downtown but also businesses who support each other throughout the town as a whole, and it's adorable

We love Raleigh, Cary, Holly Springs and Fuquay. They have lots of parks, outdoor eateries, very updated nice movie theatre, walkable cafes, restaurants, facilities for entertainment for adults (axe throwing, escape rooms, golfing, etc.) and for children (trampoline parks, go carts, basketball courts, etc.). We need basketball courts, nice places to walk and enjoy the weather, update old businesses.

North market commons north Myrtle beach. It was an old Air Force base. The work force now wants to shop, live, and play.

Garner. If we didn't have to drive there to spend money, we would stay here and spend it. I don't think Smithfield needs to have as much going on as Garner does, but a Target, better restaurants, and better shopping would be amazing.

Clayton or Kannapolis

Apex, Asheville, Selma is moving up, Goldsboro (Cry Freedom store & Laughing Cow Restaurant)

Clayton or Selma

Clayton. NC, Wake Forest, NC look at Milford or Waynesville Ohio

Clayton, Garner

Hillsborough, Oriental...any SMALL town. Bigger is NOT better

in our immediate region: Sanford perhaps; numerous others across the state and beyond

Apex/Holly Springs/Fuquay Varina/Wake Forest

West Jefferson

McDonough, Georgia is a small THRIVING city that is very similar to what Smithfield could be.

Greenville SC

Clayton, Hendersonville, Cary.

Sykesville Maryland, Apex, Wendell

Wendell (just visit one Friday night).

Wilmington

**What is one thing that Smithfield's does better than other towns?**

Its "Mayberry" appeal
Complain that nothing changes but then does nothing to change anything.
events in the downtown area
Housing prices.
Safety of citizens?
I think Smithfield is an upcoming town, I believe Smithfield listens to what their residents want and I hope to see a lot of greenery, new business, beautiful roads to match the new beautiful homes being built. We need lots of parks, for older teenagers (basketball court, baseball field, soccer, etc.) and for little kids (swings, slides, open spaces to run around, jungle gym, climbing areas, etc.)
Infrastructure is well maintained
Seem open to new ideas
Have cricket hotdogs!
Electric rates
Overall respect for all the people.
The police force and fire dept are incredible. Bravo.
Keep the streets clean
Sanitation
County seat - courthouse
in recent years: parks & recreation developments
Still has a hometown feel in spite of growth
Proximity
I can't think of anything. But. Smithfield has potential with the right planning.
The wonderful third street eatery.
Giving it the local charm!
Small town gossip ;)
Excellent utilities. Our electric crews do an amazing job keeping the power on. Also our sanitation workers are great!
Provides quality and timely information about local events
Ham & Yam (I have been since I was a kid and now bring my own kids)
Downtown
Police and fire support
Location

## What outcome would you like to see from the strategic plan?

a real plan to make our schools better. And a plan to increase home ownership.

The plan is implemented.

A long range vision with clear , tangible deliverables with backing with financial capacity and human capital to make it happen.

growing the population and filling business/retail spaces

Promoting and having a vision for the future of the Town and not rest waiting for "something to happen."

Rapid development and increased attention to infrastructural needs as growth rates increase.

To become a space people love to visit. To be a home where residents can enjoy plenty of time without having to leave town. To have a community that supports one another

I would love to see many parks with basketball courts, walking trails, soccer fields, baseball fields, jungle gyms, swings, slides. Updated movie theatre like in Holly Springs (AMC theatre) we drive 40 mins to Holly Springs to see a movie and I would love to spend that money in our own town! Better roads & highways, shopping stores and cafes and restaurants downtown and just make Smithfield a beautiful place to live.

Economic growth

A rise in quality of life.

not to lose the small town atmosphere. don't become overcrowded

That Smithfield is a destination for visitors and provides higher quality attractions and services to residents.

More business downtown and a place for kids to enjoy

I would like the outcome to be that the Town recognizes its potential in both residential and commercial opportunities. The Town should clean up its major corridors (70 East and West).

Growth of Downtown with unique small businesses and somehow grants to help them get started especially if rent does not come down or utilities or taxes.

A Wegmans, Whole Foods or Trader Joe's in the plans

Better roads, more stop lights, more cell phone towers

sidewalks! bike lanes

Great grocery stores and family restaurants

Long term planning that promotes balanced growth and sets strict standards for residential

Action

More young people/families moving and working here. Schools would benefit also.

a push for leaders to get on with it!

Changes made to our schools through the school board better understand their negative impact on our community.

A long term development plan that allows us to be proactive in taking advantage of strategic growth opportunities rather than being reactive. Would really like to see more of an emphasis on our parks and recreation opportunities for youth development.

Development of local attractions, restaurants, to bring people downtown at night - date nights, girls night, etc. I would love to see the run down houses across from the riverfront amphitheater turn into a group of restaurants/bars.

Making downtown a more people friendly place.

I'd like to see a real plan that involves business owners and Residence owners that live in this community. And people in power that listen and work with the people that want this to be the best place to live and visit.

I would love to see an upgrade in housing and less empty commercial buildings. A thriving downtown that does not shut down when the sun sets. We have the perfect location to make all of this happen.
County offices are representative of the county. We're the fastest growing county and our offices are insufficient. Being the county seat, Smithfield needs help from the county.
Focus on local, focus on keeping us small but impactful
Values of existing homes to increase
Less excessive landscape requirements. Businesses all around town are so overgrown with all the landscaping that the town required, that you can't see the business from the street.
Diverse population and increased community involvement
Someone with a vision being involved. Get rid of people who have been here forever and are unwilling to change the way the town looks and feels.
Splashpad/ Playground similar to Clayton's (yes, we have visited the Smithfield one) / hometown local restaurants/breweries in a walking district (similar to downtown Wendell)... local Bakery, outdoor dining, downtown brewery, etc.
More upscale housing and higher end restaurants.
Growth through jobs!
Growth and jobs at the \$100,000 level
Achieve a plan that brings in middle class people. Not a housing plan that brings in low end housing that will be slums in 15 years

**Please make any additional comments here.**

If one is coming to Smithfield from RDU the entrance to Smithfield is not attractive. There are communities in New England and along the Great Lakes that are attractive to enter. Brightleaf suffers from what appears to be a lack of planning. Visually it's overwhelming and difficult to see what businesses exist.

The town needs to get revenue. At some point the town will need to find ways to increase revenue for economic development and that might have to mean taxes. Don't be shortsighted, as you grow in size and the demand on infrastructure grows if you don't gain new revenue you will always come up short.

The highway and street improvements are good. More street lights in some of the rural areas.

My family and I just want to be able to do the things we enjoy, without driving 30-60 mins to Raleigh, Hollys Springs, Cary, Fuquay Varina. We desperately need shopping centers, cafes, walking areas, lots of parks, entertainment for adults and children, especially teenagers. Thank you so much for asking us residents what we would like to see and what we think will help.

Housing is a large issue. Keep mind my family resided there for over 50 years. Without job opportunities you have zero. Smithfield has been a low paying area for many many years. That is why when we went off to college we left. You cannot live on a 10.00 an hour salary.

I love Smithfield and not against growth, but we need more than just housing going up. Schools are getting full and have to go out of county for shopping and fun activities.

It would be great to get another cell tower or two, or whatever it would take to get better reception.

We need better grocery stores. Better restaurants, less fried food spots.

Please allow backyard chickens

Need a plan to keep the street and roadsides mowed. Litter pick up is desperately needed. Roads need paving. Too many corporate chain stores and restaurants. Preserve the historical homes and structures. The cookie cutters on Buffalo road are awful, please don't approve any more.

The trucks and speeding on Main Street is horrible. Police must issue tickets for it to improve - signs don't work!

We need more attractions to draw industry and residents into the town. More restaurants in downtown and more events.

Smithfield needs to control the direction of the development; not let the development control the direction. We also need more investment in local youth sports and recreation programs. Smithfield can barely even field youth sport leagues because of everyone playing out of town at better organized locations such as Cleveland, Princeton, etc. Being the county seat and highest population base, this is shameful.

Smithfield has so much potential! We need our community's support and a consistent vision! We don't need to do things the "cheap" way but build things long lasting. Ex. The houses near the little brown jug, that's what we need to see more of.

Smithfield has great opportunities to make this place better. We can be a place that families want to come spend their time and stay. Make it a better place to be. Stop the downtown trucks and make it a great place to walk around town. I moved to downtown several years ago hoping to see growth. Taxes are high here and we want to be in a place we are so proud of. Smithfield can get there! Let's do it!

We absolutely love living in downtown Smithfield but certainly look forward to town-wide improvements. Also thank you to all of the town workers; they always do a phenomenal job.

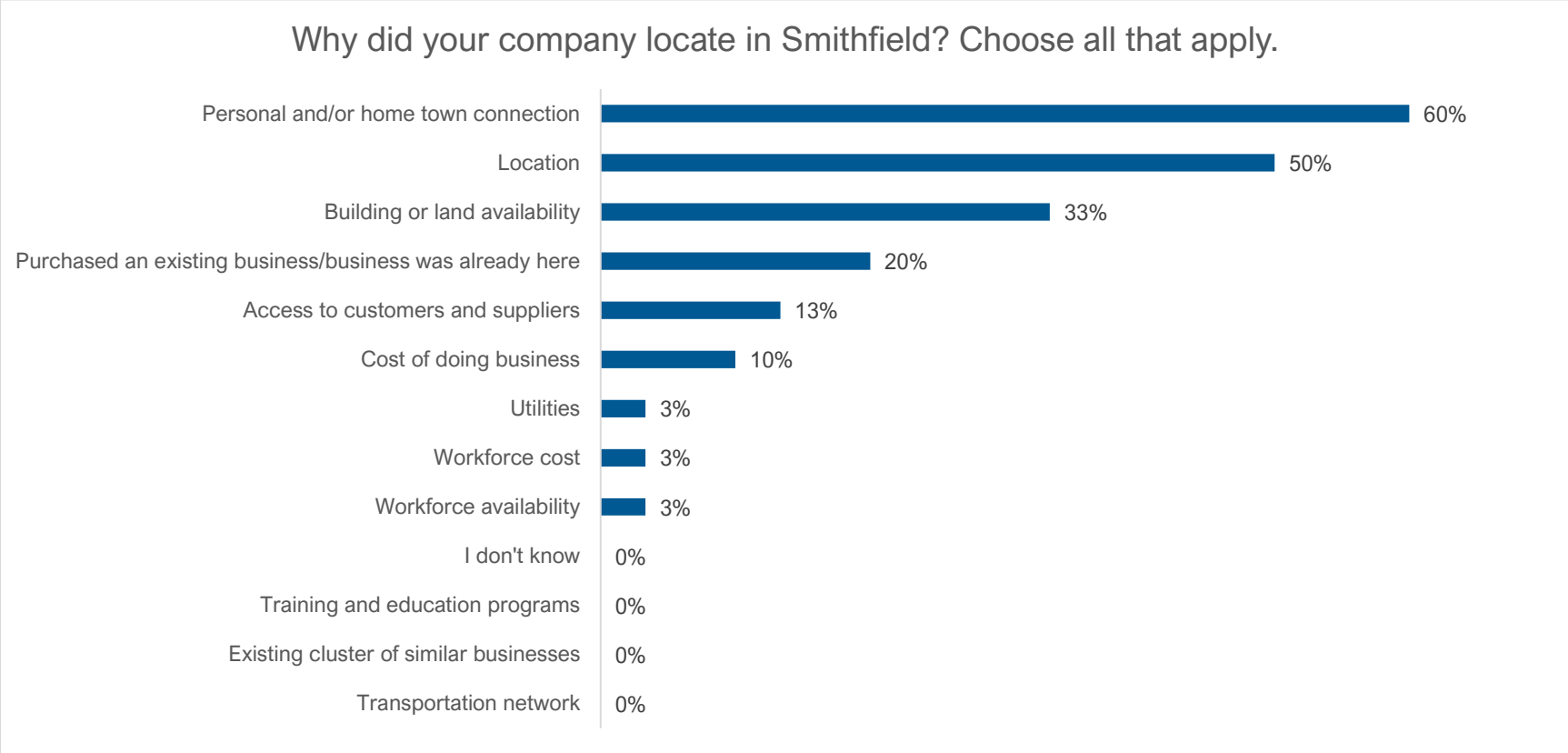
I love this town so much!

Become more business friendly. This includes excessive utility deposits and planning/zoning approval requirements. Consider one stop permitting.

We desperately need a higher end steakhouse.

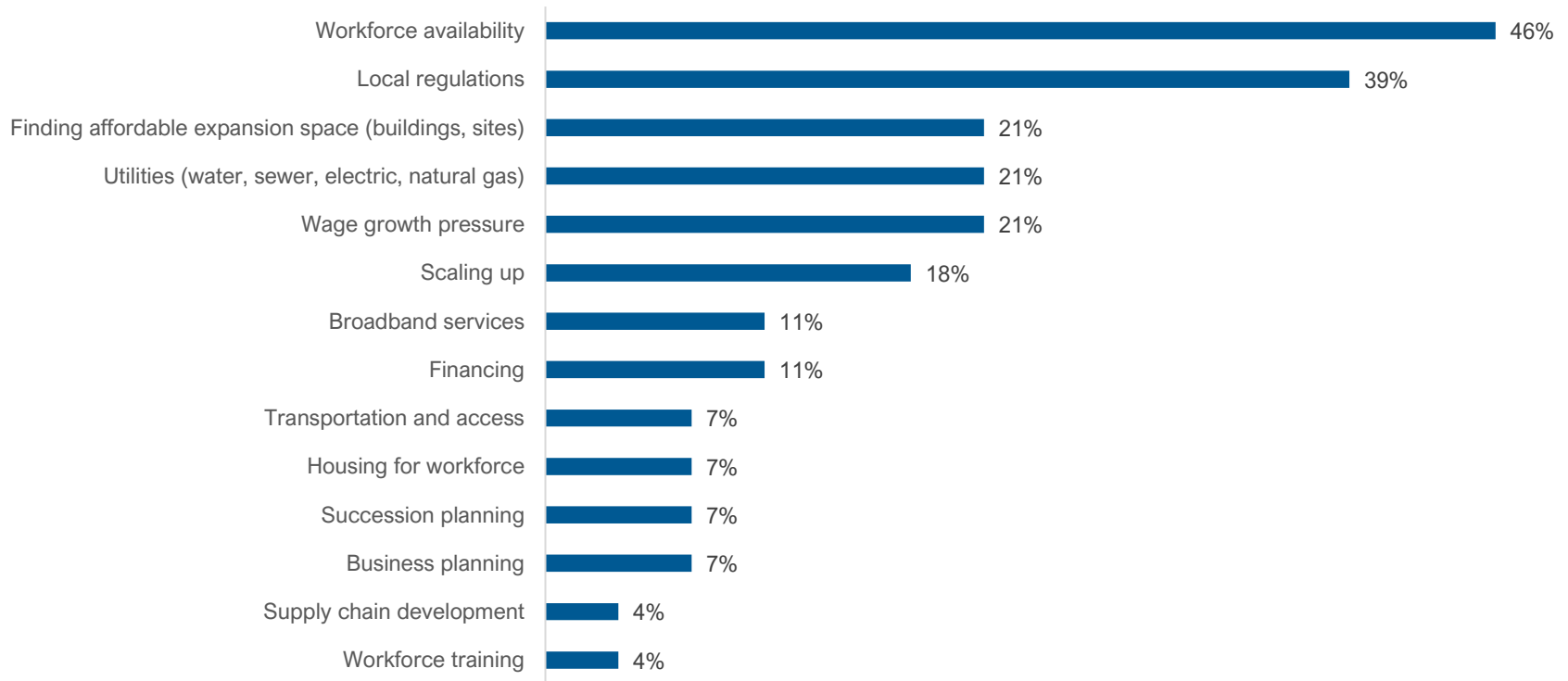
Let's build a Materiel Recycling Facility. Let's build an amusement park.

# Appendix C: Business Survey Results

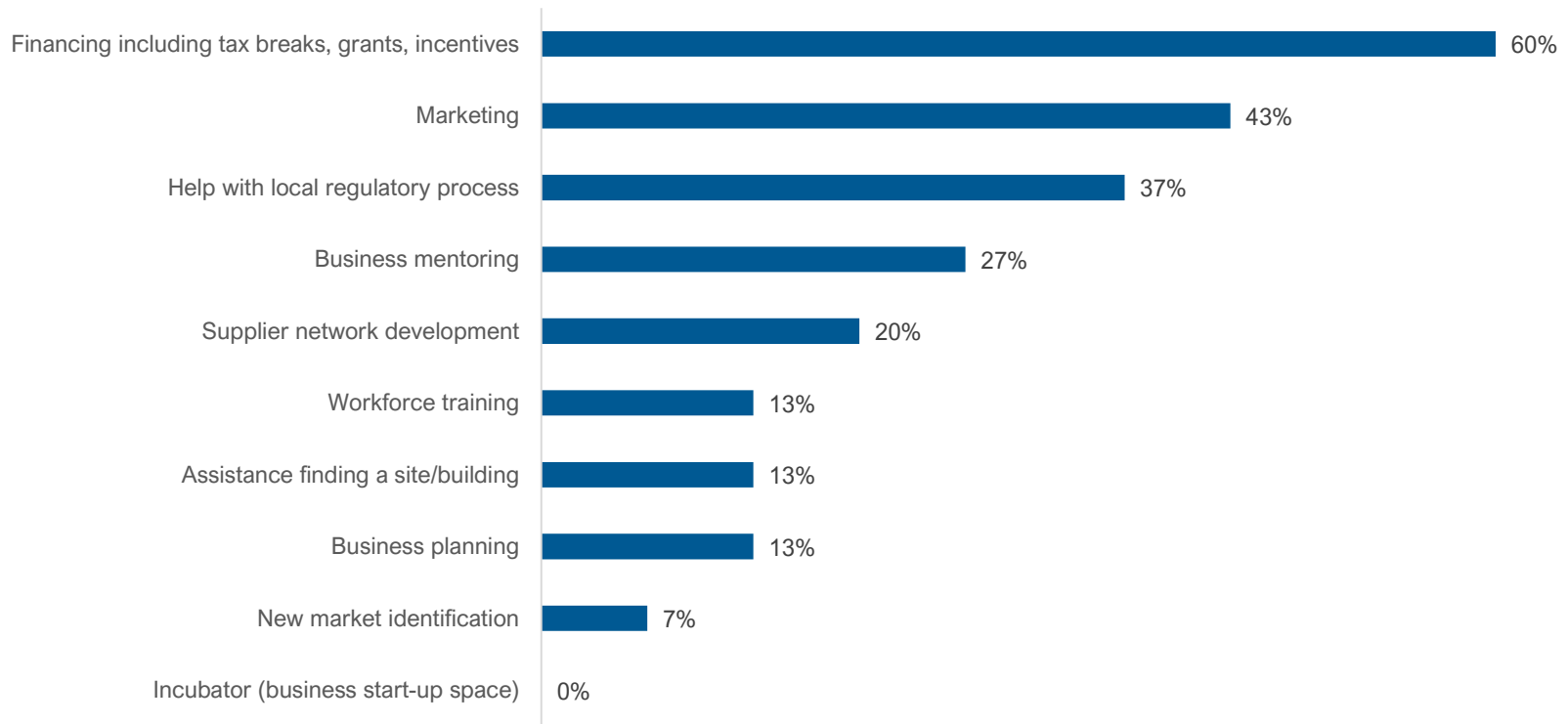




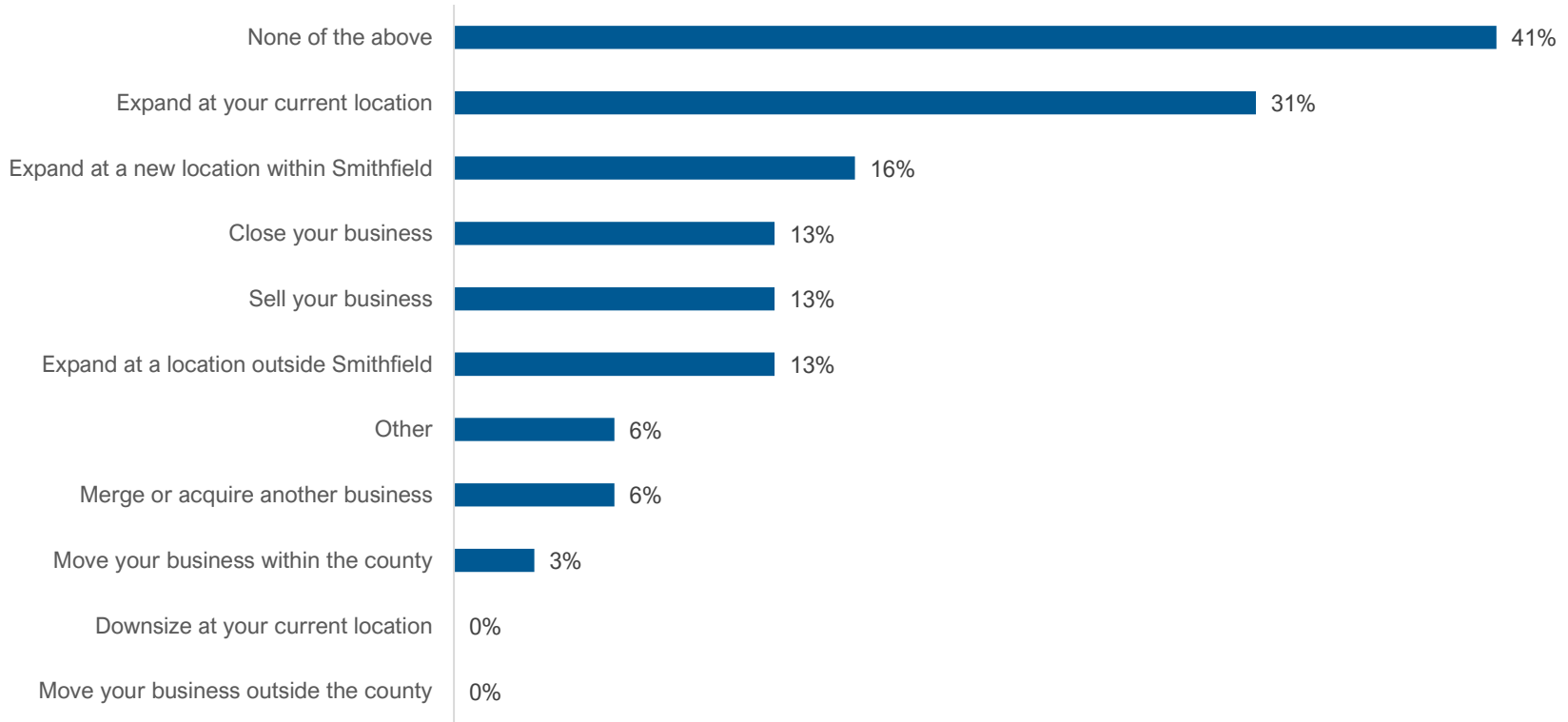
What are your main challenges to sustaining and growing your business? Choose all that apply.



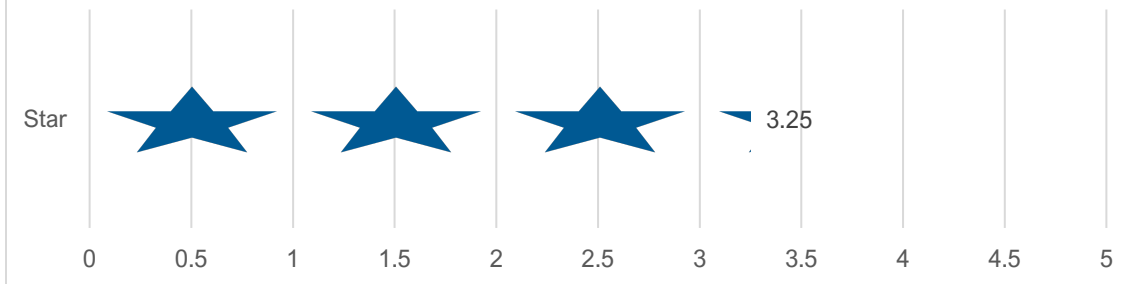
What business assistance would have been helpful when you started your business or that you believe would be helpful to a new business starting in Smithfield today?  
Choose all that apply.



### Are you currently planning to... Choose all that apply.

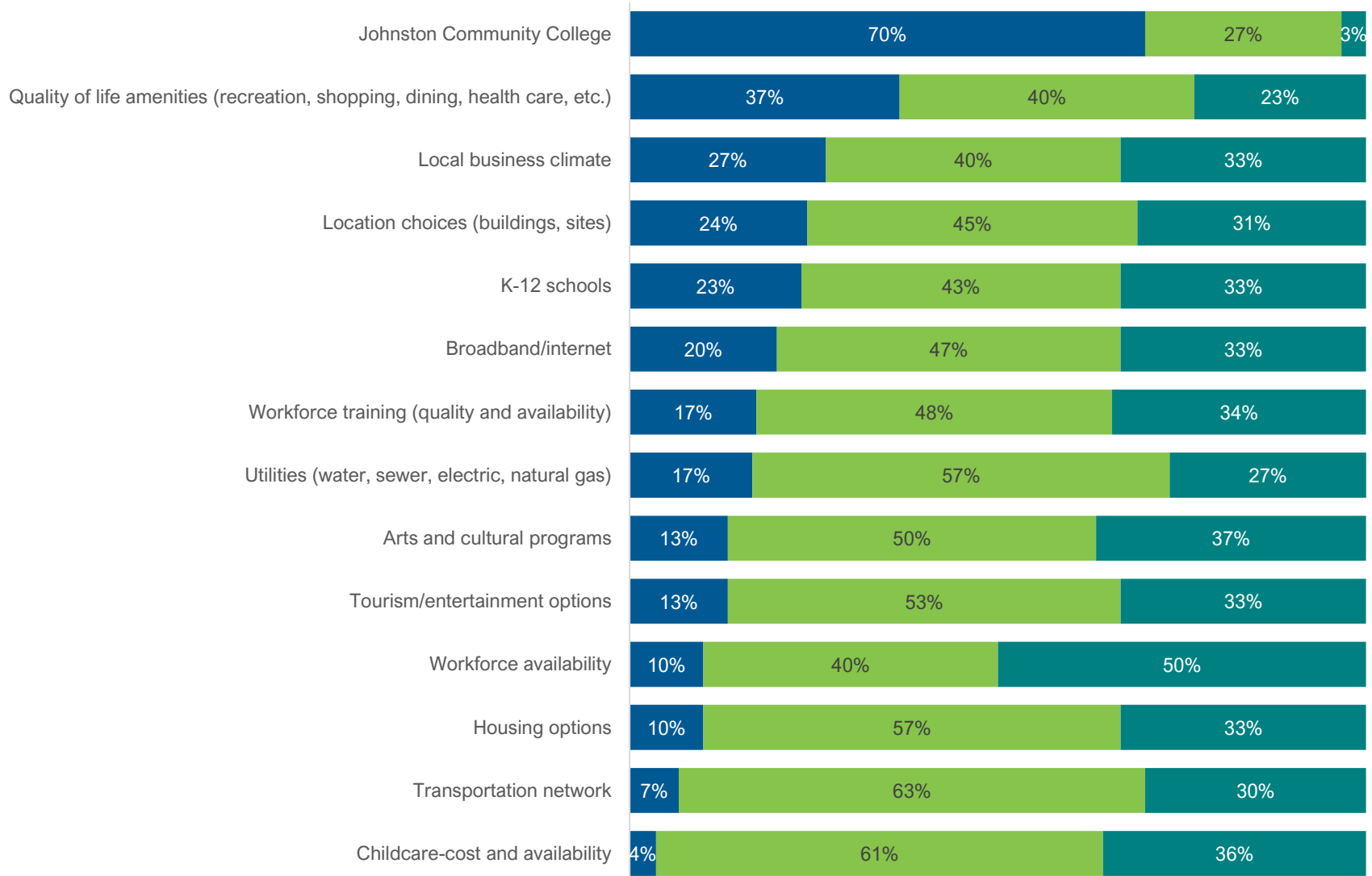


### Rate the business-friendliness of the Town of Smithfield

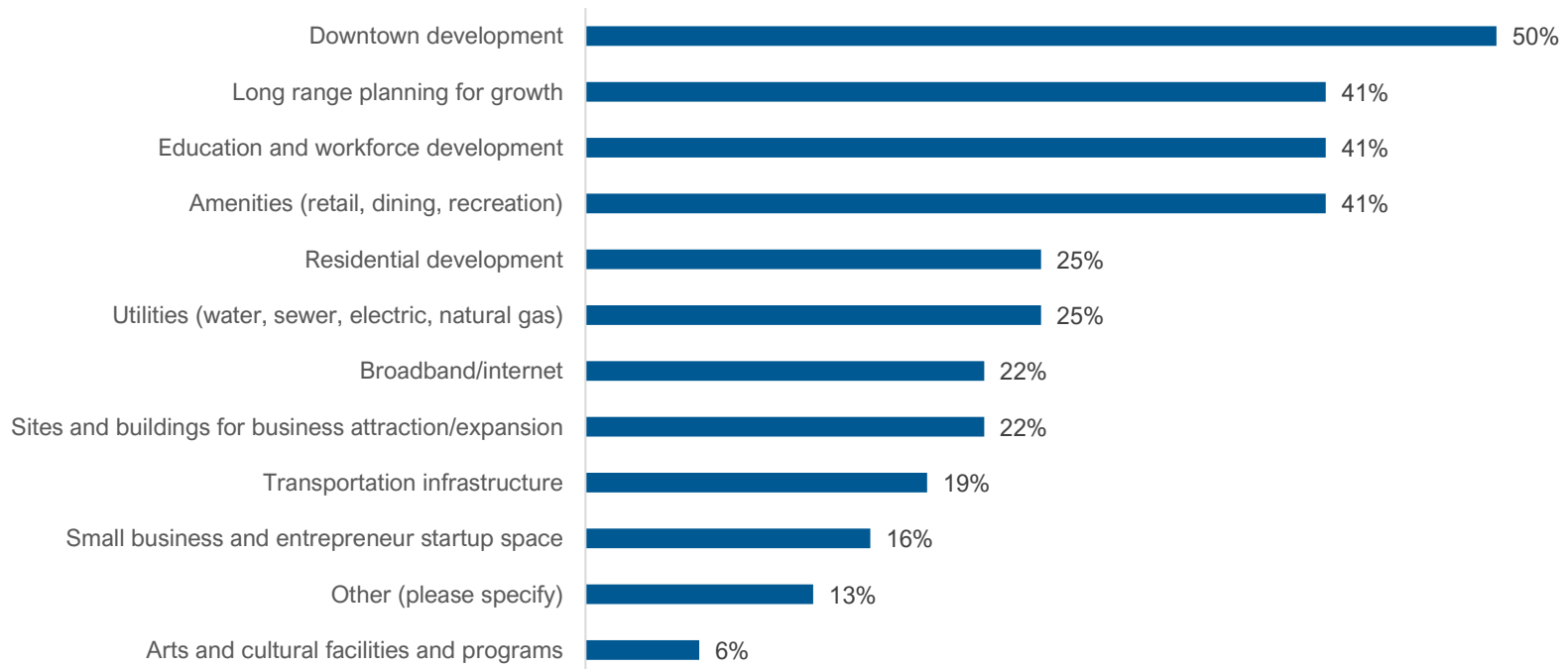


From a business perspective, rate the following as strengths, weaknesses, or neither.

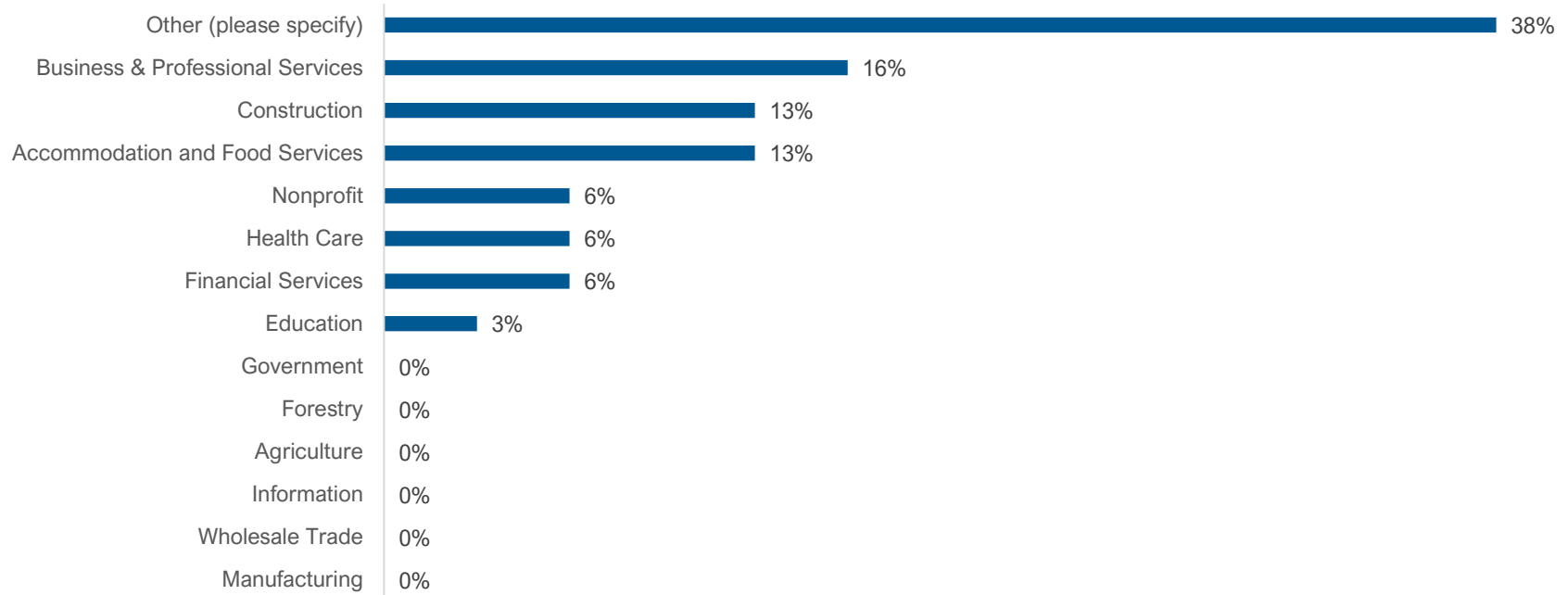
■ Strength ■ Neither strength or weakness ■ Weakness



What is the most important investment Smithfield could make to ensure long-term, sustainable economic growth? CHOOSE THREE.

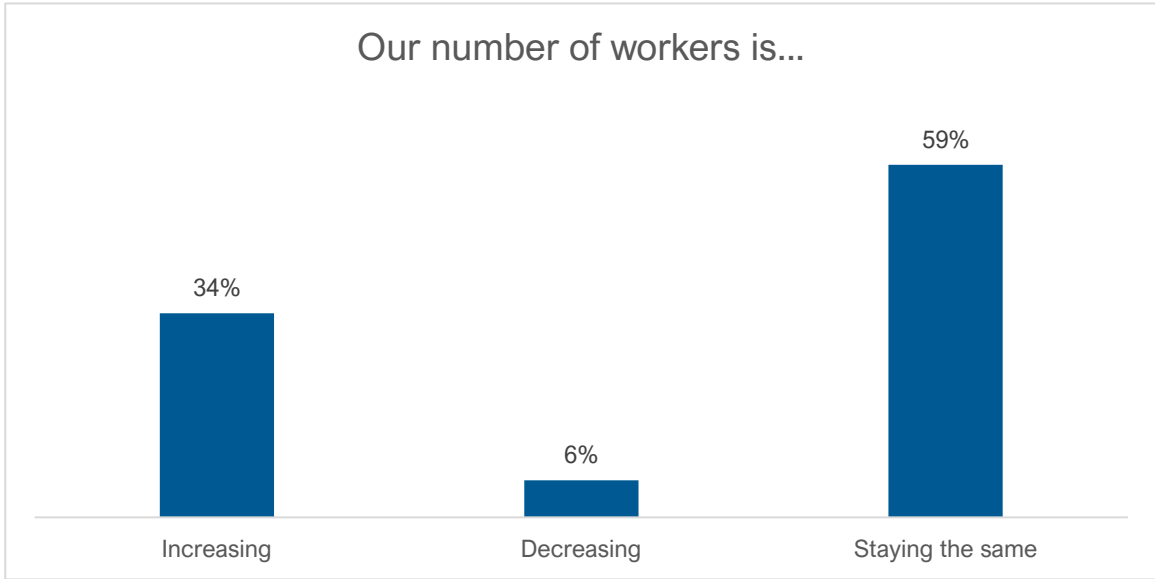
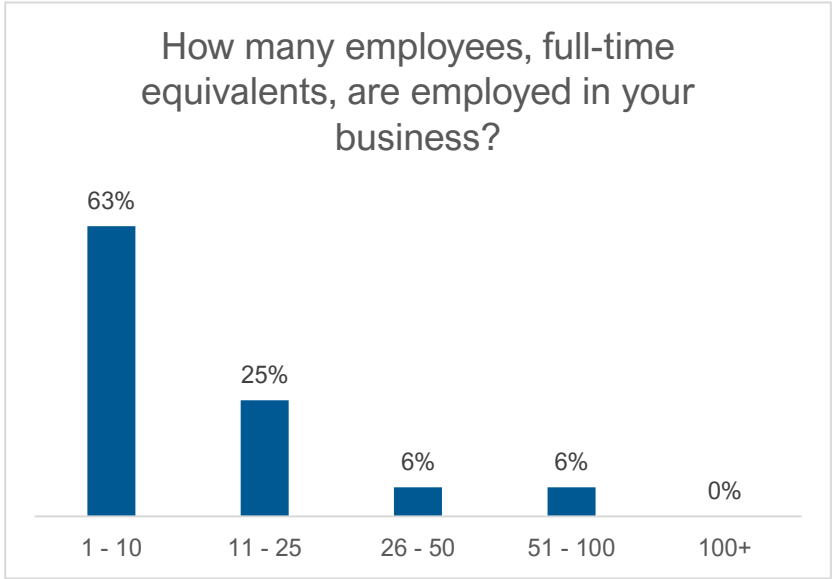
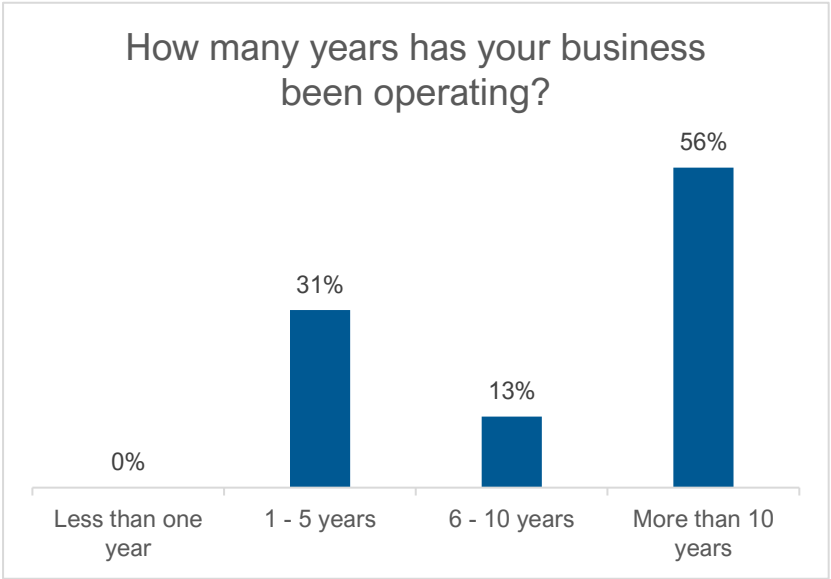


## What business sector most closely matches your business?

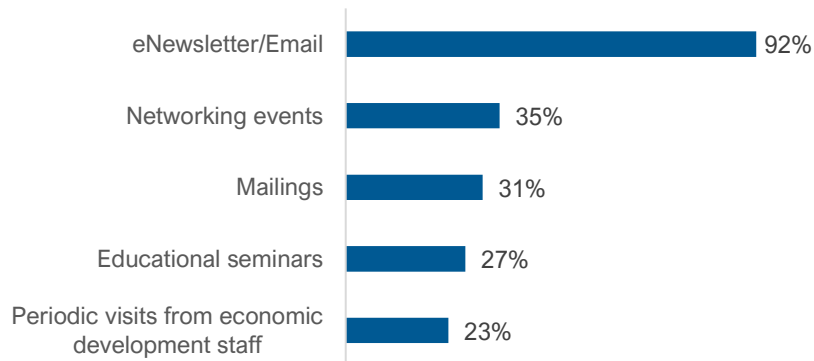


### Other (please specify)

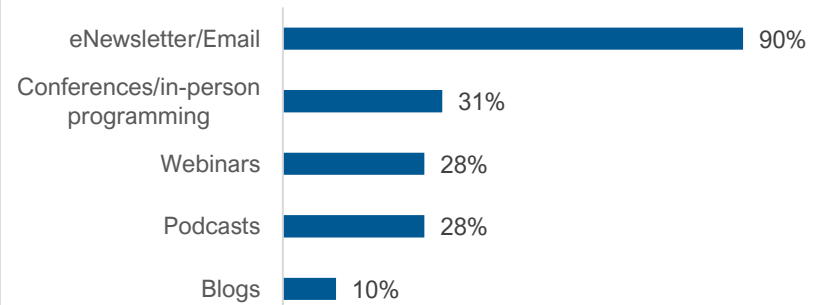
- Pest Control
- Fitness Martial Arts
- Organizing and interior design
- Machine and equipment fabrication
- entertainment
- Home Furnishings
- Retail
- Retail
- Recycling
- Hospitality
- Real Estate
- Retail



How would you like to be contacted with information from the Town?  
Choose all that apply.



What is your preferred method to consume information that can help you grow your business? Choose all that apply.



**Please share any additional information that you believe is important to the strategic planning process.**

The planning department checklist must be disposed immediately.

For any businesses that aren't located downtown in Smithfield it is very difficult to advertise. Each town has their own group and if you don't fit the group, you aren't supported unless you have money to join the Chamber and go to a bunch of events. We need more support for businesses on the outskirts and for businesses that don't have a brick and mortar.

Create market experience on river walk to attract visitors for weekend business

Reaching out to small businesses and requesting our feedback.

Embrace change once in a while. Don't be afraid of new ideas.

Making sure we have ways to get information out to local people and visitors about the small businesses. Leave maps in hotels of businesses.

We need communication. Grants for small businesses start up. Grants to fix buildings to rent out and bring up to date. Fix parking and traffic



# Study Sponsor and Consultant



ElectriCities of N.C. Inc. sponsored the Town of Smithfield Economic Development Strategic Plan. ElectriCities' economic development department offers a variety of services to promote NC Public Power communities to businesses and economic developers. It helps communities recruit business and industry by providing:

- ⊙ Target Marketing
- ⊙ Marketing/Collateral Assistance
- ⊙ Aerial Photography
- ⊙ Proposals for Prospects/Clients
- ⊙ Advertising Opportunities
- ⊙ Target Sectors
- ⊙ Trade Show Opportunities
- ⊙ Direct Marketing
- ⊙ Retail/Commercial Developments

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