

Introduction

Community

Rogers (pop. 54,967) and Lowell (pop. 7,046) are part of the dynamic northwest Arkansas region, consistently ranked one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the nation and the only Midwestern area to demonstrate such growth. Overall, the region has grown more than 25 percent since 2000 and is ranked the 17th fastest-growing and 110th largest metro area in the nation. Since 1990, the region has doubled in population, with more than 2.4 million people currently living within a 100-mile radius (NWA Regional Planning Commission).

The community's growth has been predominantly driven by several major and secondary economic engines, including the world headquarters of three Fortune 1,000 companies: Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (Fortune #1), Tyson Foods Inc. (Fortune #88) and J.B. Hunt Transport Inc. (Fortune #601). Additionally, hundreds of consumer product (or "supplier") companies as well as thousands of third-party suppliers, professional services and small businesses propel the local economy.

These businesses attract world-class employees, often from established metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Denver or Dallas. Consequently, a strong and continually expanding retail, dining, hospitality and amenity base has become a significant driver of the economy, bringing a variety and caliber of establishments to the community typically found in larger urban areas. The world has taken note of the community's emergence as an international business hub, and the Arkansas World Trade Center opened in Rogers in 2007 to promote import and export trade opportunities.

Industrial and manufacturing operations have not been left by the wayside in northwest Arkansas: the region, as well as Rogers and Lowell specifically, are home to dozens of major employers who have experienced success and expansion despite tough economic times and a national downturn in most manufacturing. In 2007 and 2008, Rogers and Lowell have even welcomed a handful of new industries as well as announcements of expansions with unique and cutting-edge green technology and sustainable manufacturing processes and products.

Tourism continues to be a strong foundation of the economy, although the community's focus has transformed in recent years as the region has emerged as a convention and meeting destination. Corporate travel remains a major component of the tourism market, and leisure travel generated by regional events such as world-renowned craft fairs and sporting events complements the community's long-standing reputation first established by Beaver Lake as a vacation destination.

Northwest Arkansas has enjoyed national acclaim thanks to repeated top 20 accolades from the Milken Institute as well as *Forbes* Magazine, *Kiplinger's, Inc. Magazine* and *Money Magazine*. Quality of life is consistently ranked high for our communities, with the area named one of the least stressful and most secure places in the nation, as well as one of the best places to relocate a family.

The area's explosive growth has resulted in \$300 million in recent health care facility expansions in northwest Arkansas and the opening of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Centers for Children in 2007. The Rogers Public School District (serving Rogers and Lowell) is consistently ranked one of the finest in Arkansas, and many charter, private and parochial schools, as well as local and national higher education institutions, complement the University of Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas Community College and John Brown University.

The excellent business climate in northwest Arkansas, bustling corporate travel market, affordable cost of living, job creation and higher than average personal income combined with unprecedented quality of life yield thriving communities that continue to be national anomalies.

History of the Vision Process

The community's long-range planning process was first conducted in 1989 (Vision 2000). The Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce has collaborated with citizens and community leaders to revisit the community plan five more times since 1989 (Vision 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2025). The previous version, Vision 2020, was completed in September 2002, and the Vision 2025 process was conducted from April-November 2008.

Several intercity visits have been conducted in the past by the Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce, most recently to Springfield, Mo., and Chattanooga, Tenn. The most common factor in these and other successful, thriving communities throughout the United States is a long-range planning process which engages citizens and leaders in identifying and proposing solutions to advance their community.

The Vision process has been a critical component to our community's success, and is referenced frequently by leadership and planning bodies as they make critical planning decisions. It encourages community participation and citizen input, allowing individuals to influence the future of our community and impact issues about which they are passionate. Most importantly, it serves as a springboard to launch us into new projects, infrastructure and facilities.

In Rogers and Lowell, past projects resulting from the Vision process have included annexations, streets, library expansions, court and police facilities, parks and many others. Specific projects have included the Perry Road Interchange, New Hope Road enhancements, the 45th Street Bridge, the Rogers greenways and trails master plan, opening of the Lowell Historical Museum, resolution of Lowell water and sewer issues and lifting of the building moratorium, passage of a Lowell sales tax, annexation, master street plan and future land use plan.

Structure of Vision 2025

Community surveys were conducted in March and April 2008, with more than 500 individuals submitting opinions and feedback. Survey results were compiled and used to identify and

prioritize sectors representing key issues identified by each community. Leadership for the process was selected in May, with David Thrasher and Bill Watkins serving as Vision 2025 co-chairs for Rogers, and Greg Stanfill and Mike Solomon serving as Vision 2025 co-chairs for Lowell.

In June, committee chairs were selected for the 38 sectors, with committee meetings held throughout July, August and September 2008. A first draft of sector reports was presented to the Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and Advisory Board as well as the Main Street Rogers board in October, and the final report was presented to the community at the Leaders Conference held on Nov. 18, 2008. Presentations to community organizations continue in the subsequent months.

Participants in the Vision 2025 process were asked to think big and to solicit input from throughout the community. Sectors were asked to consider their charge as it related to our community in 2025, and to identify short and long-term goals to address issues related to their sector. The final individual sector reports were compiled into the Vision 2025 plan, one document which serves as a road map for advancing our community.