



Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce rolls out new economic development Blueprint

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By

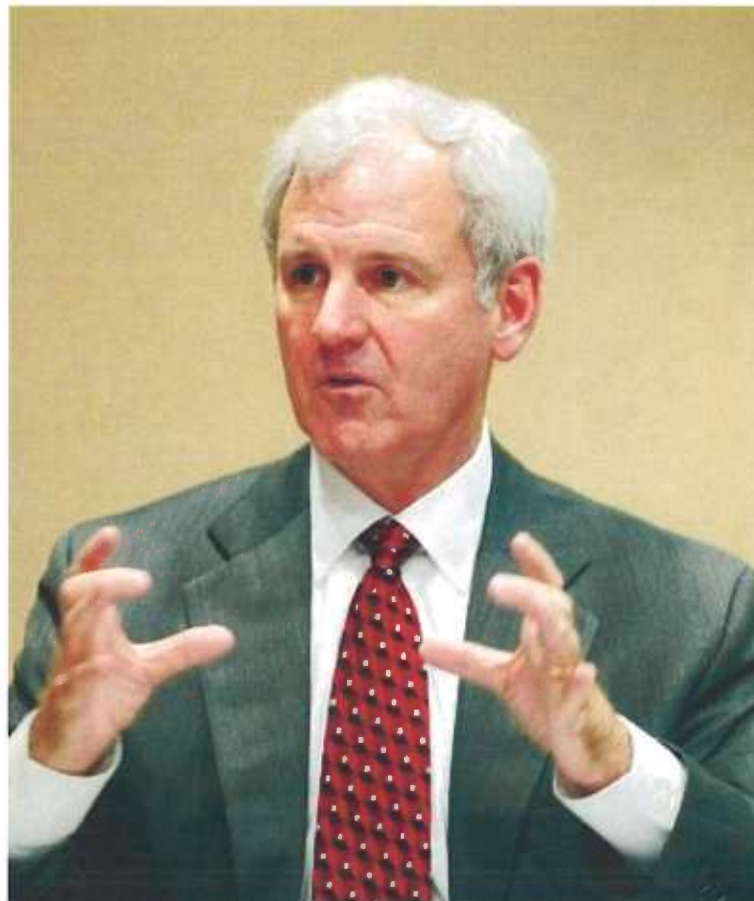


Bradley Byrne (The Huntsville Times/Dave Dieter)

DAPHNE, Alabama — The Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce wants to capitalize on the education level of the people who live there with its new "Blueprint for a Better Tomorrow" economic development strategy.

At a news conference Tuesday, Bradley Byrne, vice chairman of the chamber board's economic development council, outlined four areas of concentration. They are:

- Aerospace and high-tech precision manufacturing.
- Medical.
- Film, music and entertainment.



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Dave Dieter

- IT and technical support centers.

According to the chamber, some 88,000 people live between Blakeley and Barnwell, with 91 percent of adults age 25 and older holding at least a high school diploma, and 38 percent earning a bachelor's degree or higher.

The level of college education is higher than the national average, Byrne said.

"Most of your economic development comes

Bradley Byrne with Reform Alabama speaks with The Huntsville Times Editorial Board. (The Huntsville Times/Dave Dieter)

Bradley Byrne2-1-12 gallery (3 photos)

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from people who are already here," Byrne said. At the same time, he said, "We believe we are in a great position to recruit new prospects to Baldwin County."

The plan was updated over four months by a group of 60 community leaders and elected officials.

Tourism has its own separate plan that was not a part of this process.

Byrne and other chamber officials said they've learned that people outside south Alabama don't know enough about the Eastern Shore, but are intrigued when they hear about the workforce and the quality of life. Marketing will be an early part of the action plan.

The Blueprint picks up on the Eastern Shore's strengths and potential for growth.

Reality TV shows and the occasional movie illustrate the potential for growth in the film and entertainment industries. Mississippi has built some of the large-scale sound stages required for local production work, and the Eastern Shore should do the same, Byrne said.

Byrne, a former candidate for governor, said the Blueprint is not meant to separate the Eastern Shore from the rest of Baldwin County or from Mobile when it comes to economic development. The basic themes of "retention, recruitment, renewal" are the same as Alabama's statewide plan.

"We have consciously fit our plan into the state plan," he said.

The Eastern Shore chamber works closely with the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance and with other chambers. It supported the recent acquisition of the "megasite" industrial property just north of Bay Minette, officials said.

Education is a crucial component of the Blueprint. The chamber will support all levels of education, from new technical programs at Faulkner State Community College to putting electronic tablets in all Eastern Shore public schools.

One goal is to ensure that eighth-graders have selected a career path for high school so they can plan their coursework. Businesspeople will be asked to take part in structured programs to show students careers and how much money they can make in various fields.

Chamber employees will set benchmarks and a timeline with 60 to 90 days. The chamber board will discuss fundraising to implement the Blueprint, and it will also be presented to the cities of Daphne, Fairhope and Spanish Fort, their industrial development boards and the Baldwin County Commission.

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