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Historic,
walkable
downtown



Caption

Forest Grove: A New Home for Businesses

How one of Oregon's fastest-growing communities works to bring prosperity to companies and residents

BY NATALIA HURT

Twenty-five miles west of Portland lies a rapidly-growing community that blends the best of rural and urban living: it is charming and sophisticated, historic yet innovative, quaint but energetic.

Forest Grove's unique quality of life hasn't gone unnoticed. Between 2010 and 2017 its population grew by 13%, ranking it among Oregon's top-10 fastest growing cities. Median household income rose 15% and poverty plummeted by 40%.

As Oregon bounced back from the recession, Forest Grove not only took part in the region's growth, it steered quality expansion in the form of balanced, diversified and sustainable activity across all sectors — residential, commercial and industrial.

"We want to create growth and prosperity for the entire community. This means diver-



New shopping center on Pacific Avenue

sity, entrepreneurship and broad employment opportunities," explains Jeffrey King, Economic Development Manager, Forest Grove. "We don't want to rely only on a couple of big companies and we've done a good job with that."

As growth picked up, the city got to work developing a 2020 economic development strategy that incorporates equitable ac-

cess, business attraction and the needs of entrepreneurs and small companies, while strengthening the town as a whole.

Thanks to direct assistance and quality customer service, companies gain quick access to a list of available site inventory and guidance with permitting, regulations, and taxation. Forest Grove's Business Incentive Program waives or reduces permit fees for

small businesses while the Marketlink Program accessed via Micro Service Enterprise Services of Oregon aids with market analysis and marketing.

The city also connects businesses with regional resources like the Oregon Business Development Fund, Entrepreneurial Development Loan Fund, SBA 7A and the Col-Pac EDD Business Development Loan Program. Lower costs, including power from the city-owned utility, further attract business.

"I work very closely with the business community. For economic development it's important to establish relationships so that they're aware that we're always here to help them. It is also critical that we strive to stay abreast of changing or new resources for business," King adds.

When larger companies consider moving to Forest Grove, the city's economic development team works to rapidly assess the business's logistical needs — e.g. water, power, sewer — in order to facilitate a smooth transition. The City's property tax exemption enterprise zone program has also been valuable in helping to encourage new investment and jobs.

"Time is money and so are surprises. We spend a lot of time on technical assistance behind the scenes," he says. "We try to guide them in identifying costs up front, navigating the leasing process, and outfitting their buildings. It is why Forest Grove is active in Oregon's Certified Shovel Ready Program for industrial sites."

Whether they want visibility from the highway or Main Street, companies can find affordable lots and buildings. A local report* highlights the number of commercial opportunities still waiting to be tapped. McMenamin's Grand Lodge — with restaurant, bars, spa, movie theater and hotel — recently completed a \$4.1 million dollar expansion project in the town while a new commercial shopping area — The Stonewood Center — is underway and leasing.

Vacancy rates are dropping, as private investment has resulted in new commercial developments totaling \$23.6 million in addition to \$100.7 million in industrial construction. The city approved nine residential projects, exceeding \$100 million and delivering 780 additional housing units, including the 78-unit



Jesse Quinn
Apartments

Jesse Quinn mixed-use project in the heart of downtown.

While the numbers speak for themselves, Forest Grove's real appeal cannot be quantified. Its walkable, bike-able downtown full of historic storefronts and friendly people wins visitors over time and again.

"We want to create growth and prosperity for the entire community. This means diversity, entrepreneurship and broad employment opportunities."

JEFFREY KING

"We are an attractive community with both historic and new buildings and friendly, welcoming residents. There's space to breathe with a number of parks, with forests and open space adjacent to the City," King says.

The City's Urban Renewal Agency downtown revitalization project allocated more than \$60,000 to help businesses renovate storefronts, install new landscaping, and

implement pedestrian-friendly changes. Property owners themselves have spent \$2 million on renovating their buildings. These efforts have attracted 24 new businesses, including world-class restaurants, boutiques, and microbreweries.

For innovators, business people and creatives who value work-life balance, community and the outdoors, Forest Grove provides the complete package.

"The next thing we're working on with regional partners is innovation and entrepreneurship

for the area: a Clean Water Services R&D center, a makerspace at Pacific University and a co-working space in Hillsboro," says King.

Forest Grove operates with a collaborative approach, working alongside the greater region toward collective success, for example with Washington County on regulatory issues, Greater Portland Inc. on marketing and project leads and associations like the Chamber of Commerce, and the Small Business Development Center to improve conditions and incentives.

Adjacent to Silicon Forest, the city understands the importance of maintaining quality infrastructure, broadband and advanced facilities to support its manufacturers, high-tech enterprises, growing number of telecommuters and many professionals, including many Intel employees.

While in some ways it feels like a world away from densely populated Portland, in reality, Forest Grove is an easy train and bus ride — reachable via TriMet 24-hours a day. A shuttle bus links Tri-Met stops to schools and business areas, while the freight-train line and growing Hillsboro airport add another layer of connectivity to support the region's economy in the long term.

With its wine and dining culture, stunning backdrop, Tillamook Forest, agritourism, cycling and world-class cultural events at Pacific University, the city draws tourists and families for a day or a lifetime. Describing its appeal on paper only goes so far; truly grasping it requires a visit.

Forest Grove may have that small-town feel, but it has plenty of space for big ideas. ■

*https://www.forestgrove-or.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/economic_development/page/32161/opportunities_for_commercial_business_2018-2019.pdf



Daniella's on Main