

# Good Hope Shares EDA Experience



Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM

The Alabama League of Municipalities is proud to select the city of Good Hope for this edition's feature story on our Economic Development Academy. Good Hope participated in the League's first class of EDA in 2022. EDA is specifically designed to educate and engage municipal officials on the essential elements and phases of economic development while highlighting their vital role in economic initiatives and projects within their communities. This program was developed, in partnership with the Alabama Community College System, to fill an educational void.

The city of Good Hope is located in the center of Cullman County, about five miles southwest of the city of Cullman (the county seat). It was given its name by some of the first pioneers that settled there, many of whom were Baptists by faith. They established the first church there in 1842, which doubled as a school. When it was incorporated in 1962, Good Hope had a land area of 640 acres and a population of 180 people. Now, it encompasses more than 5,000 sprawling acres with a population of 2,600.

Good Hope's EDA team consisted of Mayor Jerry Barlett, Councilmember Susan Eller, Councilmember Terry Shabel, Councilmember Eric Phillips, Corey Harbison (the city planner and former mayor) and Christie Chamblee (the city clerk). Their backgrounds range from education to accounting to sales and the state legislative branch. This is the type of diversity the program wants EDA teams to consist of so that various professional strengths can assist with developing community plans.

Chamblee has served as the city clerk since 2013 and has nearly three decades of experience in accounting in the private and public sectors.

"The class is a great way to get together and brainstorm with other municipalities to get new ideas and learn about those communities and how they operate," Chamblee said. "A lot of cities across the state face the same issues, and it is nice to gain knowledge and hear things from other perspectives."

Mayor Bartlett said they applied for the program because very few of them had experience in economic development and because they needed more guidance on making proactive plans for a quickly growing area. Good Hope has two exits off of Interstate-65. They opened Exit 305 at the start of 2016. They developed a traffic plan for access around the new interchange and adopted a façade program for buildings located within commercial zones. They have since worked to promote it as the new "happening" exit in Cullman County.

Their plan is in motion. In February 2023, Good Hope broke ground on a new Love's Travel Stop right off the new exit. It will be open 24 hours, seven days a week. It is expected to have a McDonald's, Subway, country store, RV hook-up areas and even a dog wash. It will also be one of the first Love's to feature a double truck wash for tractor-trailers. The

*On December 5, 2023, city officials and members of the public cut a ribbon to open their new fitness court.*





*The city of Good Hope broke ground on a new Love's Travel Stop on February 8, 2023. It will be located right off of Exit 305.*

project is expected to be completed next year and will create more than 75 jobs. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs awarded a \$250,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the project. Additionally, the city matched that contribution with \$187,000 for sewer infrastructure.

Councilmember Eller serves as the workforce and retail development manager for the Cullman Economic Development Agency and has been instrumental in locating numerous industrial partners to the community. Their agency provides information used to make economic development location decisions, assists with relocation of employees, coordinates announcements, groundbreakings, grand openings and anniversary celebrations.

“My years of experience at my current job has provided a lot of experience. I have seen things that work and things that do not work,” Councilmember Eller said. “It helps me realize what is good for cities the size of Good Hope; it gives me realistic expectations of what Good Hope can accomplish.”

It is important to note that Cullman County has a shared sales tax system that distributes revenue to all municipalities in the county, based on their population. Cullman County is the only county in the state with this type of sales tax distribution system. As Good Hope grows, the entire county benefits.

Two of the main projects that have occurred since Good Hope participated in the EDA program are sewer upgrades and building a new 33-acre park with a playground.

Harbison said that sewer upgrades became a focal point when discussions were first being made about constructing Exit 305. City officials wanted to invest in making all four corners of the interchange suited with sewer infrastructure to recruit new businesses and build up the exit. He said the city just finished their sewer expansion to the west side of this interchange, which completes their goal of getting all four corners prepared.

Furthermore, the city is undergoing a roughly \$3 million sewer plant expansion project. As the city has grown, it has reached its capacity of treating up to 250 gallons of wastewater a day. This expansion will allow them to double their capacity. Harbison said that none of these sewer improvements would have been achievable without financial assistance from ADECA and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.

In December, the city opened its latest attraction at the community park – a world-class fitness court! This project was made possible by a joint partnership between the city, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama and the National Fitness Campaign. The city contributed \$250,000, BCBS donated \$50,000 and the National Fitness Campaign designed





the outdoor exercise center to match the city’s parks and recreation plans. The court is free to access and is designed for all fitness levels. One side is a fitness court, and the other side is a studio for classes.

The city is working on adding more basketball courts, pickleball courts, walking and cross-country trails, and a splash pad. Mayor Bartlett said they hope to eventually build a multipurpose storm shelter and senior center on-site. Then, they want to construct a bridge that will allow more access to the park’s property.

Prior to his service on the council and becoming mayor in 2014, Mayor Bartlett was an educator and coach for 27 years. He said that gave him a better perspective on how young people view their community.

“They want growth, change and progress for our city,” Mayor Bartlett said. “As mayor, along with our council, we have tried to grow the city and provide new businesses and housing projects so that we can offer our newly graduated students a place to work and live in Good Hope.”

Therefore, the city council passed two planned development zoning measures in 2023 that will allow Good Hope to significantly increase its housing supply. The 30-acre Mize Meadows subdivision is currently being built along Mize Road and will create 185 homes. The Doc Clemmons subdivision will lie along Doc Clemmons Road on the city’s eastern side. It is a 38-acre development that will create more than 140 homes. The aforementioned sewer improvements will be critical for these developments.

Mayor Bartlett and the rest of the EDA team said they plan to use the skills and lessons learned through the program to continue looking for opportunities to enhance their city. Good luck, Good Hope! ■

*City of Good Hope Council pictured left to right: Greg Brown, Susan Eller, Eric Phillips, Terry Shabel, Mayor Jerry Bartlett and Taft Dillashaw*



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