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People to know economic development: Eric Farris

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Eric Farris*Senior partner, Buckman & Farris PSC***Years in current job :** 35**Years in economic development:** 35**Tell us about the biggest economic development win for your agency.**

The biggest in scope is the Velocity65 project at Ky. 480 and Interstate 65. I have served as local counsel to Indianapolis-based Browning Investments throughout that project. The “win” is not only the decision of Browning to locate in Bullitt County, but also the successful collaboration of the Bullitt County Economic Development Office, the City of Shepherdsville, state government and Browning to secure a new interchange on Interstate 65 at mile-marker 114. The biggest win in its unique character and a source of pride for my firm is Speyside Bourbon Cooperage in Shepherdsville, which processes thousands of used bourbon barrels each year.

What areas of the city are ripe for economic development?

Bullitt County is where I was born, raised, educated and where my practice has always been located, so my answer necessarily is focused here. We have seen unprecedented growth in the commercial/industrial sector but we need more support for the labor market in the form of affordable housing, shopping and family-friendly restaurants.

What can the region do better to market our area for economic development?

A regional, cooperative approach among all the boards in the metro area and along the Bourbon Trail can only be beneficial to all of us. If I were a young parent or company considering moving to another area, I would ask what is there for my family or the families of my employees to do. We need to make sure the finer points of what makes this area such a good place to raise a family are shared with potential customers and developers.

What are some benefits and drawbacks of public-private partnerships?

Like any relationship, there will be celebrations and strife along the way. There is strength in multiparty approaches to a problem and we have seen that in the Velocity65 “partnership” among the developer, state/local government and economic development advisers, which resulted in the significant infrastructure improvements underway. The strain comes in negotiating the incentives that the companies want and need to move here, which requires state and local government to temporarily forego some of their income stream.

What’s the most useful tool in your toolkit to encourage economic development?

Over 35 years, I’ve had the pleasure of working with many professionals in government, real estate, utilities, public education and private enterprise. Each potential development provides an opportunity to call upon one of those professionals for assistance or direction. You don’t have to know all the answers, just know the people who do.