



**PARTNERS IN PROGRESS**  
**April 2023 Status Report**

**Initiative 1 – Next Step Up Retail and Commercial Recruitment**

**Mission:** As the lead organization, convene and form partnerships with developers, builders, community organizations and the public sector to identify opportunities, develop strategies and execute programs that will result in the ability of developers and builders to provide new retail, commercial and residential development in the Alexander City region.

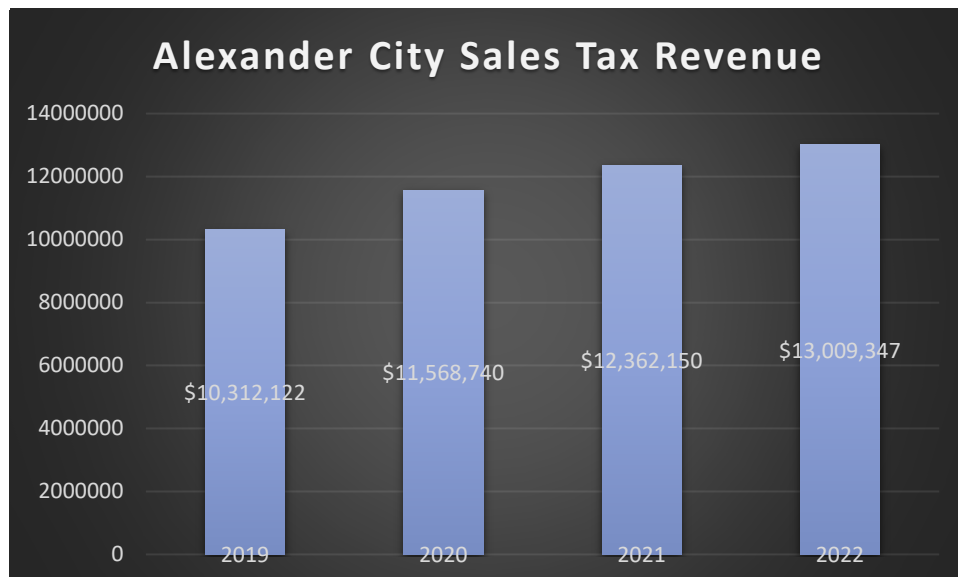
**Outcomes:**

1. Two new retail and/or commercial projects underway by 2021.
  - Projects we have taken a lead role on through direct recruitment or supported through indirect recruitment.
    - ✓ Although we experienced a slight interruption in activity during early-mid 2020 in onset of the COVID pandemic, developers, tenant representatives and retail site selectors remained interested in the market.
    - ✓ Scooter's Coffee was approved for incentives in November 2020 and opened in Jan. 2021.
    - ✓ Chick-fil-A was approved for incentives at the end of 2020 and opened in November 2021.
    - ✓ A grocery-anchored shopping center was approved for incentives in the summer of 2021. Under that agreement, the developers had until the end of 2023 for the project to be opened. At the request of the developers, the City extended the development incentive agreement in the spring of 2022, giving the developers until the end of 2024 for the project to be opened.
    - ✓ Wharf Casual Seafood was approved for incentives in January 2021 and opened in February 2023.



## Next Step Up Retail and Commercial Recruitment continued...

2. Recruit 15 new-to-the-market retail/commercial businesses by 2024.
  - Projects we have taken a lead role on through direct recruitment or supported through indirect recruitment
    - ✓ Scooter's Coffee, Chick-fil-A, Wharf Casual Seafood, Alex City Nutrition (site location assistance), Phoenix Physical Therapy (site location assistance), The Local at 41 Main, The Square (Alana's Place, Harper Grey, Sarah Bella Salon Spa, Lake Martin Tan Bar, Plasma by Pita, Integrative Massage), Lake Martin Pizza and Rita's Italian Ice on HWY 63 S (provided market information and data); Servpro, Exit Realty Anchor South and Burke's Outlet. Pending grocery-anchored shopping center could feature up to 10 new-to-the market retailers.
3. Maximize the environment to foster new retail, commercial and residential development by 2021.
  - Judging by the accomplishments above and ongoing interest/activity in the market, Alexander City is capitalizing on an environment conducive to new retail, commercial and residential development. Retail demand and growth is demonstrated by strong sales tax revenues\* to local municipalities and the county. Current and projected ad valorem revenues reflect ongoing residential projects on and around Lake Martin. More work is needed to help bring more middle-income and workforce housing to the market.



\*Figures provided by the City of Alexander City

4. Complete a builder/developer survey to best understand their needs to develop in Alexander City.
  - Completed July 2019. Feedback was used to help develop "Business Guidelines" document on best practices and recommendations for City of Alexander City. Results and guidelines were shared with City of Alex City Community Development and Mayor.

## Next Step Up Retail and Commercial Recruitment continued...

5. Focus on zoning and building regulations that promote growth, investment and new development.
  - Community Leadership Visits to Guntersville, AL (Lake Guntersville) and Greensboro, GA (Lake Oconee) were used to gain insight into other community best practices for zoning and building. These best practices, ordinances and philosophies have been shared with City and County leaders as well as advocated for through the Alexander City Planning Commission which Chamber President/CEO Jacob Meacham serves on. In partnership with Lake Martin Area EDA, the Chamber helped bring Auburn University's Master of Community Planning program to the market for projects focused on urban economics, land use planning, urban design, sustainable transportation planning, community development and historic preservation planning.



Community Leadership Visit 2019

6. Assist in creating incentive programs for developers and projects that meet specific criteria.
  - In partnership with City of Alexander City Council, Mayor's office and Community Development, we have created packages to incentivize development for projects that are high-demand retail and develop the economy by increasing the tax base and creating jobs.
7. Maintain strong relationships between public and private entities resulting in Alexander City's continued growth and development.
  - Throughout the duration of this campaign, the Chamber has maintained a strong position of influence in the community and a network beneficial to our community, our members and our organization. The Chamber maintains strong relationships with business leaders, agency/organization partners, Alexander City City Council, Mayor, Community Development, County Commissioners, state and federal elected representatives, volunteers, community advocates and educational partners.

## Initiative 2 – Existing Business Growth & Entrepreneurship

**Mission:** The Existing Business Growth and Entrepreneurship initiative will identify opportunities and develop strategies to best support the well-being and growth of our existing businesses and leverage the success of the Chamber’s Innovation Center to encourage and shepherd entrepreneurs as they build innovative start-up companies.

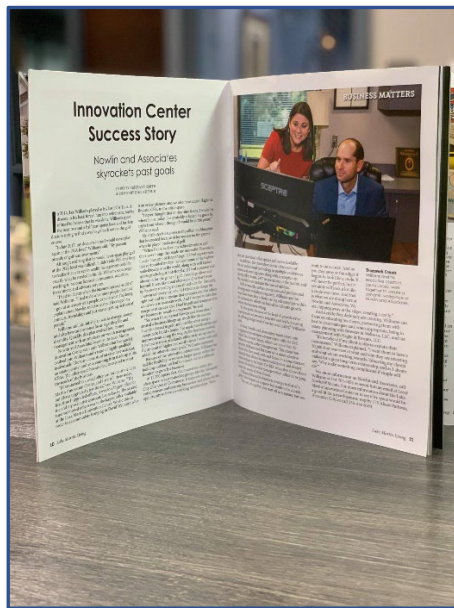
### Outcomes:

1. Through existing business and entrepreneurial programs and projects, create 70 new jobs in Alexander City over the next five years.
  - Through direct and indirect retail recruitment efforts, as well as entrepreneur support, the Chamber has helped create over 70 jobs in the community from the following businesses: Scooter's Coffee, Chick-fil-A, Wharf Casual Seafood, Alex City Nutrition, Phoenix Physical Therapy, The Local at 41 Main, The Square (Alana's Place, Harper Grey, Sarah Bella Salon Spa, Lake Martin Tan Bar, Plasma by Pita, Integrative Massage), Servpro, Exit Realty Anchor South and Burke's Outlet. Pending grocery-anchored shopping center could bring up to 10 new-to-the-market retailers with up to 200 jobs combined.



2. Host 4 professional development workshops annually to help grow and retain existing business.
  - Workshops provided have included topics such as Cloud Computing, Department of Labor / Career Center On-the-Job Training, Opportunity Zones, Series of Department of Labor / Small Business Administration seminars and workshops during pandemic related to businesses assistance support (4), Taking Care of Yourself - Work/Life Balance, Branding Your Business, Digital Must Haves, Social Media Do's and Don'ts, Alabama Department of Commerce Office of Apprenticeship Employer Workshop; 2023 remaining schedule in development.
3. Engage and provide services to 35 entrepreneurs and small business owners annually beginning in 2019.
  - Through the Chamber’s Total Resource Campaign, over 180 businesses annually are assisted in targeted promotion and advertising through Chamber business programs and special events. Promotion and advertising provide local businesses a platform for building their brand in the community, deepening relationships, reaching potential customers and promoting their goods and services.

- Data and market information is regularly provided to prospective and active entrepreneurs and small businesses. Services provided include start up consulting, marketing strategy, demographic deep dive, establishing connections and relationships, promotion, event support and job sharing.
- Local businesses of all sizes and types benefit from use of the Lake Martin Innovation Center as a membership service for using the work and meeting space which features conference rooms, meeting space, audio/visual presentation technology and high-speed internet which many businesses do not have on-site at their facilities. Over 500 meetings were held in 2022 alone at the LMIC.



4. Assist 8 businesses or organizations each year beginning in 2020 through the Innovation Center Executive Resources team.
  - There currently is not a locked-in Executive Resources team. Instead, through our relationships with business people in the community, we can pull in volunteers to consult and advise on an as-needed basis, covering areas such as financial planning, business structure, HR, IT, advertising and marketing, and operations.
5. Populate and manage an ongoing database of existing business employment needs and skillsets. Align those needs with Chamber programming and educational partners.
  - Surveys and interviews with local businesses inform our database. This information is used in our work with ACMS Advisory Council / BRHS Career Advisory and CACC Workforce Development programs. The emphasis for a large majority of businesses is on soft and basic employability skills with more in-depth training available in-house / on-the-job.
6. Compile a renewing and expanding database of Business Development needs based on survey of Chamber workshop attendees.
  - What will enable local businesses to further develop? This is ongoing and ever-changing and has been altered some during and since COVID; major needs identified are: talent attraction, understanding generational differences in the workforce, sales, public speaking, customer service, B2B sales development. Retail and restaurant businesses routinely indicate that more tourism and visitors to our community positively impact their businesses by diversifying their consumer base.

### Initiative 3 – Partnership with Education

**Mission:** As leaders of the business community, provide full support to the educational system in Alexander City in order to deliver the highest quality education and work skills training.

#### Outcomes:

1. Enhanced partnerships at all levels of education with local businesses and community leaders.
  - We maintain very close relationships with Alexander City Schools and Central Alabama Community College through educational programs and partnerships. The Chamber chairs the Benjamin Russell High School Career Advisory Council and participates in the ACMS Advisory Council. We lead the Choices program at Alexander City Middle School which is an interactive two-day program every year designed to help eighth graders learn about making good, career-minded choices as they prepare for and enter high school. We regularly participate and bring business involvement into schools for career exploration, mentoring, panels, workshops and career prep.



2. Partner with BRHS to engage a minimum of 10 students each year in the Wildcat Entrepreneur Academy.
  - The Wildcat Entrepreneur Academy experienced successful years in the early part of the campaign (2018-19). COVID interrupted the program in 2020 and 2021 due to restrictions on in-class visitors and out-of-class activities in the community which limited the opportunities for field trips, guest speakers, mentorships, panels and company tours. We worked within the restrictions to deliver what we could during those academic years. In 2022, we were able to implement the program in the traditional way. No students moved forward with the business pitch, but through field trips, guest speakers, panel discussions and in-class curriculum, we delivered the entrepreneurship elements of the program and blended in some workforce readiness topics such as public speaking, resume writing, interview skills and digital communication.



## Partnership with Education continued...

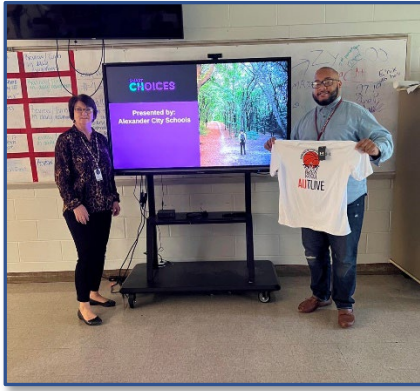
3. Increase student success in choosing career paths toward higher education or skilled trades.
  - Through programming at Alexander City Middle School, such as Choices and the ACMS Advisory Council, seventh and eighth graders are being informed of skilled trade careers that exist here locally and the pathways for employment in those careers. Through speaking engagements with students, BRHS Career Advisory involvement and relationships with administrators and teachers, we push the opportunity for careers in skilled trades that exist here locally as well as relay skill set needs for those career paths as identified by area businesses. BRHS has seen an increase in the number of students enrolled in their Building/Agri-Science programs (shop, machining, welding, small engine, marine tech), Healthcare track, and Culinary/Hospitality track. Through oversight of the Gateway to Education Scholarship program, students attending CACC on Gateway are oriented to local career options through company tours.
4. Administer and promote Gateway to Education scholarship program to pay tuition expenses at CACC for over 60 students.
  - This is ongoing. The Chamber administers the Gateway to Education Scholarship which includes communicating to students about the opportunity as early as seventh and eighth grade and continuing that throughout high school, maintaining the online application process, screening applicants for eligibility, scholarship award notification, appeals, orientation and tours of area businesses. In February 2020, the Gateway board of directors voted unanimously to limit annual tuition expenses to match previous year's revenues as well as base the tuition distribution on a financial need-based in order to stabilize and sustain the investment fund that supports scholarship payouts.



5. Through the BRHS Co-Op program, assist 100 students per year to find employment.
  - This is ongoing. The Chamber partners with BRHS Co-Op leadership to connect students with jobs. For the 2018-19 school year, the BRHS Co-Op program employed 112 students who worked a total of 62,890 hours and earned \$534,565. There were 127 students in the Co-Op program for the 2019-20 school year. Despite challenges with the pandemic, there were still 127 students participating in the Co-Op program in 2020-21. 2022-2023 ongoing. In January 2023, the Chamber hired Autumn McManus, a student from the BRHS Co-Op program. We can personally attest to the quality of productivity of students in this program.

## Partnership with Education continued...

- Recruit local business leaders to serve as mentors to annually administer Choices program to local 8th graders
  - This is ongoing. CHOICES is a two-day program that teaches middle school students how to make positive, career-minded choices as they prepare for and enter high school. Chamber staff members and business community volunteers deliver the curriculum in class every year.

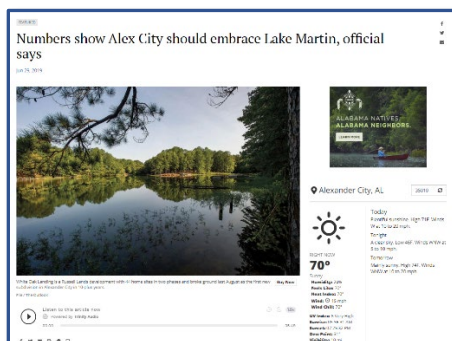


## Initiative 4 – Destination Marketing and Community Engagement

**Mission:** Partner with Alexander City leadership to establish a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). The Chamber will engage with the DMO to develop a unified tourism strategy to promote our area as a tourist destination. Involve the community in a plan that will lead to repeat tourist visits to enjoy Alexander City and Lake Martin activities, entertainment venues, recreation opportunities and sports tournaments/events.

### Outcomes:

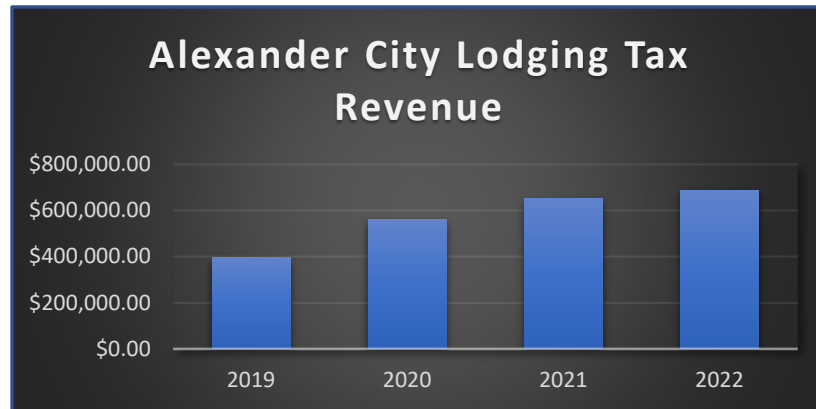
- Partner with City officials to create a Destination Marketing Organization.
  - Worked with City Council in 2018 to increase lodging tax by 5% to provide funding for the Lake Martin Tourism Association (LMTA). The organization was officially formed in with 12-person Board of Directors in February 2019 with organizational objectives of promoting and growing tourism in Alexander City and the Lake Martin area.
  - With LMTA leadership turnover in 2023, the Chamber is helping lead an effort to merge Lake Martin Tourism Association, funded by the City of Alexander City, with Tallapoosa County's tourism department which will combine resources for a county-wide collaborative effort.





## Destination Marketing and Community Engagement continued...

- Partner with the Destination Marketing Organization to execute a market study to understand community assets and implement a marketing strategy by end of 2020.
  - Through the establishment of Lake Martin Tourism Association, a comprehensive marketing strategy has been implemented which features heavy digital media focused on increasing visitors to [explorelakemartin.com](http://explorelakemartin.com), showcasing area tourism assets (things to do, places to stay, etc.) on the website, building print collateral and distributing to key locations (visitors guide, lodging and dining guide, etc.), hospitality/tourism training for area professionals and helping build a network of professionals in the local tourism industry. For its work, LMTA was named "Tourism Organization of the Year" by the Alabama Tourism Department in 2022.



- Partner with Clean Community Partnership to organize, promote and execute regularly-scheduled trash walks.
  - This is ongoing. Through partnerships with AL PALS (Alabama Partners Against a Littered State), LMRA (Lake Martin Resource Association) and Alabama Power, we have helped implement and deliver youth educational programs to aid in "long-term" strategy for stopping the problem before it starts.



- Host annual Alabama Bass Trail fishing tournament on Lake Martin.
  - This is ongoing. ABT continues to host annual tournaments, including its championship event in 2020, at Lake Martin. Fishing tournaments have grown through Lake Martin Tourism Association to include high school and college tournaments which provide strong ROI due to the number of participants and guests who visit and stay overnight in the market during tournament weekends.

## Destination Marketing and Community Engagement continued...

5. Host annual community events like Sun Festival, Jazz Fest and the Christmas Parade.
  - The Chamber hosts an annual calendar of community engagement events that serve the purposes of fun/social activities, business networking, community information and more. Events include Annual Meeting, Chamber Open Golf Tournament, Jazz Festival, Sun Festival, Lead Forward Women's Conference, State of Series, Holiday Open House, Tis the Season to Shop Local, Coffee & Connections, Business After Hours, Christmas Breakfast, Christmas Parade, First Responders Appreciation Breakfast and Maximize Your Membership.



6. Develop, implement and advise fundraising efforts to install a fence in Strand Park along Tallapoosa Street.
  - Approvals were granted from local governing authorities to move forward with feasibility and design. Approvals on design and structure were granted by City of Alexander City (Community Development, Parks & Rec., Public Works) and ALDOT. A public/private financing strategy was in place; however, the City of Alex City did not approve funding in 2019 budget hearings. Project remains on hold.

### PARTNERS IN PROGRESS April 2023 Status Report

*Thank you for your investment into the strategic community development initiatives of the Alexander City Chamber of Commerce. Our work would not be possible without your support. On behalf of the Chamber staff and Board of Directors, THANK YOU!*

